

“Sail or Jail”

Merchant Seamen’s Claim for Benefits

Briefing to the National Council
of Veterans Associations
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This is a briefing concerning the benefits to Canada's Merchant Seamen who served in the Merchant Navy in World War II. It has really been a 50 year battle, but it came to a head in, late in 1998, when groups of Merchant Seamen went on hunger strikes on Parliament Hill. And believe me, that caught the attention of the parliamentarians; was well covered by the media, and certainly resulted in a lot of interest on the part of the Canadian public.

This is not a pretty story. We have the documents to indicate that there was a great deal of government treachery in the way they handled the Merchant Seamen right after World War II. And there is plenty of evidence to indicate that 50 years later, 54 years later, these people, the survivors are certainly entitled to some compensation for the benefits they did not get because they were not treated as veterans.

Firstly, let's deal with the question. Did the government acknowledge what these Merchant Navy people were doing during the war? And in this regard, I must turn to a document titled Canada's Merchant Seamen, and this was issued by none other than the Honourable Lionel Chevrier, who was the Minister of Transport in 1945.

I'd like to read several passages from this document, dealing with the government's praise for the work which the Merchant Navy was doing.

“No body of men has contributed more to the prosecution of the war effort than those gallant seamen who man the ships of the Allied Merchant Navies, to which the Canada's contribution in ships and men has grown from small beginnings to now play a substantial role.”

Document goes on to say this:

“Nevertheless, all of us know that those Seamen whose voyages and duties bring them in contact with the enemy, undergo desperate risks and hazards. The dangers they encounter are comparable with those experienced by the average man in uniform.”

And I would note that although the government said that their dangers and risks were comparable to the average man in uniform, when the time came to pay Veterans' Benefits, they paid very substantial benefits to those of us who were in uniform, but to the Merchant Navy, they were totally excluded. To read further from this Chevrier document. There's an Order in Council in here. And

I'll just read it. Firstly we have to note the date, May 19, 1941, Order in Council P.C. 14/3550. Very early in the war, it read in part:

“That the Merchant Marine, on which our seaborne commerce depends, is under present conditions, virtually an arm of our fighting services, and the provision of Merchant Seamen, their training, care and protection is essential to the proper conduct of the war, and vitally necessary to the keeping open of the sea lanes on which the successful outcome of the present conflict so largely depends.”

So firstly we see that during the war, the Canadian government, in official documents, was paying great tribute to the job which the Merchant Navy was doing. We must now ask ourselves another question. What did the Canadian government promise to the Merchant Navy at the end of World War II? And again we refer to the Chevrier document, and I want to read the first little bit of what I call the treachery. In this part of the document Mr. Chevrier is dealing with benefits for those who served in the uniformed Armed Forces, that is, the Navy, the Army and the Air Force. And then he goes on to say this.

“Such benefits should not be of a nature which would encourage Seamen to leave the industry at the end of the war to seek employment in other fields as the services of many skilled Seamen will be required if Canada is to maintain a Merchant Marine after the war.”

So there we have it in writing. The question? Why didn't the government consider that they should pay veterans' benefits to the Merchant Navy, to the seafarers who had served Canada so valiantly during wartime? It was simply that according to the government statement, they did not want to pay them veterans' benefits because, they did want to use them, they wanted to discourage them from taking a discharge, and they wanted them to use them to build up Canada's Merchant Navy after the war. I consider that to be a bit of treachery.

Let's ask ourselves a third question. What happened to this great plan for the Canadian mercantile marines? Well, in July of 1947, that's two years after the war, the Canadian government passed what was known as the Maritime Commission Act. That was, and I quote, “To develop Canada's post-war shipping policy.” So again we have it in writing, that the idea was, that we were to build up a great Merchant Navy after World War II, and that was the government's intention. Unfortunately, by 1948, just a year after they passed this legislation, this grandiose plan began to fall apart. Why? Very simple. Canadian Merchant Seamen would demand a living wage. They would

demand to be paid the same amount of money as other Canadians who had jobs ashore. However, if we stop to consider what they, what they called the Deep Seas Fleet were doing right after World War II, it's a very unsavoury story.

Instead of Canadian ships being able to compete, we were selling a lot of our ships to countries of foreign registry. Those countries hired seamen of perhaps abled seamen, trained seamen. But at wages, at wages which no Canadian could even live on. Consequently, the government's plan fell apart for a very simple economic reason. The government could not continue to fund a Merchant Navy, a Merchant Marine or mercantile service as they called it, because they couldn't compete with other countries.

I have a quotation here, from the government, which indicates this in no uncertain terms. This is a statement from Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, on the 9th of December of 1949, and I'll read it.

“We have concluded that we are not justified from an economic viewpoint in maintaining a Canadian flag by artificial means. It is not the intention of the Government to maintain an industry at the expense of the taxpayer.”

So let's stop and re-cap what really happened. World War II ended. We did have a very effective Merchant Navy, manned by Canadian sailors. The government plan was that we will build up this mercantile marine of ours, and they will carry Canadian products abroad and they will bring imports into Canada, and this will be another service, which would be available to all Canadians. Now the Canadian government wasn't prepared to put any money into this, as we see. And when, when they found that this, Canadian ships couldn't compete with the ships of foreign registry, it didn't take the government long, just two years, from 1947 to 1949, to do a complete change-around. And the Prime Minister Mr. Louis St. Laurent himself says, it's not the intention of the government to maintain an industry at the expense of the taxpayer. That really spelled the end of the plans for a Merchant Navy for Canada, and you can imagine what it did to the plans of those Merchant Seamen who loyally agreed to stay on the Canadian merchant ships, and assist Canada to build up this Merchant Navy. Imagine what it did to them. They were, as the saying goes, they were on the beach. They not only didn't have any jobs, but as we shall see, they were then deprived of the re-establishment benefits under which veterans such as myself who served in the army, under benefits that we had that allowed us to go to university, take training, do all types of things. So again I think the word treachery has to creep in here.

I would like to quote next from an excellent book, written by Robert G. Halford, and it's called *The Unknown Navy – Canada's World War II Merchant Navy*. It was published not too many years ago, as a matter of fact, in 1995. And I wanna quote from Halford, when he talks about the end of this plan for a great mercantile marine in Canada, and he says, "For those with hopes for a Canadian flag Merchant Navy, that was that. Within a few years even the thirty or forty ships had dwindled away to a handful."

Now we must deal with another unsavoury aspect, and with some very doubtful actions on the part of the Canadian government, which all had to do with the dismantling of this planned Canadian Merchant Navy after World War II.

The Canadian Seamen's Union, spoke for Canadian Merchant Seamen. It was a good union, it had a good reputation, the Canadian seamen strongly supported their own union, and they felt that this Canadian Seamen's Union should be fighting the government to try to stop this dismantling of our Canadian ships. Well, history tells an interesting story. If you want to break a union, there's several ways to do it, and one of them is to bring in another union and develop a union versus union fight. And so the ship owners in Canada turned to this ploy. They knew of the Seafarer's International Union, the SIU in the United States. They also knew that it was a very tough union, it was run by thugs and felons. Among its officers were people with criminal records. Anyway, arrangements were made to bring the officers of the Seafarer's International Union from the States into Canada, with the objective, undoubtedly, of breaking our own Canadian Seamen's Union.

Some may remember the infamous name of Hal Banks. He was one of the strong organizers of this SIU from the United States. He had a long criminal record. Now, people with criminal records are not allowed into Canada. And the research and the history shows another little bit of treachery. In order to get Hal Banks into Canada, he had to sign an application. On the normal application it says, "Do you have a criminal record?" Well now isn't it interesting. Isn't it interesting, that when we checked the application for Hal Banks to get into Canada, that question had been left off. So he didn't have to lie, he just didn't answer the question 'cause it was not on the form. So Hal Banks got into Canada, and then we began about a 12 to 14 month union struggle. The only way that the Canadian Seamen's Union, our own union, representing our own Merchant Seamen, the only way they could put up a fight was to go on strike, so they went on strike, and what happened? This SIU from the States began signing up other seamen to go onto the Canadian ships to serve. I'll tell you, it was a bloody, bloody, bloody time. But just another chapter, and I want to use the word treachery again, another chapter in the sad story of the way we treated our Merchant Seamen who'd served so valiantly during World War II.

I would like to deal, now, with another book, which tells the whole nasty story of how, with the connivance of the Canadian government, and using this Seafarer's International Union and Hal Banks, the Canadian Seamen's Union and the whole idea of a Canadian mercantile fleet after World War II was destroyed. That book is called *Against The Tide – The Story of the Canadian Seamen's Union*. By an author by the name of Jim Greene. This was published in 1986.

I think it's worthwhile to use a couple of quotes from Jim Greene's book. He says, "With Banks' arrival in Canada" you'll remember Hal Banks is this thug with the SIU from the States.

"With Banks' arrival in Canada, the government, labour and corporate forces arrayed against the seamen had all of their pieces in place. They were not interested in compromise; the destruction of the CSU was their common goal."

And Greene's book continues.

"The federal government clearly backed the shipowners - its Canadian National Steamship Company was one of the first to sign its deepsea fleet over to the SIU."

In other words the Canadian government was one of, with its own fleet, was one of the first ship owners if you like, to abandon the Canadian Seamen's Union and go over to this SIU which, as history now proves, were really just a bunch of thugs brought into Canada to break the Canadian union and to bring about the end of our merchant fleet after World War II.

I mentioned earlier about the strike, that was called on March the 31st, 1949. Again I wanna quote from Greene's excellent book. And what does he say? "The Canadian Seamen's Union ceased to exist as a legal entity in 1951." What is it? That's six years after World War II, a Canadian Merchant Seaman who had served so valiantly on the high seas. You know one in eight of these people lost their lives. Who really, their service to this country, and we'll tell you a bit about that later, but it was enormous. So what did we find? That by 1951, these people were completely abandoned, because the Canadian government said we were wrong, we don't wanna keep a merchant fleet going.

So to continue Greene's quote.

"The seamen had carried out an historic struggle which was lost to insurmountable foes, and with the death of the CSU, the hopes of saving Canada's merchant fleet came to an end."

Now let's deal with another question. Why is it that today, Canada's Merchant Seamen are the forgotten heroes? Well, five years had elapsed since the end of the war. These people were the only thing they knew, really, because most of them enlisted even under-age, the only thing they knew was a life at sea. They were thrown onto the employment market in Canada, at a time when veterans from the regular forces were still struggling with their rehabilitation. So the good jobs, they were all gone. Any government aid for the seamen, by way of relocation, training etc., it just did not exist. Consequently, these people were really the big losers of those who served valiantly in World War II.

Just like to change the subject a little bit. I've been dealing with this problem of veterans' benefits for the Merchant Navy for more years than I care to remember. One of the things that I often heard and it makes me a little bit ill, is that whereas in the regular forces we had military discipline, we had King's Regulations and Orders, we had courts martial etc., etc. I've heard a lot of people say to me, well, that didn't apply to seamen. The Merchant Seamen really didn't have any, any discipline to worry about. Firstly, they sailed under what was known as Admiralty Orders. I'm not going to get into that. But I invite you if you're interested; take a look. Those Admiralty Orders were written by the British admiralty, back in Nelson's time. If you think that isn't a tough code of discipline, just think again!

Just to bring it back to Canada, from Great Britain and Nelson, I want to read to you Order in Council 2385, or April the 4th, 1941. This was known as the Merchant Seamen Order. Now remember 1941, was very early in the war. And what did it say? And this is a direct quote from this Order in Council.

“A troublesome (or even considered likely to be troublesome) seaman, licensed or unlicensed, Canadian or otherwise could be removed from a ship of any registry in a Canadian port, detained, and within forty-eight hours, brought before a Board of Inquiry.”

It goes on to say that this board of inquiry, and I quote again, “Had the authority to jail the offender for up to nine months.” This Order in Council contains a clause, and I'll quote again, “There shall be no appeal to any court or tribunal from an order of the board, which order shall be final.”

That's a pretty tough code of discipline. Also mention, that a Merchant Seamen brought up under this Order in Council was not entitled to have a legal representative, and as I've said earlier, the decision was final, from which he had no appeal.

The Order in Council had a very notorious name among the sailors. It was called *Sail or Jail*. No options. Either you did what they told you to do, under admiralty orders, or you went into the pogy and that was it. Boy, that was a tough ultimatum.

Now, the Merchant Seamen Order did some other good things. It established manning pools and there has been a lot of misconception about this. Not every seaman who sailed, Canadian seaman who sailed even in a Canadian ship, had to go through the manning pool. If he did, he was subjected to the same military admiralty discipline. Why didn't some of them go through the manning pools? Because they were sailing on ships which would rather hire them directly. That was an option. Now who you gonna blame in that case? You had to blame the Canadian government. When they put the manning pools in, because we had a conscription order in Canada, when they put the manning pools in, they could have said to these Merchant Seamen you must come under the manning pools. But the Canadian government said no, it's your option, you don't have to. So the manning pools are really not relevant to what happened to the Merchant Seamen. Some of them went under the manning pools, some of them didn't. The only perhaps difference was, that if they stayed out of the manning pool, they might, and I'll use that word might, have some choice of ship. But they were still subjected to the Sail or Jail order. So if a ship happened to be in Halifax Harbour, and it needed men, and it went to the manning pool and there weren't enough there, they could go to the street, they could pick up other Merchant Seamen who were in the Merchant Navy and say "You, press gang. Get on board or you go to jail."

Another myth that we've been struggling with over the years, is what is called the pay myth. For some reason or other, many Canadians got the idea that the Merchant Seamen were highly paid, they got the idea that the conditions under which they sailed were somehow less arduous than serving for example, in the Canadian Army.

In Halford's book *The Unknown Navy*, he devotes an entire chapter to the pay myth. He quotes a statement from the Canadian Shipping Board, that was the powers that be, that ran the whole shipping industry in Canada during the war. He quotes this statement from the Canadian Shipping Board, to the Minister of Trade and Commerce, and note the date, right in the middle of the war, 15th of July, 1943. And what does it say, quote,

"The present rates of pay on Canadian merchant vessels are not considered equivalent to the remuneration granted to no more sustained and no more dangerous work of a similar character in the Canadian Navy."

And by the way, I take my hat off to the civil servant who wrote that statement. It bothers me a little bit because what he was really trying to say was this. Is that the rates of pay for Merchant Seamen were certainly not even the equivalent of people in similar jobs in the uniformed Armed Forces. So much for exploding this myth, that the Merchant Seamen were entitled to a higher rate of pay.

It also points out another fact. That although members who served in the Regular Forces paid no income tax of any kind, if you served in the Merchant Navy, your pay was taxable, you paid income tax all the way through the war.

Halford states further and I quote,

“As a postwar sweetener, all Canadian seamen who had entered the standard Two-Year Manning Pool Agreement became eligible for a Special Bonus amounting to 10 percent of total annual earnings, including a War Risk Bonus.”

I think what happened was the government had a fit of conscience. They said we kept these sailors at sea at very low rates of pay and they've admitted that. But at the end of it, they said now if you were good enough to enlist in one of our manning pools, we're going to give you a War Risk Bonus. But we will deal a little bit later with the actual figures and you make up your own mind as to whether they were being overpaid for the tremendous job that they had to do.

Let's deal now with that job. We have a diary, an unpublished document by a seaman by the name of K.C. Hackman. He quotes in this diary as follows:

(New voice)

We were in convoy somewhere south of Iceland. Severe storms hit us everyday, we lost the convoy. We came under attack by land based Luftwaffe aircraft. The sanitary conditions aboard the ship were a disgrace and posed a real danger to health. We went without hot food for at least four days. Half the crew were injured from the rough seas as they bounced from companionway to bunks, and tables. Eventually we caught up to the convoy. I was on the watch when an 8,000 ton freighter was torpedoed, not 300 yards from us. We could hear the screams of the crew, but she went down like a stone. The skipper sent out a signal asking to be moved ahead in the convoy. As we were moving we picked out a dark blob in the water. It turned out to be a life boat manned by six or more Brits. Two had died. One from exposure, the other from swallowing oil. We hauled the rest on board. Seeing what

oil can do when a guy swallows it, I made myself a promise. I'd rather sink to the bottom than try to stay afloat in a heavy oil patch.

We were refused permission to move at night and this was the luckiest break I ever had. In the direction we were planning to go, a tanker was hit. There were flames everywhere. No one could have survived. The skipper pushed the alarm and I took my place beside the DEMS gunner. He was a naval rating trained on a four-inch gun and having earned my certificate in gunnery, even though I was a civilian, I took my place as a loader. We stood two hours before my relief came.

The rest of the convoy was a nightmare. We weren't supposed to stop even for rescues because it would make us an easy target. Not with our skipper. While I was on watch we picked up several people from the water, here and there. Probably the only thing that saved us was we could do about 10 knots while the speed of the convoy was about 6 knots, so we could catch up.

Let's go back now to another published source. And this document is titled Merchant Marine in World War II. It quotes from Winston Churchill's book, *The Second World War*. And Churchill puts it very, very significantly in one or two words. He says, "The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril." And what does the U-boat peril mean in the context of this briefing? It means, that the U-boats very nearly won. And how did they very nearly win? By sinking the merchant ships upon which our Canadian Merchant Marine were serving.

Now, depending on how old you are, you may or may not know something about the Murmansk Run. But after Russia came into the war, she needed supplies. And the only way that we could get those supplies to Russia was through the northern Arctic waters on what was called the Murmansk Run. Probably the most dangerous and certainly the most uncomfortable time at sea that any Canadian Merchant Seaman spent.

As I mentioned at the outset, there's been a lot of public attention focussed on the plight of the Merchant Seamen particularly since the hunger strikes, late in 1998. One of the statements by the Honourable Fred Mifflin, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, is that what is called an Omnibus Bill, which was tabled in Parliament in December of 1998, could not contain any retroactivity. Then the minister went on to state that none of the other Merchant Navy Bills in any of the other allied countries had any retroactivity. Now I think that is something that we really have to challenge. We have here, a copy, and I'll read it. "Statutes in Force, Pensions Navy, Army, Air Force and

Mercantile Marine Act, 1939!” What does this mean? Very simple. It was not necessary for the Brits, when they wrote their act, to write in any retro activation, because the Merchant Seamen who went to sea in British ships were covered right from the outbreak of the war. So much for your government excuse or call it what you like, about this present Omnibus Bill of 1998, should not contain any retroactivity and suggested that no other countries included retroactivity.

Well the main country we were allied with, with regard to the Merchant Navy were the Brits. We sailed under British admiralty orders. Many of our ships, merchant ships, were commanded by British officers. So let’s just use the Brits as the comparison, I think that’s fair. And we say to ourselves what happened in Canada? We waited 54 years to do what Great Britain had done as soon a war broke out, in 1939. I don’t wanna say anything further about retroactivity, because it, it’s just a word that has been getting in the way.

What the Merchant Seamen are seeking is not retroactivity. What they are seeking is a lump-sum grant to make up for the benefits that they did not receive immediately following World War II. In other words, had they served in the Army or the Navy or the Air Force, they would have had a number of rehabilitation and re-establishment provisions. But as we’ve already seen, the Merchant Seamen were denied these, for what? Because the Canadian government said, oh no! no! Don’t, don’t do anything to encourage them to leave the ships, and seek a job in civvy street. That will ruin our grandiose plans for a mercantile marine.

What benefits were they denied? This is from a submission to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, which was made in on November 26th. And at that time, we outlined some of the benefits to which the Merchant Navy were not eligible. Clothing allowance. What did that mean? Meant when a soldier came out, he took off his uniform, and he got an allowance to get into civilian clothing. A rehabilitation grant. Just a sort of a, here, you did a great job buddy, here you are, and it didn’t matter whether he served overseas or whether all of his service was in a reserved job in the army in Canada. Didn’t really matter. He got a rehab grant. He got transportation to his place of enlistment. He got what was known as a War Service Gratuity, something like seven dollars and fifty cents for every month that he’d served. What was that? It was another handout. It was well this is just a gratuity to help you along the way. He also received a re-establishment credit. What was that for? Well he took a look at his brother-in-law for example who never went to war, and he said, “Hey, you’ve got a radio.” The government said, “Okay we’ll get you one.” And they did this through what was called re-establishment credits. He had reinstatement and civil employment. In other words if he worked for a company before the war, that company was required to give him his job back, and at the same rate that he would have attained had he not gone to war.

Out of work allowances, this was what they really called unemployment insurance or today, employment insurance. And for one whole year, if he couldn't find a job, he could get out of work allowances.

Education assistance, and that's the big one. Many, many veterans who joined the army at 17 or 18 years of age came back, caught up with their high school and then went to university, and served Canada loyally as lawyers or doctors in the professions or what have you. Then there was trades training. If the man or woman for whatever reason did not want to try his or her luck at university, they could take trades training. And this was a very highly skilled Canada, to which these people returned, most of them were trappers and construction workers, that type of thing. When they came back, they could go to trades training schools, they could get certificates as plumbers or what have you. All of those things were denied to the Merchant Navy.

Another benefit denied the Merchant Seamen, was treatment for pensionable disabilities. And the reason it was denied was this. That a person who served in the regular Armed Forces could for example lose a leg in the Leopold Canal, and the government paid him a fairly decent pension. If a Merchant Seamen at sea was hurt in an accident, lost a leg, the only way, and I'm going back to 1945 now, the only way he could qualify was if the accident occurred in direct action with the enemy, or counter-action with the enemy. So the disability benefits that were available, and the medical treatment that arose from that, for members of the regular forces, were not available to members of the Merchant Navy until the first big amendment in the act, which was in 1992, and then in the final amendments which will be in the 1998 Ombudsman Act.

A number of other benefits, for example Veterans Land Act. A member of the regular forces wanted to go back to a farm or wanted to set up a small holding with potato patch in the background, he could get a grant from the government. Not if he was a Merchant Seamen. Let's say that it was a mom and pop store that he wanted to start. You know, a little business. He could get a grant from the government. Not so, for the Merchant Seaman.

And finally, what is known as a Waiting Returns Allowances. Let's say that he did start a small business, without any help from the government. If he were a member of the regular forces, he could get an Awaiting Returns Allowances until the cash started to come in. That was another benefit denied to the Merchant Seamen.

So I think you can see that, by stating that we needed, that Canada needed these Merchant Seamen to, to man this great mercantile fleet that the Canadian government had plans for, and by saying no,

we're not going to give these benefits that I've enumerated to the Merchant Seamen, this was just a, just a terrible injustice. And therefore, the Omnibus Bill should include, not retroactivity, but it should include some sort of lump-sum payment in lieu of the benefits which were denied to these people.

Okay. Let's deal next with the tactics of the opposition. I'm not gonna hold back here. This is what, this is a VAC document. This was produced by the spin doctors. Yeah, by the, we have them. It was produced by the spin doctors in Veterans Affairs, to be given to certain individuals, members of Parliament on the Liberal side as an example. To try to provide answers as to why the Merchant Seamen were wrong in asking for additional benefits to make up for those that they were denied.

I'll just deal with one or two of the questions in this document. First, "What does the proposed Omnibus Bill do to help Merchant Navy veterans?" And the answer that Veterans Affairs gives is this. That the new Omnibus Bill would cost eight million dollars a year. And yet in the briefings that we had on the Omnibus Bill, the VAC officials said there were no additional benefits, we're just transferring the benefits that are there, under the Merchant Navy legislation over to the Veterans legislation. So what is the eight million dollars for? Well if you read this you would think it's for Merchant Navy. It is not. It's for prisoners of war and to make certain benefits available to widows.

Next question. "How much does a Merchant Navy veteran receive from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)?" And here the spin doctors pull the same old rabbit out of a hat. They took the top award, which is \$25,743. And they said, a Merchant Seamen can receive up to, if he's married, \$25,743. But wait a minute. Let's not kid the troops. There are very few Merchant Seamen who are that 100 percent rate. As a matter of fact I think they're darn lucky to be at the 25 percent rate. However, this is just the kind of thing you deal with when you deal with the government and spin doctors, they try to provide their ministers and their spokespersons with the kind of information I think that would be most helpful to a government that wants to say no.

Next question. "How many Merchant Navy veterans are receiving benefits from VAC?" And what they say is, the department says about 75 percent of the Merchant Navy are receiving benefits, and they suggest that this is, and I'll quote, "considerably higher" than those who have served in the regular forces. Well. Are we not comparing apples and oranges? I mean firstly, the Merchant Seamen had to have served at least one trip, or six months in "dangerous waters." They're comparing him with a fellow who may have served in the veterans guard, or may have been on some essential duty and served in the army, guarding a bridge in Canada or coastal guns, people who never left the shores of Canada.

Stands to reason that your Merchant Navy guy, if he was in dangerous waters, he is going to qualify for more benefits than the air frame mechanic, for example, who never left Moose Jaw. Now mind you I'm not criticizing that air frame mechanic. He probably wanted to go overseas but the government said no, we need you in Moose Jaw. But to make this comparison, and say that 75 percent of the Merchant Navy received benefits and that's higher than people who served in the regular forces, I think you can see that, that is a great fallacy.

Another question in this shall we say, rather interesting VAC document by the spin doctors. "What the Omnibus Bill means for Merchant Navy veterans" compared with Armed Forces veterans. Well, it's an old saying. Comparisons are odious. Or if you want to put it another way, you can't compare apples and oranges, but that's what they're trying to do here. They're saying that the widow of a Merchant Navy veteran gets exactly the same benefits as the widow of a member of the regular forces. Wrong! Why? Let's go back in history. Member of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers was killed in action. His widow would get a pension right from 1945. A member of the navy, Merchant Navy, who died in let's say 1945, his widow would get nothing. Why? Because he could not have applied for a pension until 1992 which was the first time we had any legislation on the books for them. I won't get into that any further, I just indicate to you that the, and I can't think of a better name, that the spin doctors will almost go to any lengths to try to justify what their political masters have asked them to do.

Another question. "What benefits were available to Merchant Navy veterans following the war?" Well, by this time I'm, even I'm getting pretty confused about this, but this is a document that was handed out at a Parliamentary Committee hearing by officials of the Veterans Affairs Department, under what is known as survivors' benefits. Again, they give very erroneous information, because as I've already explained, the survivor of a person in the regular forces who received a pension in 1945, would get certain benefits. The survivor of a Merchant Navy veteran would not receive any benefits at all, unless he died after the 1992 legislation.

Looks pretty simple when you, when you sort of peel away all the nonsense and the weasel words and what are they trying to tell us here.

Next. "War Service Gratuities, Credits and Bonuses." And what they've done is they've said, the Merchant Navy people received, by a check mark in the form, they received the same, "War Service Gratuities, Credits or Bonuses." Wrong again! Yes. Members of the regular forces, as I've already said, they received War Service Gratuities, they received Re-establishment Credits. No. Merchant Navy didn't get any of those. Then we get to Bonuses. Well. Members of the regular forces did not

get anything called a “bonus” where members of the Merchant Navy did. But then you have to, you have to sort of judge how much. Well the War Service Gratuities were in the order of let was, shall we say, as much as 3,000 dollars? The bonuses that the Merchant Navy got, and not all of them got them, only those in the manning pools. The bonuses in the Merchant Navy if the fellow just had maybe two trips across the Atlantic, that bonus could have been maybe 300 dollars, certainly not more than that. Let’s come to another question, that we see in this VAC document. “Why didn’t Merchant Navy veterans receive the same benefits as Armed Forces veterans after the War?” Well that’s simple. This is what I’ve been dealing with in this briefing. Why didn’t the Merchant Navy receive the same benefits as Armed Forces veterans after the war? I’ve already quoted from the document put out by no less than the Minister of Transport in 1945, who said they did not get those benefits, because we did not want to encourage them to take their discharge. We wanted them for the mercantile marine. But what does the DVA document say?

“Canada’s postwar benefits were primarily intended to demobilize over 1,000,000 Armed Forces personnel and reintegrate them back into society. Civilian Merchant Mariners were not demobilized because it was believed they would continue to pursue their careers in the Merchant Marine.”

Well, there, there’s a vast difference. Lionel Chevrier, the Minister of Transport said they didn’t get them, because we did not want them to take their discharge and go into civilian life. The way the spin, if you like, that Veterans Affairs puts on it is that it was felt that they would want to continue their careers in the Merchant Navy. That was some option. I mean the option was, you either continue to sail, or you take your discharge onto Civvy Street, and you get no benefits at all, compared to those who served in the Regular Forces.

Next question. “Why won’t the Government pay retroactive compensation to Merchant Navy veterans?” Well I’ve already given some information but I’ll give you the DVA spin on it.

“A generous lump-sum to all Merchant Navy veterans - irrespective of their circumstances - would give some Merchant Navy veterans a greater benefit than was provided over the years to many Armed Forces veterans. This would be unfair.”

And then DVA goes on to say, or VAC as it’s now called, goes on to say this would be unfair. Well now come on. There’s no way in which VAC could justify this statement. Regular members of the Armed Forces were entitled to a number of benefits, which were denied to Merchant Seamen. And I’ve already brought out what those benefits were. There’s just no way that you could say that if you

gave the Merchant Navy guy a lump-sum of say 20,000 dollars, you would be giving him more money than the member of the Regular Forces, who went back to school, then university, and qualified as a political scientist or a lawyer or what have you? I mean, what they're really saying is if they gave this lump-sum the Merchant Navy guys would be ahead of the game, compared to your guy from the Regular Forces, who used all the benefits and got an education and has a professional life? Maybe we're comparing apples and oranges again, what I'm saying we're doing, is that VAC is putting out a document trying to justify why the government should not be paying this lump-sum.

Next. "How do Canada's Merchant Navy benefits compare to other countries?" Well, what does the VAC document say? "Canada's benefits to Merchant Navy veterans are among the most generous and comprehensive in the world." Doesn't that stagger you, I'll read it again. "Canada's benefits to Merchant Navy veterans are among the most generous and comprehensive in the world." Yes. Yes, if you're talking about 1998, and the new Omnibus Bill. But what about that 54 years between World War II and, and the new Omnibus Bill? Sure, our benefits now for Merchant Navy are certainly comparable to those for Merchant Navy in the, who served in the British Isles for example. They're comparable. But, they certainly, for 54 years they were not only not comparable, they were non-existent.

So this has been a briefing on the benefits or lack of benefits for Canadians who served valiantly in our Merchant Navy during World War II. As I've explained, but I think it bears repeating. After waiting for some 50 years, these Merchant Navy veterans are seeking a lump-sum in lieu of the benefits which were denied to them because they were not classified after World War II, as war veterans. The major reason that they, they should be, that they should qualify for this lump-sum is the government's frank admission that by a draconian stroke of a pen. The Canadian government said yes, benefits for Naval personnel, yes, benefits for Air Force personnel, yes, benefits for Army personnel. Merchant seamen? No way! Do not give them the benefits because we need them to man this grandiose mercantile marine that was planned for the end, to take place and to start at the end of World War II.

The government's published objective in other words, are a bit misleading, because there are two of them. The first objective was published in 1943, when they said we're gonna have a great mercantile marine and we'll need these guys. Within a few years after the war, when the Canadian governments Merchant Marine could not compete with the marine shippers of foreign registry, the government changed its plan. Said, "Sell off our ships, bring in the Seafarers International Union from the United States, break the back of the Canadian union, and toss these Merchant Seamen back out on the street, without one nickel's worth of benefits." Now if that is not an injustice, I really don't know what is.

Thank you very much.