

Reference Information Paper #77

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United States Merchant Vessel Logbooks

Official Logbooks were issued to American registered vessels in the foreign trade at the beginning of each voyage, and were turned in to the United States Shipping Commissioner at the port where the vessel ended its voyage. After 1937, these logs were also issued to vessels engaged in the coastwise trade.

Most of the logbooks for the World War II period became part of the records of the United States Coast Guard, and were originally consolidated and retired for storage in the National Archives' Washington National Records Center in Suitland, MD. These logbooks were subsequently transferred for permanent retention and preservation to the eight National Archives Regional Archives located geographically closest to the ports where the logs were originally turned in.

The National Archives in Washington, DC, also holds logbooks for many ports for years up to and including 1941.

A list of the addresses of National Archives units, which currently house collections of merchant vessel logbooks, is provided in [Appendix 1](#). [Appendix 2](#) is a listing of the specific logbook groups in the custody of each National Archives Regional Archives. [Appendix 3](#) is a listing of logbooks in the custody of the National Archives in Washington, DC. [Appendix 4](#) is a list of "Other Sources of Information for Merchant Seamen".

Using Logbooks to Verify World War II Veteran Status

Veteran status was finally granted to merchant seamen who served on oceangoing voyages during World War II on January 19, 1988. On that date, the Secretary of the Air Force, on behalf of the Department of Defense, signed a Secretarial Determination. This document was published in compliance with orders issued by the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. It stated that, "...the service of the group known as the 'American Merchant Marine in Oceangoing Service during the Period of Armed Conflict, December 7, 1941, to August 15, 1945, shall be construed active duty for the purposes of all laws administered by the Veterans Administration."

The United States Coast Guard has set up a special unit to assist former merchant seamen to obtain the evidence of wartime service required to qualify them for veteran status. This unit should be the first point of contact for former seamen, who should submit copies of any documents in their possession which could help to verify their service, along with Form DD 2168. “Application For Discharge of Member or Survivor of Member of Group Certified To Have Performed Active Duty with the Armed Forces of the United States.” Form DD 2168 can be obtained from offices of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (formerly called the Veterans Administration).

Acceptable forms of documentation are:

Certificates of Discharge (Forms 718A)

Continuous Discharge Books

Company letters showing vessel names and dates of voyages.

Requests should be addressed to:

Commanding Officer

U.S. Coast Guard – National Maritime Center

Attn: Records Management Branch (NMC-41)

100 Forbes Drive

Martinsburg, WV 25404

If a veteran cannot locate any of the above documents, and the Coast Guard cannot locate evidence of service in its records, then the logbooks held by National Archives units may be the next best source of verification (see below).

How to Obtain Copies of Merchant Vessel Logbooks From the National Archives and Records Administration

Requests for copies of merchant vessel logbooks should be addressed to the Director of the National Archives and Records Administration unit which holds logbooks for the port at which the individual’s vessel ended its voyage and the appropriate date. Please note the following:

Requests for logbook copies must be made in writing (See [Appendix 1](#) for addresses of the National Archives Records Administration units);

Requests for Copies needed to verify veteran scams must state that copies are needed for this purpose;

Requests must include:

- a. Full name of vessel (e.g., SS Walter Scott, not SS Scott)
- b. Name of port where the voyage ended, and
- c. Approximate dates of the voyage (month and year).

If the requested logbook(s) can be located, the veteran will be provided, FREE OF CHARGE, ONE copy of the logbook pages needed to verify veteran status. These are:

The logbook cover;

Page 3, which shows inclusive dates of voyage, man of master and, usually, the name of ports visited;

Pages containing the entire crew list; and

Pages containing, any entries which specifically relate to the injury, illness and treatment/hospitalization of the requester.

See below for information about restrictions on the availability of information, and for information about costs of copies.

Restriction on the Availability of Logbook Information

Since official Merchant Vessel Logbooks contain information relating to many individuals which may be of a personal nature, they are subject to the privacy provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 522). Thus, entries which relate to medical or disciplinary matters concerning individuals OTHER THAN THE REQUESTOR may have to be deleted from copies provided, under Exemption (b)(6) of the Freedom of Information Act, which exempts the release of information, "...the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy."

Also, please note that the location of logbooks for some ports is presently unknown. The Coast Guard and the National Archives and Records Administration are attempting to locate logbooks for ports not listed in Appendices 2 and 3, and this list will be updated as new information becomes available.

Vessels Registered in Foreign Countries: Information provided by the Coast Guard indicates that vessels registered in foreign countries (for example, Panama, Honduras, the Philippines) were not required to maintain and turn in logbooks of this type. This is the case even if the vessel were owned by an American company and operated under War Shipping Administration control. Neither the Coast Guard nor the National Archives and Records Administration will be able to provide crew lists for such vessels.

Cost of Copies

As stated above, there is **NO CHARGE** for **ONE** copy of the logbook pages, of each logbook, needed to verify veteran status. Requests for more than one copy of the required pages, however, and all requests for copies of pages not needed to verify veteran status, are subject to a **MINIMUM** charge of \$10.00.

The National Archives will send a bill with the copies, or notify the requester of the cost if it is more than \$10.00, in which case payment must be received before copies can be mailed. **DO NOT SEND PAYMENT WITH THE INITIAL REQUEST.** All payments must be made by check or money order made payable to **NATIONAL ARCHIVES TRUST FUND BOARD (or NAT)** and addressed to the National Archives and Records Administration unit from which the copies are ordered. Before ordering copies of complete logbooks, please read the following section.

Information Contained in Merchant Vessel Logbooks

The logbooks in the National Archives and Records Administration are **NOT** the “traditional” ships’ logs often referred to as “Deck Logs,” in which Masters recorded daily entries concerning the position and operation of the ship. Deck logs were traditionally considered to be the property of the owners of the ship. After World War II, however, the deck and engine logbooks of vessels operated by the War Shipping Administration were turned over to that agency by the ship owners, and were destroyed during the 1970s.

Logbooks in the National Archives and Records Administration are those issued to masters of vessels in accordance with federal laws and regulations passed to protect the health and welfare of merchant sailors. Entries initially were required to record offenses and desertions punishable by forfeiture of wages, and injuries or illnesses of crewmembers. Later legislation required entries concerning circumstances surrounding collisions in which the vessel was involved, and noting the death, births or marriage of passengers aboard the ship. Also required were entries recording emergency drills held, and the watertight integrity of the vessel.

Logbooks in the National Archives DO NOT usually contain descriptions of wartime actions in which the vessel was involved. The Armed Guard Reports created by the U.S. Naval detachments which provided gun crews for merchant vessels, are better sources for such information. See [Appendix 4](#) for information about where to write for access to these records.

Some World War II period logbooks do not name ports visited during the voyage due to wartime security restrictions. Also, due to the privacy provisions of the Freedom of Information Act previously discussed, some entries relating to individuals other than the requester may have to be deleted from copies provided from logbooks in National Archives holdings.

Appendix 1

National Archives and Records Administration Units Which Hold Collections of Merchant Vessel Logbooks

Old Military and Civil Records

National Archives and Records Administration

Washington, DC 20408

Telephone: 202-501-5395

Fax: 202-208-1903

E-mail: inquire@nara.gov

Web: <http://www.archives.gov>

NARA's Northeast Region (Boston)

380 Trapelo Road

Waltham, Massachusetts 02452-6399

Telephone: 781-663-0130

Fax: 781-663-0154

E-mail: waltham.archives@nara.gov

Web: <http://archives.gov/northeast/boston/>

NARA's Northeast Region (New York City)

1 Bowling Green

New York, New York 10004

Telephone: 212-401-1620

Toll Free: 1-866-840-1752

Fax: 212-401-1638

E-mail: newyork.archives@nara.gov

Web: <http://archives.gov/northeast/nyc/>

National Maritime Center

Keep 'em Safe, Keep 'em Sailing



NARA's Mid Atlantic Region (Center City Philadelphia)

14700 Townsend Road

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19154

Telephone: 215-305-2044

Fax: 215-606-0116

E-mail: philadelphia.archives@nara.gov

Web: <http://archives.gov/midatlantic/public/>

NARA's Southeast Region

5780 Jonesboro Road

Morrow, Georgia 30260

Telephone: 770-968-2100

Fax: 770-968-2547

E-Mail: atlanta.archives@nara.gov

Web: <http://archives.gov/southeast/>

NARA's Southwest Region

1400 John Burgess Drive

Fort Worth, Texas 76140

P. O. Box 6216

Fort Worth, Texas 76115-0216

Telephone: 817-551-2051

Fax: 817-551-2034

E-mail: ftworth.archives@nara.gov

Web: <http://archives.gov/southwest>

National Maritime Center

Keep 'em Safe, Keep 'em Sailing



NARA's Pacific Region (Laguna Niguel)
24000 Avila Road, First Floor-East Entrance
Laguna Niguel, California 92677-3497
Telephone: 949-360-2641
Fax: 949-360-2624
E-mail: laguna.archives@nara.gov
Web: <http://archives.gov/pacific/laguna>

NARA's Pacific Region (San Francisco)
1000 Commodore Drive
San Bruno, California 94066-2350
Telephone: 650-238-3501
Fax: 650-238-3510
E-mail: sanbruno.archives@nara.gov
Web: <http://www.archives.gov/pacific/archives/san-francisco/contacts.html>

NARA's Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle)
6125 Sand Point Way, Northeast
Seattle, Washington 98115-7999
Telephone: 206-336-5132
Fax: 206-336-5112
E-mail: seattle.archives@nara.gov
Web: <http://archives.gov/pacific-alaska/seattle/contacts.html>

Appendix 2

Merchant Vessels Logbooks in the Custody of National Archives and Records Administration's Regional Archives

Regional Archives	Port	Date Span	Finding Aids
New England	Boston, MA	1942 - 1959	Indexed by name of ship
	Portsmouth, NH	1942 - 1959	Indexed by name of ship
	Portland, ME	1942 - 1959	Indexed by name of ship
	Providence, RI	1941 - 1959	Indexed by name of ship
Northeast	New York, NY	1942 - 1962	Indexed by name of ship and pay off date
Mid Atlantic	Philadelphia, PA	1919 - 1921	Indexed by name of ship
		1942 - 1956	Indexed by name of ship
		1958 - 1959	Indexed by name of ship
	Baltimore, MD	1942 - 1957	Indexed by name of ship
		1964 - 1967	Indexed by name of ship
	Norfolk, VA	1940 - 1955	Indexed by name of ship
	(Including Wilmington, NC)	1940 - 1955	Indexed by name of ship
	Portsmouth, VA	1956 - 1957	Indexed by name of ship
		1963 - 1964	Indexed by name of ship
Southeast	Savannah, GA	1941 - 1953	Indexed by name of ship
	Jacksonville, FL	1943 - 1951	Indexed by name of ship
	Miami, FL	1943 - 1946	Indexed by name of ship
	Mobile, AL	1942 - 1960	Indexed by name of ship
	Tampa, FL	1942 - 1951	Indexed by name of ship
	Charleston, SC	1919 - 1958	Indexed for WW II period
Southwest	Brownsville, TX	1946 - 1959	Not Indexed
	Corpus Christi, TX	1943 - 1972	Indexed for WW II period
	Galveston, TX	1941 - 1974	Indexed for WW II period
	Houston, TX	1942 - 1973	Indexed for WW II period
	New Orleans, LA	1942 - 1976	Indexed for WW II period
	Port Arthur, TX	1939 - 1970	Indexed for WW II period
Pacific (Laguna Niguel)	Los Angeles, CA	1916 - 1942	Indexed by name of ship
	Los Angeles, CA	1942 - 1960	Indexed by name of ship
	(includes Wilmington, Long Beach & San Pedro)		
	Port San Luis, CA	1942 - 1954	Shipping Articles & Crew Lists Only
	Port Hueneme, CA	1945	Shipping Articles Only
Pacific (San Francisco)	San Francisco, CA	1942 - 1960	Indexed by name of ship 1942 - 1957
Pacific Northwest	Seattle, WA	1890 - 1911	Indexed by name of ship
	Seattle, WA	1910 - 1937	Indexed by name of ship
	Seattle, WA	1940 - 1958	Indexed by name of ship
	Portland, OR	1942 - 1958	Indexed by name of ship
	Coos Bay, OR	1914 - 1927	List Available
	Astoria, OR	1915 - 1940	List Available

Appendix 3

Merchant Vessel Logbooks in the National Archives in Washington, DC

Port	Date Span
Albany, NY	1932-1941
Baltimore, MD	1889-1941
Baytown, TX	1925-1937
Boston, MA	1908-1941
Charleston, SC	1939-1941
Corpus Christi, TX	1939-1941
Fall River, MA	1920-1940
Galveston, TX	1915-1941
Houston, TX	1921-1941
Jacksonville, FL	1936-1941
Los Angeles, CA	1929-1941
Mobile, AL	1919-1941
New Orleans, LA	1914-1941
New York, NY	1872-1941
Newport News, VA	1919-1920
Norfolk, VA	1915-1920; 1937-1941
Philadelphia, PA	1889-1941
Port Arthur, TX	1934; 1938- 1941
Portland, ME	1934-1935; 1938
Portland, ME	1912-1941
Providence, RI	1934-1938
San Francisco, CA	1883-1941
Savannah, GA	1929-1941
Seattle, WA	1911-1941
Tampa, FL	1921-1941

Appendix 4

Other Sources of Information for Merchant Seamen

1. If service was performed on a vessel operated by:

Army Transport Service – Send DD Form 2168 to:

Commander

U. S. Army Human Resources Command

1600 Spearhead Division Avenue, Department 540

Fort Knox, KY 40122-5504

Attn: PSV-V

Naval Transportation Service – Send DD Form 2168 to:

Commander

U.S. Navy Personnel Command (PERS-312)

5720 Integrity Drive

Millington, TN 38054-5045

2. If the veteran is uncertain as to the port where the voyage ended, the National Archives and Records Administration has Vessel Movement Cards of the 10th Fleet which was in charge of convoys and routing during World War II. These cards can provide dates, ports of arrival and departure and convoy numbers for most American and some foreign registered vessels. Requestors must provide the Center with the full name of the vessel and approximate dates of the voyage. The Center prefers that requests be made in writing.

Write to:

National Archives and Records Administration at College Park

Modern Military Records

8601 Adelphia Road

College Park, MD 20740-6001

(Note: Convoy operations for North Russia and in the Mediterranean Sea were under Royal Navy control. Information concerning convoy numbers may be obtained by writing to:

Public Records Office
Ruskin Avenue
Kew, Richmond
Surrey, TW9 4DU, ENGLAND)

3. Information concerning Service-Connected Aggravated Injuries or Illness may be available from:

A. Medical information on merchant seamen treated at U.S. Public Health Service Hospitals (former Marine Hospitals). Requests for information should include the name seaman used as a patient, date of birth, Z Number, location of hospital where treatment was received, and approximate date and kind of treatment.

Write to:

National Hansen's Disease Program
9181 Interline Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70809

You may also contact them by telephone at 1-800-642-2477 or (225) 756-3701. If you choose to leave a voicemail, please provide your name, date of birth, and callback number. Please also provide: 1) the year the merchant mariner was treated; and 2) the location of the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital treated at. Please do not leave any social security numbers (SSN) on the voicemail. You may also contact them by encrypted fax at (225) 756-3801.

B. Files on Awards and Decorations granted to merchant seamen may contain information about the basis for which the medal/award was given. Requests for information should include the full name of the seaman, Coast Guard Z or Book Number, and World War II home address.

Write to:

U.S. Maritime Administration (MAR-630)
Office of Sealift Support
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

- C. Records of merchant seamen trained by the U.S. Maritime Service may be available. Requests for information should include the name the seaman used during training, date of birth, and Social Security Number.

Write to:

National Personnel Records Center
(Military Personnel Records)
9700 Page Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63132-5100

Civilian Personnel Records
National Archives & Records Administration
ATTN: Archival Programs
P.O. Box 38757
St. Louis, MO 63138

- D. Academic, medical and training records of seamen who were enrolled as cadets at the U.S. Maritime Academy may be available. Requests should contain name seaman used as a cadet, date of birth, Social Security Number, and dates of enrollment.

Write to:

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
Kings Point, NY 11024-1699
Attn: Director of External Affairs

- E. Vessel Status Cards that identify vessels owned or operated by the War Shipping Administration (WSA), and of vessels owned or operated by the WSA that suffered war damage may be available at the Maritime Administration. Requests for information should include the name of the vessel:

Write to:

U.S. Maritime Administration (MAR-630)
Office of Sealift Support
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

- F. The National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD, has a collection of Armed Guard Reports (and logs) submitted by the Naval gun crew detachments. Requests for copies of the reports should include the full name of the vessel and the approximate dates of the voyage.

Write to:

National Archives at College Park
Modern Military Records
8601 Adelphia Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

- G. Medical Treatment Folders of Merchant Marine personnel treated at Army or Air Force Medical Facilities may be available. Requests for information should include the patient's name, name of medical facility, year treated, date of birth, Social Security and Z number.

Write to:

National Personnel Records Center
Military Personnel Records)
9700 Page Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63132-5100

Civilian Personnel Records
111 Winnebago Street
St. Louis, MO 63118

- H. Medical Treatment Folders of Merchant Marine personnel treated at Naval Medical Facilities may be available. Requests for information should include patient's name, date of birth, name of facility, year treated, Social Security and Z Numbers, and whether inpatient or outpatient. (If outpatient, list facilities and years if treatment was continued.)

Write to:

National Personnel Records Center
Organizational Records Section
9700 Page Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63132

- I. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., has a series of records titled “Marine Board Case Files, 1943-58” that include the record of investigation, transcript of hearing, findings of fact, and other information concerning collisions of vessels, injuries, and loss of life. Requests for copies of these records, which are part of Record Group 26. Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, should include the name of the vessel and the date of the incident.

Write to:

Navy/Maritime Team
Old Military and Civil Records
National Archives and Records Administration
Washington, DC 20408-0001

- J. The National Archives in Washington has, in Record Group 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, a collection of Records of Consular Posts 1790-1963. This record group includes records of seaport consulates, which may contain information concerning services performed for American ships, and seamen, including lists of seamen shipped, discharged, or deceased. This series may be helpful to seamen who were discharged in a foreign port for medical or other reasons during World War II. The completeness of the records varies greatly for different consulates. Requests for information or copies from these records must include the names of the seaman and ship, the name of the foreign port at which discharged and as close an approximation of the date as possible.

For records dated 1790-1963, write to:

National Archives at College Park
Civilian Records
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

4. Shipping Companies and/or Maritime Unions may have information, which might help to verify wartime service. The U.S. Maritime Administration publication, “Maritime Labor-Management Affiliations Guide,” contains listings of the names and addresses of these organizations.

Write to:

U.S. Department of Transportation
Maritime Administration, West Building
1200 New Jersey Avenue, Southeast
Washington, DC 20590

5. The Marine Index Bureau, Inc., a non-governmental organization, has records relating to illness, injury, and treatment of merchant seamen. This company has indicated that they would prefer that requests for information from their records be forwarded to them through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (formerly called the Veterans Administration). The veteran should contact the nearest Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and request that they contact the Marine Index Bureau (address below) on his behalf.

Write to:

Marine Index Bureau, Inc.
17 Battery Place
New York, NY 10004