At the end of title VI, add the following new section:

SEC. 6. METHODS FOR VALIDATING CERTAIN SERVICE CONSIDERED TO BE ACTIVE SERVICE BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For the purposes of verifying that an individual performed service under honorable conditions that satisfies the requirements of a coastwise merchant seaman who is recognized pursuant to section 401 of the GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977 (Public Law 95–202; 38 U.S.C. 106 note) as having performed active duty service for the purposes described in subsection (c)(1), the Secretary of Homeland Security shall accept the following:

(1) In the case of an individual who served on a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition for whom no applicable Coast Guard shipping or discharge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s document or Z-card, or other official employment record is available, the Secretary shall provide such recognition on the basis of applicable Social Security Ad-
administration records submitted for or by the individual, together with validated testimony given by the individual or the primary next of kin of the individual that the individual performed such service during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(2) In the case of an individual who served on a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition for whom the applicable Coast Guard shipping or discharge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s document or Z-card, or other official employment record has been destroyed or otherwise become unavailable by reason of any action committed by a person responsible for the control and maintenance of such form, logbook, or record, the Secretary shall accept other official documentation demonstrating that the individual performed such service during period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(3) For the purpose of determining whether to recognize service allegedly performed during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946, the Secretary shall recognize masters of seagoing vessels or other officers in command of similarly organized groups as agents of the
United States who were authorized to document any individual for purposes of hiring the individual to perform service in the merchant marine or discharging an individual from such service.

(b) TREATMENT OF OTHER DOCUMENTATION.—

Other documentation accepted by the Secretary of Homeland Security pursuant to subsection (a)(2) shall satisfy all requirements for eligibility of service during the period beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December 31, 1946.

(c) BENEFITS ALLOWED.—

(1) BURIAL BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY.—Service of an individual that is considered active duty pursuant to subsection (a) shall be considered as active duty service with respect to providing burial benefits under chapters 23 and 24 of title 38, United States Code, to the individual.

(2) MEDALS, RIBBONS, AND DECORATIONS.—An individual whose service is recognized as active duty pursuant to subsection (a) may be awarded an appropriate medal, ribbon, or other military decoration based on such service.

(3) STATUS OF VETERAN.—An individual whose service is recognized as active duty pursuant to subsection (a) shall be honored as a veteran but shall
not be entitled by reason of such recognized service
to any benefit that is not described in this sub-
section.

(d) DETERMINATION OF COASTWISE MERCHANT
SEAMAN.—The Secretary of Homeland Security shall
verify that an individual performed service under honor-
able conditions that satisfies the requirements of a coast-
wise merchant seaman pursuant to this section without
regard to the sex, age, or disability of the individual dur-
ing the period in which the individual served as such a
costwise merchant seaman.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “coastwise merchant seaman”
means a mariner that served on a tug boat, towboat,
or seagoing barge that transported war materials to
and from ports located in the territorial seas of the
United States in support of the war effort during
the period beginning December 7, 1941, and ending
December 31, 1946.

(2) The term “primary next of kin” with re-
spect to an individual seeking recognition for service
under this section means the closest living relative of
the individual who was alive during the period of
such service.
(f) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—This section shall take effect 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.