



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Joe Courtney
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Courtney:

This is in response to your December 10, 2019 correspondence requesting a plan on how the Navy will support the Department of Veterans Affairs adjudicating the claims of veterans who served aboard submarines for benefits covered under the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (PL116-23), which took effect January 1, 2020.

The Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC), National Archives and Records Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), and OPNAV have coordinated to establish a process to service all Blue Water Vietnam veterans' claims.

- VBA has developed a Ship Locator Tool that tracks the location of Navy vessels during the timeframe impacted by this law. Blue Water Navy veterans should submit their claims to VBA.
- VBA anticipates it should be able to service the majority of claims through this tool.
- For the rest, VBA will forward claims to NHHC and OPNAV, who will examine their records (which takes time) and provide responses to VBA for review and adjudication.
- VBA estimates responses to Blue Water Navy submariner claims overall will take 150.3 days compared to 112.6 days for non-submariner Blue Water Navy claims.
- VBA/NHHC estimates Blue Water submariner claims that require referral to the Navy or other entities will require an additional 60-90 days for processing, with responses estimated at 180-210 days. While process efficiencies over time may decrease these figures, the claims of Navy submariners, by their nature, may require additional effort to locate responsive records.

I am fully committed to supporting our Navy veterans and the efforts of the VBA. If I may be of further assistance, please let me know. A similar response has been sent to the other signatories.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Kenneth J. Braithwaite", is written over a blue circular stamp. The stamp contains the text "THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY" and "WASHINGTON, DC 20350-1000".

Kenneth J. Braithwaite