

VICTORY FOR THE BLUE WATER NAVY VETERANS!

WASHINGTON – The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is urging President Trump to quickly sign into law H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, which the Senate passed this evening by unanimous consent on July 12. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the VFW-supported legislation on May 14 by a vote of 410-0.

Earlier, the Department of Justice, in a filing with the Supreme Court June 4, said they would not appeal against the federal court ruling extending disability benefits for Agent Orange exposure to Blue Water Navy veterans. The Procopio v. Wilkie decision was a major victory for Blue Water Navy veterans in their long fight for VA benefits to treat illnesses linked to exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in January ruled in favor of Alfred Procopio Jr., who served aboard the *USS Intrepid* during the war. Procopio, 73, suffers from diabetes and prostate cancer, both of which are linked to Agent Orange exposure.

Veterans who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange if diagnosed with a medical condition associated with the herbicide, according to the Agent Orange Act of 1991. Presumptive diseases of exposure to the herbicide include certain cancers, Parkinson's disease and diabetes. This act applied only to veterans who served on land and in Vietnam's inland waterways, excluding those who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam. The Procopio decision extends these benefits to any military personnel who served on any vessel during the Vietnam War that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam.

The measure had support of a host of veterans groups, including Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. However, ironically officials from the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association and Military-Veterans Advocacy have announced opposition to the measure, saying the geographical parameters laid out in the measure are more restrictive than what the court order earlier this year included.

Note: American Legion, VFW, and other military websites were used in creating this article.