

CAPTAIN MCDONALD'S COMMISSIONING SPEECH  
FOR THE  
USCGC PENOBSCOT BAY  
4 JANUARY 1985

GOOD AFTERNOON. I PROMISE TO KEEP MY REMARKS SHORT IN VIEW OF THE COLD WEATHER.

THOSE OF YOU WHO WERE HERE IN OCTOBER FOR THE DECOMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF THE CGC MAHONING WILL CERTAINLY AGREE THAT IT WAS A SAD OCCASION--SAD PERHAPS BECAUSE THE CUTTER WAS A FAMILIAR SIGHT AFTER HER FORTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE HARBOR--AND SAD BECAUSE WE TEND TO TRANSFER THE HUMAN QUALITIES OF THE CREW TO THE SHIP HERSELF. DECOMMISSIONING IN A VERY REAL SENSE MEANT LOSING A FRIEND.

TODAY IS A HAPPIER OCCASION. TODAY WE HAVE WITNESSED WITH THE BREAKING OF THE PENNANT AND HOISTING OF THE COLORS THE BIRTH OF A COAST GUARD CUTTER. WITH THE SETTING OF THE WATCH, THE SHIP'S MACHINERY COMES TO LIFE. HER CAPTAIN AND CREW STAND READY AND EVEN ANXIOUS TO TRY OUT THEIR NEW SHIP IN THE CHALLENGING MISSIONS THAT LAY AHEAD. AND, AS WE SLIP FURTHER INTO THE WINTER, I CAN SAFELY PREDICT THAT THE PENOBSCOT BAY'S ICEBREAKING BOW WILL SOON BE PUT TO THE TEST.

THE BIRTH OF A COAST GUARD CUTTER IS NOTHING NEW FOR THE PORT OF NEW YORK. THE FIRST COAST GUARD CUTTER COMMISSIONED IN NEW YORK WAS THE VIGILANT ON MARCH 31, 1791. SHE WAS A FORTY-EIGHT FOOT SCHOONER--ONE OF THE TEN ORIGINAL CUTTERS COMMISSIONED BY THE

FIRST SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY, ALEXANDER HAMILTON. WHEN PATRICK DENNIS TOOK COMMAND OF THE NEW VIGILANT, THE NATION WAS ALMOST AS NEW AS HIS SHIP. ALL ALONE AND WITH ONLY FOUR SMALL GUNS, SHE TOOK ON THE ALMOST INSURMOUNTABLE TASK OF SECURING THE HARBOR AND ENFORCING NEW CUSTOMS LAWS.

MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE THE DAYS OF THE CUTTER VIGILANT. IN MANY WAYS IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE THAT VIGILANT AND THE PENOBSCOT BAY, SEPERATED BY ALMOST TWO CENTURIES OF DEVELOPMENT IN NAVAL ARCHITECTURE, SHARE ANYTHING IN COMMON. BUT THERE ARE COMMON THREADS. IN A BROAD SENSE OUR PRIMARY MISSION AREAS OF SAFETY AT SEA, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DEFENSE READINESS REMAIN UNCHANGED. AND THE CHALLENGES OF THOSE CRITICAL MISSIONS ARE STILL GREAT. MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMAND OF THIS CUTTER AND ALL OTHERS THAT PRECEDE HER RESTS SOLELY WITH THE CAPTAIN. HIS LEADERSHIP AND THE COURAGE AND DEDICATION OF THE CREW GIVE THE CUTTER BOTH HER LIFE AND HER PURPOSE.

I WELCOME PENOBSCOT BAY AS THE NEWEST MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY HERE AT GROUP NEW YORK. AND I HAVE ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE THAT CAPTAIN BECHTLE AND HIS CREW WILL SERVE WELL ON PENOBSCOT BAY AND PENOBSCOT BAY IN TURN WILL SERVE THE PORT OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY WELL.

TO CAPTAIN BECHTLE AND HER CREW I WISH YOU GODSPEED.