



Admiral James M. Loy

Recruit Graduation

"Young and at Sea"

Cape May, New Jersey

June 11, 1999

Amenities:

Captain Brice-O'Hara . . . Training Center staff . . . family and friends of the graduates . . . members of Charlie One Five Five . . . I'm honored to be with you this morning to welcome you to our nation's Coast Guard.

Introduction:

It's always good to know the expectations of one's host when beginning a set of public remarks.

Some hosts are more subtle than others in conveying their expectations. Captain Brice-O'Hara chose to employ all the subtlety that one would expect from one of her Company Commanders.

At the beginning of the week, as the East Coast was bracing for its first round of hundred degree heat, she told me I could speak for any length of time I chose: forty five minutes, an hour, two hours—no problem. She just wanted me to be sure to remember two things. First, that I would be speaking to a crowd of about 500 people, most of whom would be standing in the bright sunshine and overbearing heat. And, second, that my primary audience—the graduates in Charlie One Five Five—won't hear a word I said because their minds will be one hundred percent focused on putting Tracen Cape May in the rear view mirror of the first form of vehicular transportation to which they can attach themselves.

Taking her hint, I resolved to speak for about a minute and a half.

But as I stand here now . . . I observe that temperatures have moderated and the heat no longer seems to be a restricting factor. And as I look upon the fixed and alert gaze of our graduating company, I refuse to credit any slander against their attentiveness. In fact, seldom have I seen such an assemblage of radiant faces so obviously eager to receive all the wisdom their Commandant might dispense. And so, though I had planned only the briefest of remarks, this gathering now seems like a most propitious opportunity to offer a

detailed analysis of our 208 years of service to America and a thorough report on everything we're doing in headquarters. Guaranteed heart stopping excitement if you really like tales of policy development and paper pushing! Should only take a few hours.

Well . . . Maybe not. Let's talk about you instead.

-

The Love of the Sea.

Today you enter your apprenticeships in the craft of professional mariners, and so I will talk to you about the love of the sea.

That phrase "love of the sea" may jar you. Some of you have never felt any emotion with respect to the sea that bears the least resemblance to your concept of love.

That is quite natural. The love of the sea is an acquired understanding, and it is not a qualification for enlistment. The Coast Guard has always welcomed into its ranks those who are willing to work to improve their station in life. For my part, I joined the Coast Guard from the middle of Pennsylvania without the least trace of a desire to be at sea. My sole purpose in affiliating with the Coast Guard was to obtain the college education my family could not afford to provide. The love of the sea came later—after I had lived on the sea, learned from the sea, and had been treated to both its awesome power and magnificent serenity.

Some of you love the idea of the sea as you imagine it from poems or stories, but again that is not the love of which I speak. You will soon have the opportunity to love the reality of the sea.

Others of you have enjoyed fishing or swimming or other water sports, but you may not yet understand the love of which I speak. One sailor of the last century called it the "strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft, which no amount of enthusiasm for yachting, cruising, and so on can give, since one is only the amusement of life and the other is life itself." There is a difference between enjoying the water and loving the sea. It is the difference between flirtation and marriage.

Joseph Conrad, the sailor whose work I just quoted, tells the story of five gentlemen who met for dinner and an evening of conversation. All of them had begun their careers at sea, but most of them changed course, pursued careers ashore, and all had now reached a prosperous middle age. They had never sailed together, but they knew that fellowship of craft, and so they shared the bond that unites all sailors.

One of them tells the others the story of one of his first voyages. The voyage ended disastrously, but that's almost irrelevant to the story. It's a story of a young sailor learning he was stronger and braver and better than he ever suspected, of holding up well under adversity, of responding to danger with teamwork, and of facing and overcoming one's fears.

When he concludes his tale of this miserable voyage—a voyage that almost killed him a half dozen ways before finally leaving him a castaway—he surprises the inattentive reader by reflecting on what a great learning experience he had.

He asks his friends if they too had discovered that the best times of their lives were experienced in the midst of such hardship, danger, and privation: "By all that's wonderful, it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself--or is it youth alone? Who can tell? But you here--you all had something out of life: money, love—whatever one gets on shore—and, tell me, wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks--and sometimes a chance to feel your strength."

And the prosperous middle aged men remembered the time when they were young and at sea, the time they learned what they were made of, the time they realized the potential of what they could accomplish in this world. And they remembered their love of the sea . . . because that's where they learned about themselves.

They had experienced much and accomplished much, but they all agreed that nothing surpassed the time they were young and at sea.

Conclusion:

You—the men and women of Charlie One Five Five—will soon be young and at sea. It is the best possible position for a young person, though you will seldom believe and often forget that this is so.

You will feel overworked and underpaid, and it is entirely likely that your assessment will be accurate. But you will learn things about your strength and your character and your potential that you can learn nowhere else.

And when you have learned these things, you will love the sea that taught them. And you will also learn to love the Coast Guard that gave you the opportunity to learn those lessons while serving your country.

Congratulations on completing recruit training. Welcome to the Coast Guard. I envy you your beginning. Semper Paratus.

