



***Anthony Petit* Launching**

Admiral James M. Loy

"Small Before the Sea"

Marinette Marine Corporation

Marinette, WI

30 January 1999

Amenities:

Thank you, Mr. Gulling.

I'm grateful to Marinette Marine for hosting this launching of the *Anthony Petit*. She's coming along beautifully, and I look forward to welcoming her to the Coast Guard fleet next year as the eighth member of the Keeper Class of Coastal Buoy Tenders built by the fine craftsmen of Marinette Marine Corporation.

Small Before the Sea:

Though we are properly in a celebratory mood this morning, Captain Suchy's recounting of the destruction of Scotch Cap Light—and the loss of Chief Petit and his crew—carries an implicit reminder of the power of the sea and the dangers associated with doing business on the sea.

Let us consider that reminder for a moment.

An extraordinary passage in the book of Psalms describes a blessing that comes to, "They that go down to the sea and do business in great waters," because, "they see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep."

However, the precise manner in which they see these works hardly seems a blessing to the casual reader. The psalm describes a stormy wind and huge waves—waves that mount up to heaven. Waves that make sailors stagger like drunken men. Waves that drive brave mariners to their wit's end.

Quite a blessing! If being so battered is indeed a blessing, I must confess it to be one I have experienced without ever praying for.

The psalm continues with a brief tale of helpless sailors calling out for mercy and ultimately seeing the storm pass. Only then does the psalmist reveal that a major component of this "blessing" is that the sailors learn how precarious their condition is. They learn that they are small. Small before the sea.

It is a blessing. Sailors who know they are small before the sea have a better chance of reaching their desired havens.

Knowing they are small, they understand that their physical strength and determination matter little in a contest as unequal as that between sailors and the sea.

Knowing they are small, they conscientiously maintain their ships in seaworthy condition, observe the stability limits of their craft, avoid the worst weather, and properly equip and train their shipmates.

Anthony Petit and the crew of Scotch Cap Light remind us how small we are before the sea.

Scotch Cap Light was a modern and sturdy building in 1946. It sat squarely on a solid rise of land, tucked into the shoulder of an even higher promontory. It appeared for all the world to be as strong and secure as ever we could please.

But it—like us—was small before the sea. Just how small became clear when a wall of water travelling three hundred miles per hour slammed into the island, erased the lighthouse, and even reached the Radio Direction Finding Station that was set well back from the top of the cliff above the lighthouse. From the damage to that Radio Direction Finding Station, we know that the devastating wave was more than a hundred feet high. Never doubt that we are small before the sea.

Scotch Cap light was just north of the epicenter of the earthquakes that spawned the fatal tsunami. But those tremors also sent shocks to other points of the compass. Within five hours those shocks had raced from the Aleutian chain up at fifty degrees north latitude all the way down to the Tropic of Cancer, where four great waves rose up to the heavens from a calm sea and smashed the north shores of Hawaii and Oahu, killing over 160 people. Truly we are small before the sea.

Last August I was in Marinette for the launching of the *Joshua Appleby*. Joshua Appleby's death carries the same warning. He and his daughter died when a hurricane washed away his lighthouse in Sand Key, Florida, in 1836.

Thursday, the Coast Guard observed the anniversary of the sinking of the buoy tender *Blackthorn*. We remembered the twenty three shipmates who died in that collision. We are small before the sea.

Every generation must learn that lesson. When the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, there was great reluctance in Washington to spend any money on a territory that most people considered to be unprofitable wasteland. For fifteen years, there were no lighthouses and no buoys. The whaling season of 1883 took a particularly fearsome toll

on the whaling fleet, finally teaching that generation that we are small before the sea and convincing them of the need for aids to navigation in Alaska.

We are learning that lesson still.

Tomorrow ends a very difficult month for the U.S. commercial fishing fleet. Ten boats sunk. Eleven people missing or known dead.

The Coast Guard is so concerned that we launched the Fishing Vessel Casualty Task Force to discover why these disasters occur with such frequency.

I do not want to pre-suppose the findings of this task force because I know well that the economic and safety issues faced by a fleet of more than 100,000 fishing vessels are varied and complex. Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that lurking among the technical factors is an insufficient appreciation of how small we are before the sea.

Because we are small, going to sea is an inherently dangerous business. This dangerous business degrades into utter recklessness the first moment we relax our vigilance, permit the smallest compromise of professional seamanship standards, or allow the least diminishment of our awe of the power of the sea.

Today we launch the *Anthony Petit* to promote safe navigation in Alaska. Let us honor Chief Petit by heeding his eternal reminder that we are small before the sea.

Introduce Senator Murkowski:

Our keynote speaker today is Senator Frank Murkowski of Alaska.

Among his many important committee assignments, Senator Murkowski chairs the crucial Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

More importantly, however, Senator Murkowski holds one extraordinary credential to which no other member of the United States Senate can lay claim—a distinction that can neither be bought nor obtained by political favor.

Senator Murkowski is a veteran of the United States Coast Guard, having served in Alaskan waters aboard the cutters *Thistle* and *Sorrel* after he graduated from college in 1955.

The *Sorrel* wasn't exactly a new ship when Senator Murkowski served aboard her forty years ago. Even so, it wasn't until Marinette Marine finished building the *Katherine Walker* just two years ago that we were able to let *Sorrel* cease from her labors.

Over the course of those forty years, the technology in our lights and batteries and our buoy positioning systems has changed, but the basic business of working buoys remains intact.

Buoy tenders still face the challenge of bringing industrial platforms into treacherous waters. They still haul heavy, barnacle-encrusted buoys up on pitching decks. Deckies still arrange tons of buoy chain to pay out smoothly when they deposit Volkswagen-sized chunks of concrete on the ocean's floor with the precision of a Brett Favre pass to Antonio Freeman. Buoy tender sailors still get chilled to the bone as they cling to icy rails with one hand and perform their work with the other.

Senator Murkowski knows well what it is to feel small before the forbidding North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea. And he knows well how a sailor depends on well built ships to reach home again.

Because that is so, and because he understands the Coast Guard's value to America and this ship's value to the Coast Guard, I am delighted to ask him to dedicate the *Anthony Petit* to years of service.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming United States Senator Frank Murkowski.

