

**National Memorial Service
Remarks of the Commandant
Escanaba Park
Grand Haven, Michigan
02 August, 2013**

Good Morning Shipmates, citizens of Coast Guard City USA, and distinguished guests!

I can't tell you how wonderful it is to be back here in Grand Haven again this year. I am particularly honored to once again have the opportunity to speak at this remembrance for our shipmates of today, along with those who were lost aboard the ESCANABA. Thank you to the city of Grand Haven and the Coast Guard Festival for inviting me back, and for your absolutely magnificent hospitality.

It is humbling to think of all this town has done, and continues to do – and to think of all those who have stood here before me, on this very spot, year after year, to observe and practice the manners of our profession by paying tribute to those who gave their lives answering our nation's call. Over the nearly three-quarters of a century that Grand Haven has been observing this remembrance, it has become more than simply memorial service. It has become part of the culture, traditions, and history of our Coast Guard.

I'm reminded that 70 years ago this week, less than two months after the sinking of the ESCANABA, Raymond O'Malley, one of only two survivors, stood here and placed a wreath in honor of his lost shipmates. It is a testament to the bond he had with his shipmates – and this community – that he continued to return here to this ceremony for the remainder of his life. And now his son and grandson, Peter and Michael, carry on that tradition. I consider myself fortunate to have twice stood here beside Ray O'Malley.

And 45 years ago – 25 years after the loss of ESCANABA – another Coast Guard Admiral stood here to speak. It was Rear Admiral William Rea III, the Ninth District Commander. But he was more than the District Commander that day. Twenty-five years earlier, as a young lieutenant aboard the Coast Guard Cutter STORIS, he had stood on deck and watched as ESCANABA slipped beneath the waves. He told of seeing the ESCANABA's Executive Officer in the water, waiving STORIS on and telling them to go pick up others – displaying that selfless sacrifice that is the hallmark, the soul, and the ethos of our Service.

Of course only SN Ray O'Malley and Boatswain's Mate Second Class Melvin Baldwin survived that day. That Executive Officer, LT Robert Prause – who even while floating in the icy north Atlantic thought of others before himself – perished along with 100 others of his crew.

And so it has been *every* year here in Grand Haven. Every year you have set aside this time to remember our fallen shipmates, and every year a member of our Coast Guard as stood here to pay tribute to the friends, family and crew members of the ESCANABA. Today I represent all the men and women of the Coast Guard in paying my respects, and again add my voice to those who have come before.

This ceremony – as well as this event and this city – is etched forever in my memory. Just as the family of Ray O'Malley continues to return, I hope to return again with my children, and my children's children, and share with them what is so special about Coast Guard Day in Grand Haven. And as we gather on some future day to pay our respects to the crew of the ESCABANA, I hope to also share with them something of the history of this great Service, as well the sacrifice, the loss, *and the triumph* of those who came before.

When we gather for occasions like this, I often talk of the *Manners of our Profession*. It is right that we do so. One of my guiding principles for our Service is to *Honor Our Profession*. Observing the manners of our profession is part of that.

It is less often, however, that we actually take the time to think about what those manners are – and why we observe them.

Or where we first started to learn and appreciate them.

For me, it began with my father – who was a Marine. I remember being at a parade with him when I was very young and seeing the American flag pass by. He looked down and told me to remove the cap I was wearing and place it over my heart. He explained to me all that the flag stands for – including the memory of those who gave their lives so it could continue to wave.

This was obviously long before I had a profession – and before I put on the cloth of our Nation – but it gave me the foundation to understand what “*The Manners of our Profession*” really means.

As I grew older, I had many more moments like this with my father. Sometimes he explained things to me; sometimes I simply learned by watching him.

I've seen the same thing here every year. And as I look around, I suspect maybe some moments just like that are occurring here this afternoon. I hope so, because this is the way it works. We learn from one another and the actions we take – like this ceremony here today. You don't find these manners written in our publications or instructions. Things like this are observed, they are taught, they are passed down, and they are experienced.

And eventually they are *felt*. They become part of who we are. I think there are few places where that is more apparent for Coast Guard men and women than it is here in Grand Haven.

I've been thinking about that a lot this week as I looked forward to being here today. I also found myself thinking of the other ceremonies honoring fallen Coast Guardsmen I've attended over the past year.

In March I was at our Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey, for the dedication of Bruckenthal Hall, named in honor of Damage Controlman Third Class Nathan Bruckenthal. Petty Officer Bruckenthal was killed by a terrorist bomber in 2004 while serving his second tour in the Arabian Gulf as a member of a joint Coast Guard/Navy boarding team.

Later that same week, I visited Mobile, Alabama, for the dedication of a memorial to the crew of Coast Guard Helicopter 6535. It had been one year since the 6535 crashed into Mobile Bay killing all four crew members on board.

I will never forget the night I got the call telling me of that tragedy. I had an event at my home in Washington, D.C., and I had asked a trio from the Coast Guard Band to come down. At the end of the dinner the trio performed one of my favorite songs, "American Anthem." And when the evening was over, and my guests were departing, the chorus of that song was still going through my head:

"Let them say of me, I was one who believed in sharing the blessings I received. Let me know in my heart, when my days are through, America, America, I gave my best to you."

It's a song I think that plays to everybody who's ever served their country. While those words were still going through my head, the phone rang, and I was

informed that the 6535 had gone down. Ever since that time, for better or worse, I find myself connected to that song because I think of my Coast Guardsmen every time that I hear it. And every time there is a mishap with one of our Coast Guardsmen, I think of it as well.

I thought of those words again in December as I presided at the memorial service for Senior Chief Boatswains Mate Terrell Horne III, the Executive Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Cutter HALIBUT, who was killed while protecting our shores from illegal smuggling.

During a pre-dawn pursuit off the California coast, when the Cutter HALIBUT's small boat was about to be rammed by smugglers, Senior Chief Horne, the Boarding Officer, leaned forward towards the point of impact and pushed his boat coxswain to safety.

Let me say that again.

He leaned *forward – towards* the point of impact – and pushed his boat coxswain to safety.

And just two months ago, the Coast Guard said farewell to one of our great heroes from World War II, CDR Ray Evans. Evans – at the time a young Signalman First Class – served aboard Navy landing craft, taking Marines ashore at Guadalcanal.

After putting Marines ashore during one beach assault, Evans and his Navy coxswain, despite heavy enemy fire, elected to stay behind to be available to immediately transport wounded marines. During this action, his coxswain was killed and Evans was forced to return to base with his badly damaged craft.

However, he wanted to ensure the wounded Marines were safely evacuated. He volunteered to return to the beachhead, and he successfully retrieved the wounded Marines. Signalman First Class Evans was awarded the Navy Cross for his courage that day. His best friend, Douglas Munro, was killed in that engagement, and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

I had the honor to talk with Ray Evans on a couple of occasions over the past year – most recently five months ago on his 92nd birthday. I also met with his wife, Dottie, when I was in Seattle last month.

Senior Chief Horne and Signalman First Class Evans did what leaders do. Just like LT Prause, the Executive Officer on ESCANABA, they put their crew before themselves. They were willing to give their lives for their shipmates. Humility. Courage. Leadership like that is the very *soul* of our service.

As I was thinking about all of this, and about being here this afternoon and this week, surrounded by our extended Coast Guard family, I was reminded of a book I came across earlier this year, *The Secret of a Happy Family*. It confirmed what I have long believed to be true, and it seems to me particularly appropriate for today.

The book wasn't about memorial ceremonies; it was about building a strong family – exactly what we have in the Coast Guard and what we have here in Grand Haven. In one of the chapters, the author discussed a study done several years ago that examined the things a family can do to help children better handle all of the difficulties that life sometimes brings. They wanted to know what would make them the most resilient – what would make them strong enough to handle all of the things that life might throw at them.

The study looked at all the things you would expect – like eating breakfast together, playing sports together, and attending regular religious services...those things we've all been told will make a family strong. And no surprise, the researchers found that those things do indeed matter.

But they also found something totally unexpected – at least to them – but not to me, and I suspect not to many of you here. They discovered that the more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, the more resilient they were, and the more successfully they performed as a family. It turned out to be the single biggest predictor.

They found that this awareness of family history – both the great moments and the tragedies – gave the family members a strong belief that they belonged to something bigger than themselves. And that's what made the difference.

Of course this book was talking about our personal families – our sons and daughters, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. But the same idea applies to our Coast Guard family – and *all* of you here are children of that family.

So that is why we revere our history and heritage. This is why we observe the manners of our profession.

In our service we talk of our “*long blue line*” of Coast Guardsmen. It describes those who served before us - like Senior Chief Horne, the crew of helicopter 6535, the crew of the ESCANABA, CDR Ray Evans, Ray O’Malley, Melvin Baldwin, Senior Chief Terrell Horne, ET1 James Hopkins, Chief Richard Belisle, and thousands of other men and women who have served since the Cutter MASSACHUSETTS first slid down the ways and the Coast Guard was born. It speaks to their accomplishments, their commitment, and their sacrifice.

But it is more than that. It is more than simply looking back to honor those who have served. It is also looking *ahead* at the obligation we all have before us. To our country. To our Service. And to each other.

It is a reminder of the responsibility *we all have* to keep faith with those who came before.

It is also a source of comfort, because we can be sure that those who follow *us* will do the same. I have no doubt that years from now, men and women of the Coast Guard, and men and women of the city of Grand Haven, will continue to gather here. Some future Commandant will stand here just as I do today. And together they will remember the Service and the sacrifice of the ESCANABA crew, as well as all of those who have followed. Maybe a band will play “American Anthem.” And as fathers and mothers bend down to whisper to their children about why they have gathered on this spot, before this mast, and why it’s important – they will continue to build that bridge that extends not just to the past, but to the future as well. And they will all know they belong to something bigger than themselves.

And all of those watching from their place in that long blue line – including the crew of the ESCANABA, and our shipmates who we remember here today – will smile....

And that is another reason this day is so important to all of us.

On behalf of all of the men and women of the Coast Guard, thank you for all that you do, and for helping us to observe the manners of our profession.

Semper Paratus.