

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Robert J. Papp's Remarks

At the

Bruckenthal Hall Dedication Service

Coast Guard Training Center Cape May

Cape May, New Jersey

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

Good Morning Shipmates.

It has been almost nine years since the tragic loss of our Shipmate, Petty Officer Nathan Bruckenthal. Yet that loss is still indelibly etched in our Service's collective consciousness.

I am reminded of this every time I visit our Shipmates in Bahrain. I've seen the memorials to his service there and I've talked with Coast Guard men and women still serving with Patrol Forces Southwest Asia. They may never have met Petty Officer Bruckenthal, but it is clear to me how well they know his story and how much they honor and respect his service and his sacrifice.

Given that fact, some may ask: "Why do we need this memorial? What purpose does it serve?"

There are many answers to this question.

One, of course, is to give substance to the memory of Petty Officer Bruckenthal – the person he was and the sacrifice he made. To coalesce the thoughts and feelings of those who knew him and cement it together with the respect and admiration of all who are here today.

By doing this, all of those who pass through these doors in the years and decades to come – those who are the future of our Service – can know and share that memory as well.

It is important for those who follow to know the dedication and the sacrifice of those who came before. That alone is reason enough for this memorial.

Another reason often given is because the Manners of our Profession require it.

And this is true. We are a military service. A profession of arms. We commit ourselves to our nation and to each other, and we often find ourselves in harm's way. We are called to be a part of something larger than ourselves.

When one of us gives all in pursuit of that noble endeavor, the manners of our profession demand that we pay homage to that service.

We 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.

And this is the way it works. We learn from one another and the actions we take – like this service here today, and so many of the things we do here at Cape May. You won’t find these manners written in any publication, or in the books we give our recruits. They are observed, they are taught, and they are experienced.

And eventually they are felt. They become part of who we are.

I’ve been thinking about that a lot this week. You see, this is the first of two memorial dedications I’ll attend this week. I’ll be in Mobile, Alabama, on Friday for the dedication of a memorial to the crew of Coast Guard Helicopter 6535. The 6535 crashed into Mobile Bay a year ago this week, killing all four crew members on board.

As I was thinking about what I might say at these dedications, I came across a book that helped bring some of my thoughts together. It reminded me of that time with my father, and the reason we build memorials like this. And it confirmed what I have always intuitively known.

The book wasn’t about building a memorial; it was about building a strong family. 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 stress that life brings. They wanted to know what would make them the most resilient.

The study looked at all the things you would expect – like eating breakfast together, playing sports together, and attending regular religious services... Many of the same things our recruits do here at Cape May. 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.... 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 what they called a strong “inter-generational self”. They all knew they belonged to something bigger than themselves. It gave them what they needed to get through the tough times.

This, too, is why we build memorials.

Of course this book was talking about our personal families – or sons and daughters, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. But the same idea applies to our Coast Guard families – and we are all children of that family. And this Training Center is where most of our Service first enters that family. Because of that, there is no more appropriate location for Bruckenthal Hall.

In our service we talk of our “long blue line” of Coast Guardsmen. It describes those who served before us. 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 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.

Petty Officer Bruckenthal is part of our long, blue line of dedicated Coast Guardsmen who have stepped forward to serve their fellow man and put service before self.

He is missed. But as future generations of Coast Guardsmen walk through these doors and into this building – and into our Service – we can be sure he will always be remembered.

And that is the mortar that holds this memorial – and our Service – together.

Semper Paratus.

And Thank You.