



Maritime Administration

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"A CHALLENGE CONSTANTLY RENEWED"

by
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"The Great Society is...a challenge constantly renewed,
beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our
lives matches the marvelous products of our labor."

President Lyndon B. Johnson
University of Michigan
May 22, 1964

It is always a pleasure to visit the Academy, as I have now done three times since March 2, and today you have coupled this pleasure with the honor of an invitation to speak to you on this most symbolic day.

College campuses have provided me many pleasant years, beginning with the University of Iowa, in Iowa City, where I grew up and my father still teaches. And two years after leaving the University of Texas law school in Austin, I returned again to a campus, the University of California at Berkeley, although this time as a member of the faculty. So my interest in the Academy is as personal as it is an official responsibility of the Maritime Administrator.

It often may seem to you--and to the faculty and staff--that the Administrator in Washington is far removed from the life and mission of the Academy. But I want you all to know that my interest in the Academy--in each of you personally--is very real, and continuing. It will never be possible for a Maritime Administrator to know well every cadet and every member of the faculty. But many of you know from personal experience that my time at the Academy has not been limited to discussions with Admiral McIntock and his staff about the many items of business we regularly must handle. Over the years I will spend more time here. You are an impressive group of men, and that is a matter of some pride to your faculty and to me. But beyond my interest in you today is my vision of your futures. For above all the Merchant Marine is men, and you are the men in whose hands that future now reposes. The burden, gentlemen, is not a light one.

It is particularly appropriate at this time in the development of the American Merchant Marine that you should have received your training at this particular institution. The United States Merchant Marine Academy was born in a time of grave national need, when the Nation was beset by war, and beleaguered by its failure to have properly prepared for its advent. As I am sure you all know, the Academy was called on to train enormous numbers of officers in an extraordinarily short period of time. Those men acquitted themselves with great competence and honor under the most hazardous conditions.

Now, 21 years later, the classes are far smaller, the facilities are better, and the program has been refined and developed to reflect the experience of the years since 1943.

But the national need, and our burden in meeting it, is still very great. Never since 1936 have the economic problems of the industry been subjected to such searching examination. With each year that passes, the gap between foreign costs and the costs of building and operating ships in this country widens. While we build approximately 17 new ships per year, the Soviet Union adds ships to its fleet at the rate of two a week. The average age of our ships increases year by year, so that we have now reached the point where the American-flag dry-bulk fleet actually can be modernized by injections of World War II ships from the reserve fleet.

President Johnson has said that he regards "achievement of the full potential of our resources--physical, human, and otherwise--to be the highest purpose of government policies, next to the protection of those rights we regard as inalienable." Whatever the causes may be, present government policies have not resulted in the maritime industry achieving full potential from its vast physical and human resources. How can we do better? That objective is the challenge I throw down to you today.

The President also has said--with a truth central to an understanding both of the difficulties which lie in your path and the bright future that is possible--that "The contest today is not so much between the aroused and the hostile as it is between the concerned and the indifferent. It is not so much between the oppressed and the privileged, as between the farsighted and those without any vision."

So I say to you that your future is not grim, it is exciting. It is not discouraging, it is exhilarating. The challenge you face is unique in that you can begin to meet it from the moment you step aboard your first ship. And your training here at Kings Point has been carefully designed to enable you to meet that challenge with as much success as your predecessors met the challenge posed by World War II.

To begin with the narrowest view, in entering the Academy you have chosen to make your careers in the maritime industries. Most of you will remain at sea for the traditional three-year period, and I hope that many of you will stay far beyond that time. The operation of a modern merchant ship is not only a challenging and exciting task, it is one wherein the breadth of your responsibility--for the safety and welfare of your ship, crewmen, passengers and cargo--cannot be matched in any other field of endeavor. Moreover, as retirements increase of those ship's officers who received their training during and just after World War II, we are approaching a

serious shortage of merchant marine officers. As the years pass the duties aboard a modern merchant vessel become more complex and demanding, and it becomes more difficult for one without extensive technical training to perform those duties adequately. Retraining and upgrading of present seamen--as in every segment of our society--will continue to be an ever growing need.

You will have in your chosen careers an unparalleled opportunity to travel to the farthest reaches of this world--to become sophisticated in the truly meaningful sense by seeing at first hand the vast variety that our world has to offer in people, customs, and values.

Whether you ultimately make a career at sea or not, however, there are many compelling reasons why you should remain at sea for a period of years. The most important of these derive directly from your commitment to the maritime industry. There is a great need, both in government and throughout the management levels of U.S. shipping companies, for bright, well-educated men who understand intimately the basic problems of maritime commerce. The experience you will gain at sea will be invaluable, and if you turn later to a shipping career ashore it will add immeasurably to your ability to bring to bear a creative intelligence informed by extensive first-hand experience.

Taking a larger view, however long you choose to remain at sea is only one of the decisions you are obligated to face. More important, the presently less than fully economic character of our shipping and affiliated industries is a problem moving steadily into the public view.

Let me reiterate that I do not regard the present situation as anything more than a challenge which government and industry, working together to achieve new solutions to old problems, should, can, and I believe will, meet fully. I am firmly committed to the existence of an adequate and economic merchant marine, subsidized fully to the extent necessary, but no more.

National defense, the cold war of trade, the challenge posed by the rapid expansion of the Soviet merchant fleet, national prestige, and the control over our destiny which comes with carrying a substantial portion of our imports and exports, participation in the international decisions affecting the three-fourths of our planet that is ocean--these and many other factors create the need.

But what are the answers? And more important, from where are they to come? The main lines of reform are beginning to emerge with clarity: Mechanization, containerization, and modernization of both ships and port facilities; increased transit speed, experiments with surface-effect ships and other hull designs, gas turbine engines, nuclear power; standardization of ships and modernization of shipyards; the expansion of the American-flag fleet to maintain employment levels in the industry.

It is not difficult to ascertain these broad outlines. Maritime Administrators and their staffs have been thinking about them for some time. During the course of your stay at the Academy you have discussed most or all of these ideas in class--and probably with more advanced knowledge and sophistication than I.

But between the idea and the realization lies the shadow--the never, never land of implementation which charts its course between the fear and complacency of inaction and the ignorant enthusiasm of action without purpose.

What I have chosen to call implementation is not a merely mechanical question of causing events to occur; it is not a question of bureaucratic efficiency, or the lack of it. It is above all, a question of action built on ideas and informed judgment. As Whitehead so succinctly put it, "Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice."

Let me give you an example. It has been said for many years that our present operating-differential subsidy system is subject to criticism because it offers no economic incentive to efficiency. It is not very difficult to locate this rather obvious defect. Indeed, the present subsidy system has been subjected to increasing congressional and executive scrutiny. But what form of subsidy shall be substituted in its place? How can we encourage efficiency without sacrificing the adequacy of our fleet?

In the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 the government undertook to promote the American Merchant Marine, and the Maritime Administration was given the mandate of insuring that our merchant fleet be adequate to carry our domestic waterborne commerce and a substantial portion of our international trade.

That is a task which I have gladly undertaken and at which many at the Maritime Administration have labored long and patiently. We have sought to discharge our obligation with all of the energy, creativity and experience we can muster. But this has not been enough in the past. And it cannot be enough in the future.

For in the end, the burden is yours, and that of those for whom you will serve. It is your industry with which we are concerned, and your future. Many of you will become masters or chief engineers, port captains or port engineers, and officials in the shipping companies of this Nation. You must--as must those for whom you labor--come forward with new ideas, methods, designs, suggestions--indeed, with new visions--to secure the implementation of the broad goals which are the key to your industry's future.

If the merchant marine is to thrive as well as survive, it must be made more economic. And it is you who must accomplish that. To that end the United States government will support the industry with money, technical aid, the vast research programs potentially available--even with ideas of its own. But you must be constructive. If you think our suggestions are subject to criticism, by all means criticize, but by no means stop there. If our ideas are not adequate, yours must be, for between us we must do better.

I simply refuse to accept the assertion that the present system is the best of all possible worlds, and that it cannot be improved. Those who choose to rest upon this assertion in time of peace are as surely sinking our merchant fleet today as enemy submarines have done in the wars of yesteryear.

Secretary of Commerce Luther H. Hodges has spoken of the challenge posed by the world market in words especially applicable to American shipping. "The world market will not give up its wealth to the apprehensive, the frightened, the faint-hearted, the lazy or the doubting. To the contrary, it will yield only to the bold, the daring, the energetic, the men with vision, the men who see problems not as something that may defeat them, but as something certain to challenge them...."

Many of you have taken a course in labor relations. I am sure you all know that it is the high standard of living that we so cherish which is at the root of the high cost of building and operating United States-flag ships. Yet it is plain to even the most casual observer that in the long run the interests of maritime labor and management coincide. I have said before that I should be very surprised if labor, management and government were not together able to come forward with plans for a more adequate and economic merchant marine. I can only reaffirm my faith in our ability to run our affairs successfully.

This is not to deny even the smallest particle of the government's responsibility for the future of our merchant marine. I only point out that the vortex of creative thinking about the problems of the industry should center on your ships, your offices, your docks, and your shipyards.

On Maritime Day this year President Johnson told the students at the University of Michigan, "Within your lifetime powerful forces, already loosened, will take us toward a way of life beyond the realm of our experience, almost beyond the bounds of our imagination. For better or for worse, your generation has been appointed by history to deal with those problems and to lead America toward a new age...."

Let me pose for your consideration what seems to me a strikingly apt analogy. It was recalled by the fact that one among the group which you now join--the alumni of the Academy--is presently in training as an astronaut in the space program. Most of you remember, I am sure, our early difficulties with our attempts at a successful moon shot. The problem, of course, was to develop a rocket with sufficient thrust to develop an escape velocity. If that speed could be reached, the rocket's payload would leave the envelope of atmosphere surrounding the earth, and fly toward the moon. But if the thrust were insufficient to develop the required velocity, the nose cone would fall back into the earth's atmosphere.

I think this worth pondering. The possibilities for the shipping industry, and for your future in it, are very bright. They lie in a modern, fast fleet carrying vast quantities of United States trade to and from every corner of the earth--profitably for shippers and shipping companies. But the attainment of such a goal--and the necessary velocity to reach it--require great effort and energy.

Secretary of Commerce Hodges has said, "We need to look ahead as far and as clearly as God gives us the power to see. These are times of very rapid and complex change. We are plunging headlong into a new world, and we are only beginning to apprehend its form."

I invite you, the representatives of the industry which you are about to enter, and the unions which serve it, to engage in a dialogue with me about the form of this new world, the "Great Society" of President Johnson, a society all of us want to see prospering with service from American-flag ships.

I invite you to leave your formal training behind you for a time, to share the challenge constantly renewed, and to enter a life more exciting than you could have imagined, more difficult and beset with obstacles than you have yet encountered, but offering the rare satisfactions that come with ultimate success.