



John Woolley and Gerhard Peters

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JOHN F. KENNEDY

XXXV President of the United States: 1961-1963

203 - Remarks in New York City at the Dedication of the East Coast Memorial to the Missing at Sea.

May 23, 1963

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General Devers, Reverend ,Clergy, Senator Mansfield, Secretary Gilpatric, Mayor Wagner. Admiral Kinkaid, Sir John, Commodore, ladies and gentlemen:

Admiral Rickover wrote me a few days ago describing the ceremony of the commissioning of a new Polaris submarine, the Andrew Jackson. He said to each captain of a new submarine he gives a plaque which contains an old Breton prayer which was said by fishermen from there for hundreds of years, and the prayer says: "O God, the sea is so great and my boat is so small."

The sea has been a friend or an enemy of us all but it has never, since our earliest beginnings, carried special hazards for the people of this country. We started as a beachhead on this continent; our forebears came by that sea to this land. The sea has been our friend and on occasions our enemy, but to life in the sea with all of its changes and hazards was added the struggle with man, and it is that struggle of nature and man which cost us the lives of 4500 Americans whom we commemorate today.

We commemorate them particularly appropriately here in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. I am sure that their families who will come here and read their names may wonder on occasion whether this rather extraordinary act on their behalf was worthwhile. It is, after all, against the law of nature for parents to bury their children. Children should bury their fathers, and when it is necessary for a father or a mother to bury a son who may range from 18 to 28 with all of his life before him, it represents a special wrench. And I am sure they wonder, with all of the bright promises particularly of World War I and then World War II, what it all meant that we should be in such hazard today. I suppose it means that every generation of Americans must be expected in their time to do their part to maintain freedom for their country and freedom for those associated with it; that there is no final victory but rather all Americans must be always prepared to play their proper part in a difficult and dangerous world. These 4500 Americans did--dying in the western Atlantic--and nearly 20 years later it is appropriate for us to remember them and also remember those who in 1963 are doing the same thing not in the western Atlantic but much farther from our shores, who also on sea and land are bearing the burden of our defense.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at noon at the dedication ceremony at Battery Park in New York City. His opening words referred to Gen. Jacob L. Devers, Chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission, who presided over the dedication; Rev. Earl V. Best, National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; Rabbi Israel Miller of the National Chapter of Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.; Rev. George J. Bacopulos, Chaplain of the American Legion Hellenic Post 1850; Rev. Joseph E. O'Brien, S.J., of the Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.; Mike Mansfield, U.S. Senator from Montana; Roswell L. Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Robert F. Wagner, Mayor of New York City; Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid, member of the American Battle Monuments Commission; Sir John Casper, British First Sea Lord; and Commodore J. C. O'Brien, member and attaché of the Canadian Navy.

Citation: John F. Kennedy: "Remarks in New York City at the Dedication of the East Coast Memorial to the Missing at Sea.," May 23, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9234.



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