

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

The 13 & 14 May 2009 entries of **iCommandant** *Web Journal of Admiral Thad Allen.*

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009

Fairwinds, Bernie Webber



Shipmates,

On Saturday (9 May) Pam and I were enormously proud and touched to be with the family of Bernie Webber at his memorial service and internment at Wellfleet, MA. Following the retirement of the CG 44301 on Friday, we paid tribute to Bernie and his legacy near Chatham, MA where he carved his name in Coast Guard history when he

rescued 32 survivors from the Tanker PENDLETON that was broken in half in 1952. He and his crew earned the Gold Life Saving Medal that day. We thank Miriam Webber and the entire family for letting us be part of the day. A special thanks to the Chief Petty Officers on Cape Cod and the Food Service Specialists who donated their time to provide a superior reception afterward.

Bernie,

Pam and I drove out to Coast Guard Beach at Nauset and thought of you when we took this picture. See you some day on the other side.

ADM A

WELLFLEET -- With full military honors, the Coast Guard memorialized one of its most storied heroes Saturday. Former Station Chatham commanding officer Bernie Webber, who orchestrated the greatest small boat rescue in Coast Guard history in 1952, was laid to rest in a family plot in Wellfleet.

Among those who paid tribute to Webber was Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad Allen, who attended the service in the Wellfleet Methodist Church, surrounded by an entourage of aides and secret service members. Small boat operations are "the DNA of the Coast Guard," Allen said, and Webber earned his reputation by taking on an impossible mission that saved 32 men from a stricken tanker off Chatham. "Bernie Webber knew how to create the 'art of possible,' where none existed," the commandant said. Webber died at his home in Florida on Jan. 24 at the age of 80.

Together with Andrew Fitzgerald, Irving Maske and Richard Livesey, Webber braved mountainous seas and driving snow and located the stern section of the Pendleton, rescuing all but one of the castaways and bringing them miraculously back over the Chatham Bar in the wooden rescue boat CG36500. The rescue gained Webber national fame, and forever changed his career and his life. Webber's son-in-law, Lt. Col Bruce Hamilton, said his father-in-law once gave him some advice on being a hero.

"He said, 'Don[']t ever let them pin that name on you. It'll ruin your life,'" Hamilton

recalled. Notoriety followed Webber every day of his life, and it was only his love of the Coast Guard that compelled him to share his story time and time again, he said.

Webber was eulogized not only as a dedicated serviceman, but as a man who loved his family above all else. He met his wife, Miriam, on a blind date, and the two were married five months later. In his retirement, Webber's focus was on family, which was "much more important to him than anything else," best friend George Rongner wrote in his eulogy. Webber was also a lifelong animal lover, and in his retirement worked for the National Audubon Society and Outward Bound; prior to that, he was also a tugboat captain.

A portion of Webber's ashes were buried in a family plot in Wellfleet; the rest were scattered by the Coast Guard in the waters of Chatham Harbor in a private ceremony.

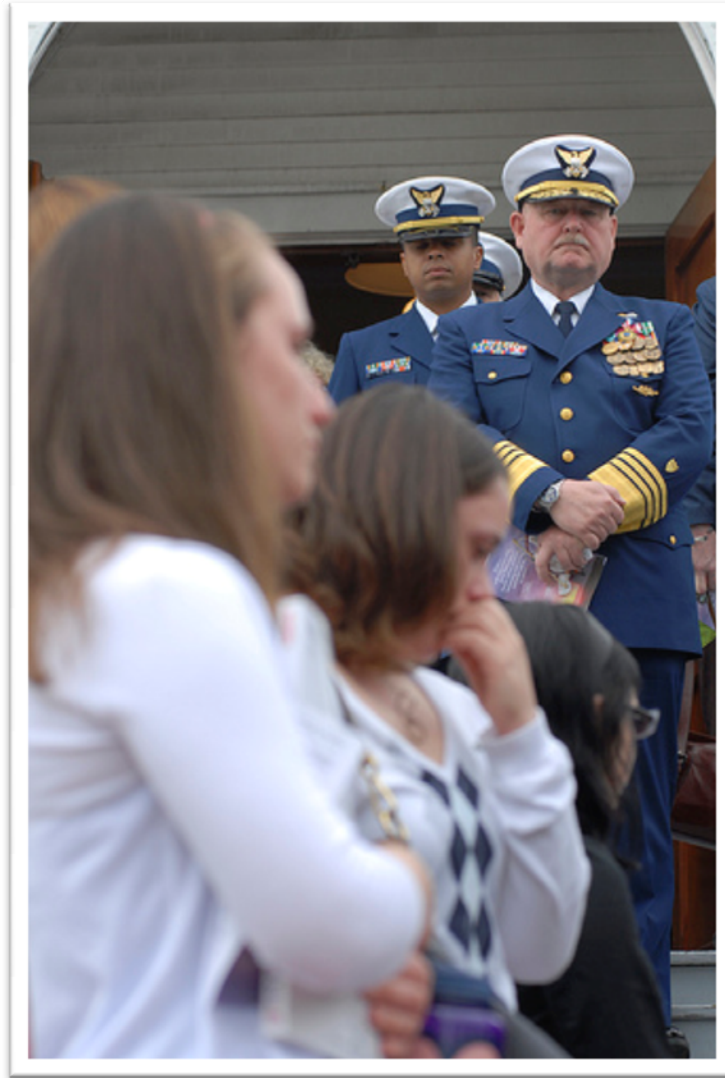
THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2009

Photo Follow-Up on Bernie Webber Memorial

These great photos from this weekend's memorial service are courtesy of PA2 Etta Smith:



WELLFLEET, Mass.- Miriam Webber, the wife of Bernard Webber for 59 years, accepts a ceremonial flag from Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Thad Allen in honor of her deceased husband during a graveside ceremony in Wellfleet, Mass., Saturday, May 9, 2009. Webber began his 20 year career in the Coast Guard in 1946 and was the coxswain of a 36-foot motorized, wooden lifeboat during the historic rescue of the crew of the Pendleton, a 520-foot tanker, off the coast of Chatham, Mass., Feb. 18, 1952, where 32 lives were saved in the midst of 60-foot seas and winds exceeding 50 miles per hour. (U.S. Coast Guard photo/Petty Officer 2nd Class Etta Smith)



WELLFLEET, Mass.- Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Thad Allen looks on as the family of Bernard Webber leaves a memorial service held in Webber's honor at the Wellfleet United Methodist Church in Wellfleet, Mass., Saturday, May 9, 2009. Webber began his 20 year career in the Coast Guard in 1946 and was the coxswain of a 36-foot motorized, wooden lifeboat during the historic rescue of the crew of the Pendleton, a 520-foot tanker, off the coast of Chatham, Mass., Feb. 18, 1952, where 32 lives were saved in the midst of 60-foot seas and winds exceeding 50 miles per hour. (U.S. Coast Guard photo/Petty Officer 2nd Class Etta Smith)



WELLFLEET, Mass.- A life ring marks the headstone of Bernard Webber during a graveside ceremony for Bernard Webber in Wellfleet, Mass., Saturday, May 9, 2009. . Webber began his 20 year career in the Coast Guard in 1946 and was the coxswain of a 36-foot motorized, wooden lifeboat during the historic rescue of the crew of the Pendleton, a 520-foot tanker, off the coast of Chatham, Mass., Feb. 18, 1952, where 32 lives were saved in the midst of 60-foot seas and winds exceeding 50 miles per hour. (U.S. Coast Guard photo/Petty Officer 2nd Class Etta Smith)

