

Port chaplain's realm is most of Alaska

by Mary Pat Murphy
Times Writer

Brother Gerald O'Malley has big dreams for his new job as official Catholic chaplain for the Port of Anchorage, but making those dreams come true may be a bit tricky.

"My operating budget is zero," said the affable 62-year-old Coast Guard veteran. But he doesn't seem to be bothered too much by the limitations imposed by lack of funds.

He's an avid reader and collector of articles about port chaplaincies, which are part of the Catholic Church's worldwide "Apostleship of the Sea." He points to an article about a \$1.2 million center for seamen in Houston, complete with restaurants, a cinder track and a gift shop, as proof of what can be done.

His hopes for Alaska are a little more modest.

"If I can lay the groundwork for somebody to take over from me, I'll figure I've served my purpose," he said.

For now, he's investigating what's available to help seafarers in Anchorage and in other areas along the 24,000 miles of Alaska coast. And the more he investigates, he said, the

more he realizes how little is actually being done.

"I'm getting more and more of the idea that not much is happening," said Brother Gerald, who is a lay brother in the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

Seamen who come into Anchorage, he said, generally can find help from their employers, Armed Forces YMCA, Catholic Social Services or other agencies.

But it's people in more remote places like Dutch Harbor, which is served by two trans-continental steamship lines, who seem to have the greatest need. He figures that's part of his territory, since the port chaplain is an official post of the Archdiocese of Anchorage, which includes Alaska's coastal areas with the exception of Southeast.

Since Anchorage is the hub of Alaska, he said, he hopes to serve in a liaison capacity to help seamen find the services they need.

"Land people don't understand the marine community," he said. "In some ways they look down on them."

He said land people often can't understand the loneliness and disruption in family life caused by long separations from loved ones.

Brother Gerald hopes he'll be able to help.

In the past, he said, the post of port chaplain has been filled by a parish priest who usually had his hands more than full with his own congregation.

Brother Gerald, who served for 14 years in the Coast Guard before entering the Jesuit order, applied for the port chaplain job this spring when he learned it was available and Archbishop Francis T. Hurley appointed him to the post.

He moved to the Jesuit House in Anchorage last September after 17 years at St. Mary's Mission on the Yukon.

During his tenure in St. Mary's, Brother Gerald was named port director after the community was incorporated as a second-class city.

He proudly recalls a five-year battle with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare during which he was finally able to collect \$3,000 in wharfage fees from the federal agency.

He remembers the battle with obvious relish and doesn't mind the idea of future conflict if it helps people.

Brother Gerald got a first-hand view of problems in Dutch Harbor while talking to people there during a recent trip to the Aleutians. He was stationed on a Coast Guard cutter off the Aleutians from 1940 to 1944, was one of eight "World War II vintage" servicemen who attended a ceremony in Attu commemorating the Aleutian campaign during World War II.

Brother Gerald stayed in the Coast Guard for 10 years after the war, then entered the Jesuit order. "Every individual has to reach a point where he makes a decision," he said when asked why he left the Coast Guard just six years shy of retirement.

His Christian commitment had grown gradually during the years after the war, he said, and on his leaves he began helping Catholic priests in Ketchikan and Sitka, where he was working on remote light and loran stations.

He left the Coast Guard in 1954 and entered the Jesuit order.

"It's gotta be a total commitment," he said, "Not just one foot in."

He took the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and spent two years in preparation before becoming a Jesuit. After six years in Mt. St. Michaels, near Spokane, Wash., Brother Gerald returned to Alaska, which has now been his home for almost 20 years.



GERALD O'MALLEY
Total commitment

EDITORIAL PAGE

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A real headache

WHEN IT COMES to being concerned about environmental degradation because of industrial development, we can't get very alarmed by proposals for construction of a petrochemical plant somewhere nearby.

From all the evidence we have seen, the opposition to this development is based on falsehoods, myths and misunderstandings.

But what might cause some real environmental headaches from air pollution hasn't seemed to ruffle the feathers of the activists who are normally involved in this sort of thing. It's as though they have been so busy crusading against the chemical industry that they've overlooked what really should be a matter of concern.

WE SPEAK of the plan to make the Port of Anchorage a major shipping point for coal to Korea and perhaps other places in the Orient. Tens of thousands of tons of coal, as we understand it, would be moved to the port area by rail, unloaded for storage and then reloaded on coal-carrying freighters.

That's good business and a proper activity for a port that is important to the economic well-being of Anchorage. But those interested in industrial development should not underestimate the problems entailed in air quality preservation.

Steam from a petrochemical processing operation is one thing — nothing, really. But tons of coal dust floating around should be a serious concern.

THERE ARE WAYS to control coal dust in this sort of operation, of course. But the procedures and techniques make it an expensive proposition. They are not necessarily built into every coal storage and re-loading operation. Somebody must see that air quality protection is incorporated in facilities that provide economic development but do not become a dirty, bothersome eyesore.

Who's to pay the costs? Will it be the municipality, as part of the inducement to the Korean brokers to make the Port of Anchorage the shipping point of coal exports from Alaska? Or will it be the Korean shipping companies or the Korean coal buyers?

Anchorage welcomes the prospect of additional port business. But it won't welcome waking up some morning to find the downtown and the outlying suburbs gritty with a fine layer of coal dust — that keeps falling and falling and falling.

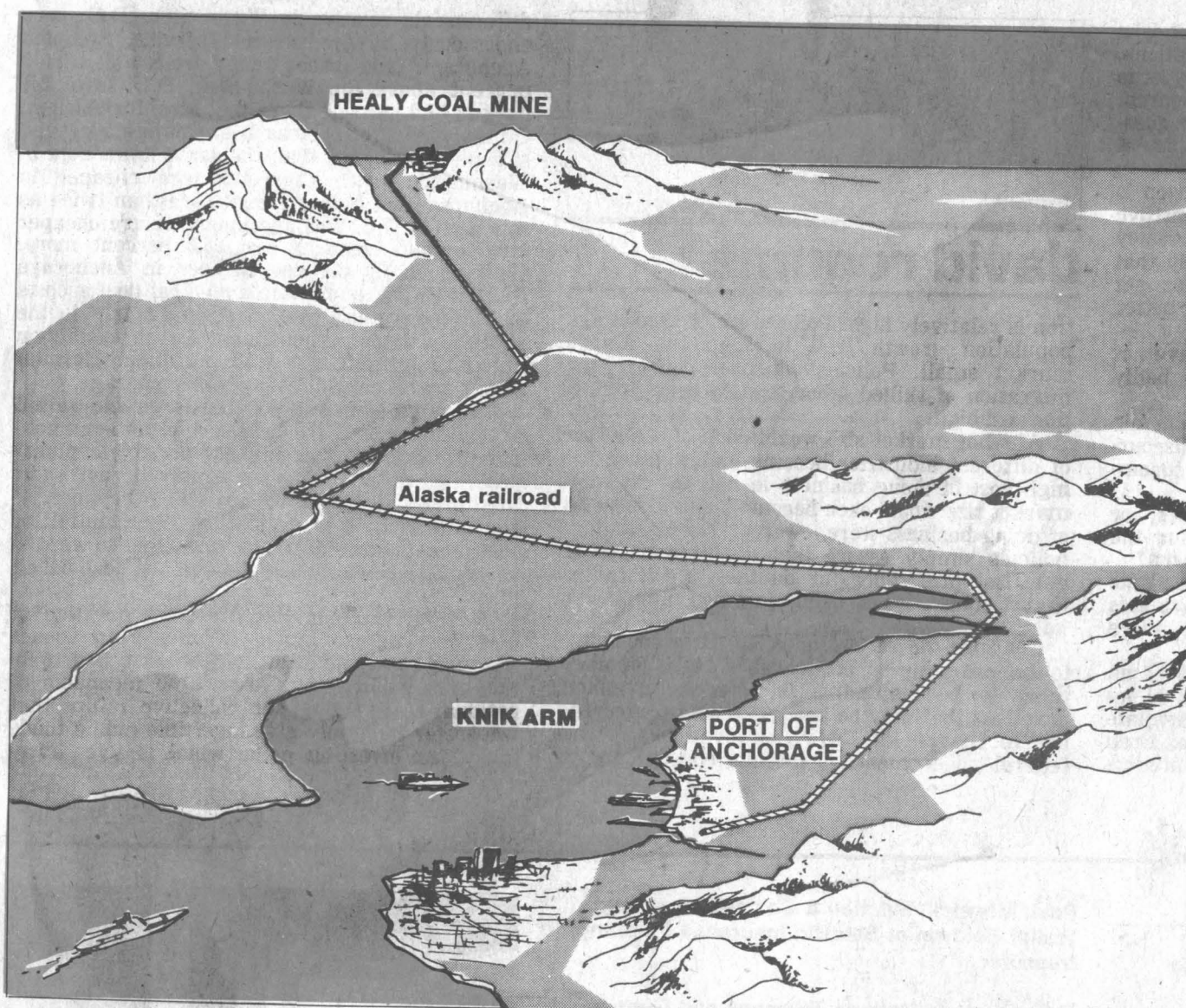


Illustration by Bobby Pitts

Coal would move by rail from Healy to Anchorage, then by ship to Seoul, South Korea. The test loading at the Port of Anchorage produced excessive dust, but officials say the problem will be under control when regular shipments begin.

Will coal dust fly?

By BOB SHALLIT
Daily News business editor

WHEN the first shipment of Alaska coal was sent to Korea late last year, environmental protection was clearly a secondary consideration.

As front-end loaders lifted the coal onto the deck of a waiting Yugoslavian freighter at the Port of Anchorage, clouds of black dust floated over the area, playing havoc with the sensitive pollution control monitors that had been stationed there to record particulate levels.

"I'm surprised (the dust) didn't knock the machines over," says William Noll, an Anchorage representative of Sun Eel Co. of Korea, which purchased the coal.

Carl Harmon, a state environmental engineer, estimates that some 15 tons of coal dust escaped

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during the loading process and settled over the dock area.

"Some dust particles made it all the way down to Ship Creek," about 1,800 feet downwind from the loading operation, Harmon says.

Despite those difficulties in the initial shipment, state, municipal and industry officials are confident that environmental problems will be virtually non-existent next year when Sun Eel begins making coal shipments every two weeks from the port.

"I'm convinced that everything possible that can be done is being done to provide a safe, environmentally sound facility," says Harmon, who works with the state's Department of Environmental Conservation in Anchorage.

Bob Rasmussen, manager of the municipality's Air Pollution Control Agency, is equally optimistic. "From everything we have been told, it appears (the developers) are going the whole distance to make it as environmentally safe as possible," he says. "We are very pleased."

What has impressed Harmon and Rasmussen are preliminary designs for an Anchorage coal-loading facility outlined by

Sun Eel. Swan Wooster, a Vancouver, B.C.-based company involved in port and harbor projects, is currently working on final plans for the Anchorage facility.

According to the preliminary plans, much of the Anchorage coal-loading operation will be either enclosed or underground.

And conveyor belts, rather than awkward front-end loaders, will be used to move the coal through the port and onto waiting vessels.

Under the plans discussed so far, coal will be carried to Anchorage every other day via the Alaska Railroad from the Usibelli mine in Healy, 250 miles north of here.

After arriving in Anchorage, freight cars — each carrying about 70 tons of coal — will be taken to an eight-acre loading site, just south of the Port of Anchorage.

There, they will be shuttled over a 20-foot-deep concrete pit, where the coal will be emptied through hampers at the bottom of the train cars.

At the bottom of the pit will be a gathering conveyor that will carry the material to a ground-level stockpile, about 500 feet from the waterfront.

"The stockpile will build to the point where we have about 50,000 tons or more, operation-

ally timed to coincide with the arrival of the ships," says Noll, a vice president with Sun Eel Alaska, an Alaska subsidiary of the Korean firm.

To control dust at the stockpile, water and other crusting agents will be poured over the coal periodically, Noll says.

When ships arrive, an automatic system at the bottom of the coal pile will gather coal onto a fully enclosed conveyor belt, which will carry the product to the waterfront.

The conveyor will rise to the ship's deck and then funnel coal through an "elephant snout" system deep into the hatch of the vessel, Noll says.

"This will be a facility of rather modest dimensions," Noll says of the \$5 million to \$7 million bulk-loading operation. "It will fit into the community very well."

Some environmentalists have disputed that contention, though none have conducted in-depth studies, yet on the impact of coal development here.

Peg Tileston, the former executive director of Alaska Center for the Environment, says she is concerned about air quality problems and the possibility that water poured over the coal stockpile may flow into surrounding areas.

"A lot of water and acid

precipitation will leak out," she says. "If it flows into Ship Creek, for example, it could have a disastrous impact on our fisheries."

She also questions the decision to locate the bulk loading facility at Anchorage, suggesting that more public study should have been directed at both the desirability of coal development and the best location for a port.

"It's similar to petrochemical development," she says. "The decision has been practically made before anybody understands what is involved."

But state and municipal officials insist that potential environmental problems have been identified, and that coal exports will not occur until adequate safeguards are established.

"There will not be any problems," Harmon says. "We will not allow them to proceed if there are."

Harmon adds that his department has been meeting regularly with Sun Eel representatives to help eliminate potential trouble spots.

"This is a unique operation because we have been in on the ground floor," he says. "I think it's probably going to be one of the best development projects we've ever had."

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Assembly to decide on coal agreement

by Sean Hanlon
Times Writer

An agreement between the Port of Anchorage and Sun Eel Shipping Co. Ltd. to ship Alaska coal to Korea is on the agenda for passage at the July 21 meeting of the Anchorage Assembly.

If the terms of the lease agreement are approved by the aldermen, Mayor George Sullivan plans to visit Korea later this month to formally sign the pact.

In May, Anchorage won a bidding war against the Port of Seward for the coal shipping agreement, which calls for a minimum of 38.4 million metric tons of coal to pass through the port to Korea between 1982 and 2031.

The port will charge a 55-cent tariff on each metric ton. This tax will generate a minimum of \$21.1 million in revenue to the port over the 50-year term of the agreement.

Construction of Sun Eel's Anchorage docking facility, which is expected to cost between \$5 and \$7 million, should also provide a boost for the local building trades.

The 800,000-ton yearly coal ship-

ments will be far below the 10,000,000 tons shipped through the typical large coal port.

The chief advantage of this early agreement, according to James Dunn, municipal Director of Transportation, is that it starts Alaska out in the coal business.

"It should do some great things for the coal industry in Alaska," Dunn said Tuesday. "It starts a process through which Alaska coal is on the open market."

"It's going to give the state and its product a lot of good advertising on the international market. It could pave the way for the development of the massive amounts of coal reserves in this state," Dunn said.

Alaska has more coal than the lower 48 states combined.

Anchorage was chosen over Seward by Sun Eel for two reasons. The city is an more attractive market for Korean goods shipped by the coal vessels on their return trips, and Anchorage is closer than Seward to the Usibelli mines in Healy, located 200 miles north of the city on the Alaska Railroad.