

56)



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20590

65-S-70

REMARKS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE U. S. COAST GUARD CUTTER MUNRO AT THE AVONDALE SHIPYARDS, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1970

Twenty-eight years ago -- and some 8 thousand miles from where we stand today -- there occurred a small incident in the global war in which we were then engaged. Far out in the Pacific, on an island called Guadalcanal, the marines were desperately trying to establish a new beachhead. Coastguardsmen had carried the marines ashore in small landing craft and the landings were a success.

But the marines met unexpected heavy resistance. They called for boats to take them off and the Coast Guard responded promptly. A flotilla of twelve boats headed for the beach, led by Signalmen First Class, Douglas Munro, twenty-three years old. Munro ordered the boats to remain safely offshore while he went in alone to check the beach. He loaded thirty marines aboard his small craft and hurried them offshore for transfer to one of the waiting boats. Then he led a small group of boats back to the beach to load the remaining marines. Wounded marines were dragged and carried to the waiting boats, and when all were loaded the boats began their retreat to safety only a few minutes away. But one boat grounded on a coral reef. Munro ordered his boat to go alongside to assist. He succeeded in getting a line over and yanked the boat into deeper water.

- more -

Just then, enemy machine guns on the beach sprayed the Coast Guard boats. Munro and his buddy Ray Evans manned their machine guns and returned the fire as they withdrew. The boat was soon out of range, but Douglas Munro had been hit and mortally wounded. His last words to his friend Ray Evans were "Did we get them all off?" They had. Nearly 500 marines had been evacuated to safety. For his heroic actions that day, Douglas Munro was awarded our Nation's highest honor, the congressional Medal of Honor.

I am very pleased that we have with us today, Mrs. James Munro, Douglas' mother. After Douglas gave his life for his country, Mrs. Munro joined the Coast Guard as a spar officer and served for two years before retiring.

We also have with us another Coast Guard veteran, a man who shared the danger that day at Guadalcanal, Commander Ray Evans. Commander Evans was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic actions.

We were glad that both of you are with us today to further honor Douglas Munro. We are here to launch the first 378-foot cutter with the new hero designation. It is indeed fitting that the first Coast Guard hero to be so remembered should be Douglas Munro. When it is placed in service, the Munro will carry this famous name around the world as it performs its errands of mercy.

The Munro is the tenth of this new class of Coast Guard cutters. Six of them already wear battle ribbons earned for their service in Vietnam. Just 2 weeks ago, 2 of these handsome cutters -- the "Rush" and the "Sherman" -- teamed up to sink an enemy supply ship off South Vietnam. (And I might note that on Saturday, October 14, I had the privilege of visiting the Sherman in Hong Kong. She's a great ship, with a great team of officers and men.)

We pray that conflict will soon be over, and that other wars will not come. But should it ever be necessary, the Munro will be ready to carry its share of wartime duties. When you ask the Coast Guard about this class of high endurance cutters, they will give you the simple facts: 378-foot long, cruising speed of 20 knots, cruising range 14 thousand miles, maximum speed of 29 knots with 36 thousand horsepower from gas turbine engines. Ask them about

personnel requirements and the Coast Guard will say simply 18 officers and 157 men. If you ask about the duties that the Munro will assume, the answer is likely to be the routine duties of high endurance cutters.

I'm inclined to think the Coast Guard tends to be too modest. From years of dedicated service to the Nation, they have come to accept their unique tasks as routine. Those of us who watch from the sidelines know that the day-to-day activities of the Coast Guard are far from routine. They are challenging, dramatic, exciting and often dangerous. True, Coast Guard duties are also often dull, tedious, monotonous and unheralded. But never routine. Coast Guard officers and men possess a high degree of professional skills. Their devotion to duty and courage in action are demonstrated daily. For every day poses new problems that must be solved. Any hour may bring word of an emergency that must be handled immediately. The Munro and its crew will be part of that exciting world the Coast Guard calls routine.

Years of experience and a tremendous amount of technological expertise have contributed to the evolution of this smartly designed cutter. And here at Avondale the design has become a reality through the teamwork of skilled workmen. I feel sure that everyone here at Avondale shares the pride of craftsmanship, and the deep satisfaction that comes from seeing the tangible results of the hard months of labor you have put into this beautiful cutter. I think I know how you feel. I started out as a hod carrier on construction projects in Boston. I was a hard hat before safety engineers had even thought of hard hats. So believe me, it is with deep sincerity that I salute all of the men and women who helped build this splendid cutter. A little bit of each of you will always be sailing with the Munro.

I think we should also salute the foresight of the Coast Guard in planning this class of cutters. As you well know, there is a long lead time between contracting and completion. And even before the contract stage, there are years of planning, engineering and budgetary processes that are involved. Without that advance planning and foresight, this cutter and her predecessors would not today be ready to serve the Nation in peace or war.

We face the same problem in the Department of Transportation. We are trying to plan now for the long range transportation needs of our Nation. At the same time, we are trying mightily to solve some of the immediate problems that plague us all across the Nation. We can point with pride to many accomplishments; safer and faster highways, new high-speed train service, better airports, and imaginative new transportation experiments. But at the same time we are keenly aware that there is much to be done now. Americans deserve a better system of transportation than we have today. I intend to see that we get it!

So as we remember today the wartime heroism of Douglas Munro, let it remind us that there is also need for peacetime dedication to do whatever we must do to achieve a better world for us and for our children.

Today, we face many challenges. True, they are the challenges of building a peaceful world. But to overcome them will require the best in all of us. Let us resolve today to face all of these tasks, to meet all of these challenges with the same courage, the same dedication to duty, and the same love of fellow man, that was so well demonstrated for us twenty-eight years ago by a brave young American, Douglas Munro.

Thank you very much.

#####