



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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**NEWS**

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE  
DEDICATION OF USCG CUTTER MUNRO, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, SATURDAY,  
APRIL 15, 1972

I am delighted to be here. It is good to be home again with valued friends and colleagues. The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter MUNRO and I are becoming great friends. I attended her launching at Avondale and Mrs. Volpe, of course, is her sponsor.

I want to congratulate you, Captain Rouse, and all members of the ship's company on this new assignment. You have a very special ship.

Outstanding in design and superior in construction, she has yet another edge over the rest of the fleet; this cutter has the honor -- and the challenge -- of carrying the name of a true American hero.

While the full history of the Coast Guard (dating back to 1790 in Newburyport) is a chronicle of heroism, this cutter could carry no prouder name than MUNRO. Behind that name lies a story of uncommon courage.

Let me tell you that story now. I told it at the launching, but it is a story that can never be told too many times.

Back in the early days of the Second World War a small island in the Pacific turned the tide of battle. The name of that island was Guadalcanal.

Thirty years ago on that island, United States marines were desperately trying to establish a new beach head. U.S. Coastguardsmen had carried the marines ashore in small landing craft and the landing seemed a success.

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But the marines met unexpected heavy resistance. They called for boats to take them off and the Coast Guard responded promptly. A flotilla of 12 boats headed for the beach. It was led by Signalmen First Class Douglas Munro, 23 years old. Munro ordered the boats to remain safely offshore while he went in alone to check the beach. He loaded 30 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 rescue the rest of the men. 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 brought his boat alongside to assist. He succeeded in getting a line over and pulled the boat into deeper water.

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. Pat Sheehan, Douglas' sister, and their mother, Mrs. Edith Munro. After Douglas gave his life for his country, Mrs. Munro joined the Coast Guard as a Spar Officer and served for two years before returning to civilian life.

Ladies and gentlemen, the name Munro commands respect. I am confident that the officers and men of the MUNRO will be worthy of this ship. She stands for all that is best in the United States Coast Guard.

Your area of action will be the North Atlantic -- and even a former Seabee like me knows that that corner of the ocean can present all that is dangerous and difficult in maritime pursuits. The ice and storms of the North Atlantic have with ease destroyed the proudest ships men have built. I am sure that the great novelist Joseph Conrad had the North Atlantic in mind when he wrote, "I have known the sea too long to believe in its respect for decency."

Out there lies danger. But I have every confidence that you will meet it and best it. The U.S. Coast Guard has a noble tradition. I am aware that through the years seas have taken their toll of Coast Guard ships and men. Yet I am certain that in this long and fierce struggle with the angry and terrible foe, never once has the morale of the men of the Coast Guard foundered or been driven off course. Your kind of spirit is indestructible.

I remember when I had the privilege of delivering the commencement address at the Coast Guard Academy three years ago. I remarked then that the traditional Coast Guard pride carried with it an unspoken expectation -- "The later obligation that you shall, in the hours of peril -- at whatever personal cost, so conduct yourself that your actions shall be an inspiration to those who come after."

I say the same thing today to the men of the MUNRO.

This spirit -- because of your service in the Coast Guard is ingrained within you. I have no doubt of your value. I have every confidence in your worth.

And I do wish the MUNRO and her men a fair tide, Godspeed on your voyage and a safe and early landfall. Congratulations and good luck.

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