



In honor of Women's History Month, the Friends of the Medal of Honor Grove celebrate not a Medal of Honor recipient, but his mother – Edith Thrower Munro. Edith Munro was the mother of Douglas Albert Munro, the first and, so far, the only member of the US Coast Guard to be awarded the Medal of Honor. She made a remarkable choice.



Edith Munro spent her life as a homemaker until the age of 48 when she joined the United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve after her son Douglas, who had been serving as a signalman with the United States Coast Guard, was killed in action in the Second Battle of the Matanikau in 1942. She decided that by volunteering for military service she would be honoring his legacy.

LT Edith Munro (U.S. Coast Guard photo)



In May 1943, Munro was presented with her son's Medal of Honor by President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt in a White House ceremony. Munro took the oath to join the SPARS two hours after accepting the Medal of Honor for her son. When asked why she joined the SPARS she said, "We are a Coast Guard family, through Doug. He loved his service. I am very happy to be eligible to serve in it." Munro's statement was released in an article by The Palm Beach Post, "Medal of Honor Goes to Mother," May 28, 1943

Later, she was the sponsor of two of the three United States warships named after her son, the destroyer USS Douglas A. Munro and the cutter USCGC Douglas Munro. He was buried at the Laurel Hill Memorial Park in Cle Elum, Washington. Following her own death, Munro was buried to the left of her son with military honors. The Munro graves have since been designated a State of

Washington Historical Site and are the location of an annual observance on the anniversary of Douglas Munro's death. Here is a bit of her story.

The Legend of the Heroes Motherⁱ

Nov 17th, 2013



On September 27, 1999, Admiral Paul Blayney, commander of the 13th Coast Guard District, spoke at the Douglas Munro Memorial and Flag Pole Dedication conducted at Cle Elum, Washington. The following is an edited portion of his remarks.

Voltaire once said, "I know of no great person, except those who have rendered great service..." I would like to share a unique and rarely told story of service...one that has particular meaning today.

You have heard the story of Douglas Munro, and his heroism during the invasion of Guadalcanal. His final sacrifice, while saving the lives of 600 Marines, earned him the Medal of Honor, but it has done far more for the Coast Guard as a whole. His name and legend reach far beyond Cle Elum where he is buried. His story is taught to Coast Guard recruits within hours of their swearing in. Douglas Munro's is the only statue in Coast Guard Headquarters.

Similar works are also located at the Coast Guard Academy and Cape May, and on the Seattle waterfront. Douglas Munro stands for all that we are in the Coast Guard. He represents our core values of honor, respect and especially devotion to duty. The Douglas Munro legacy is an enormous part of our spirit and tradition, *but it's not the whole story*. The Munro family carries on its service to the Coast Guard. One person in particular was Douglas Munro's mother.

Mrs. Munro will always be remembered for raising one of the Coast Guard and Marine Corps' greatest heroes...but few people know that Mrs. Munro was also *LT Munro, of the U.S. Coast Guard Women's Corps – also known as SPARSⁱⁱ*. Shortly after her only son's death, Mrs. Munro decided that she would do what she could to carry on his life of service that her son's death had cut short.

Within weeks, Mrs. Munro signed up, and she was sent to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy for officer candidate training. She was one of the first SPAR's to ever show up, in New London, Connecticut and she was also the oldest. Most new SPAR's were in their late teens and early 20's...Edith Munro was in her mid-forties.

SPAR training was not very well thought out in those days. In fact it had moved three times before finally being located at the Academy – all in the course of a year or so. The curriculum was just as disjointed. While SPAR's were intended to backfill administrative positions, so that the men could go to sea, there was no training program for that. Instead, for lack of a better

idea, they were instructed in knot tying, military drill, seamanship and small boat operations. Edith Munro's daughter, Pat Sheehan recalled her mother's first letter, It simply stated, "Pat this would kill you, and it might kill me."

The SPAR's had no uniforms at first, so they were issued large hats to wear with their civilian clothes. They wore the hats everywhere including all small boat operations. Mrs. Munro, weighed in at barely 90 lbs, but managed to row up and down the Thames River like a seasoned veteran. According to her grandson, retired Coast Guard Commander Doug Sheehan, "the pictures of those women rowing crews in their floppy hats are worth more than a thousand words."



Because of, or maybe in spite of, that six-week training period at the Coast Guard Academy, Mrs. Munro was commissioned as a LTJG in the Coast Guard SPAR's. In actuality she had been commissioned before the program started, but wouldn't accept any special recognition or favors. She insisted on going through the entire training program like all of the other recruits. By all accounts, she didn't need any special considerations...she led the way. That same year, Munro was also given the honor of being designated SPAR of the year.

Her first assignment was on the staff of the Commandant as a Public Relations Officer. She toured the country telling the Coast Guard story, and that of her son. After about six months, she asked for a transfer She wanted to do more...she wanted to make a direct contribution.

In 1943, the Commandant assigned her to the 13th District, as Commanding Officer of the Base Seattle Barracks. There she really made her mark. Referred to as "The Old Lady," she was much more than just the CO...she was a teacher, mentor, and mother to a gaggle of wartime recruits. Lt. Edith Munro had been assigned to be in charge of the SPAR barracks at the hotel. She was in charge of watching over the SPARS home lives. Lt Munro's new job was not nearly as visible or glamorous as public relations, but it was exactly what Edith was looking for.



District Thirteen

LT Munro established a name for herself almost immediately.

- She separated male and female accommodations in the barracks and established new regulations to smooth the transition of women into the Coast Guard ranks.
- She streamlined administrative processes, adjusted galley menus for better nutrition, and made appropriate uniform changes to better compliment a diverse workforce.
- LT Munro was the first woman to ever attend 13th District staff meetings as a member of the staff. Old misplaced feelings of gender superiority flew out the door, as she became a valued and trusted advisor to Rear Admiral Frederick Zeusler.



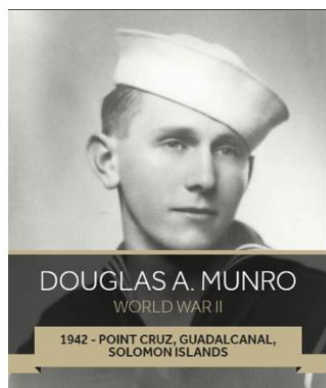
Because she was such an involved and caring leader, she really got to the pulse of the Thirteenth District workforce – men and women alike. She gave the Admiral a new perspective and greatly increased his knowledge, awareness and appreciation for diversity. *LT Munro was one of the Coast Guard's first gender policy advisors.* Edith Munro was way ahead of her time, and Admiral Zeusler knew and respected that.

At the conclusion of World War II when sailors returned, and SPAR's moved back home, LT Munro received a commendation medal. *As those of you familiar with that era know, individual medals for non-combat service were exceedingly rare. LT Edith Munro had truly done something special.*

Edith Munro's dedication to the Coast Guard and to America continued for the next 50 years...long after her days with the SPARs. She attended literally thousands of events and ceremonies, and was an active Coast Guard supporter to the end. In fact, she was the honored guest at the 50-year commemoration of Guadalcanal – Just a year before her death.

Like her son, Edith Munro embodied the Coast Guard's core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty, long before we ever put those words to paper. She did what needed to be done. Mrs. Edith Munro lived a life of service and sacrifice!

While the days of SPARS, WAVES and other women's reserve units in the 13th District and the rest of the U.S. are long since over, they left a strong legacy and their sacrifices would not go in vain. Women have now become active-duty members of every branch of the military working side by side with the men on the home front and fighting over seas. 'We Can Do It' just might have to be changed to 'We Did It.'ⁱⁱⁱ



World War II - U.S. Coast Guard

DOUGLAS A. MUNRO

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

ACCREDITED TO: WASHINGTON

AWARDED POSTHUMOUSLY: YES

PRESENTATION DATE & DETAILS: MAY 24, 1943
THE WHITE HOUSE (OVAL OFFICE), PRESENTED BY PRES. FRANKLIN D.
ROOSEVELT TO HIS MOTHER, EDITH MUNRO

BORN: OCTOBER 11, 1919, VANCOUVER, CANADA

DIED: SEPTEMBER 27, 1942, GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

BURIED: LAUREL HILL MEMORIAL PARK (MH), CLE ELUM, WA, UNITED STATES

LOCATION OF MEDAL: U.S. COAST GUARD MUSEUM, NEW LONDON, CT;
DOUGLAS MUNRO BARRACKS, COAST GUARD TRAINING ACADEMY
(DUPLICATE MEDAL), CAPE MAY, NJ

DETAILS

RANK: SIGNALMAN FIRST CLASS

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION DATE: SEPTEMBER 27,
1942

CONFLICT/ERA: WORLD WAR II

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION PLACE: POINT CRUZ,
GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

MILITARY SERVICE BRANCH: U.S. COAST GUARD

CITATION^{iv}

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action above and beyond the call of duty as petty officer in charge of a group of 24 Higgins boats, engaged in the evacuation of a battalion of marines trapped by enemy Japanese forces at Point Cruz, Guadalcanal on 27 September 1942. After making preliminary plans for the evacuation of nearly 500 beleaguered marines, Munro, under constant strafing by enemy machine guns on the island, and at great risk of his life, daringly led five of his small craft toward the shore. As he closed the beach, he signaled the others to land, and then in order to draw the enemy's fire and protect the heavily loaded boats, he valiantly placed his craft with its two small guns as a shield between the beachhead and the Japanese. When the perilous task of evacuation was nearly completed, Munro was instantly killed by enemy fire, but his crew, two of whom were wounded, carried on until the last boat had loaded and cleared the beach. By his outstanding leadership, expert planning, and dauntless devotion to duty, he and his courageous comrades undoubtedly saved the lives of many who otherwise would have perished. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

ⁱ <https://coastguardnews.com/the-legend-of-the-heroes-mother/2013/11/17/>

ⁱⁱ Semper Paratus Always Ready, better known as SPARS, was the United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve created Nov. 23, 1942.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://compass.coastguard.blog/2010/04/04/history-the-womens-reserve-americas-backbone/>

^{iv} <https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/douglas-a-munro>