

Coast Guard Decommissions Service's Final High- Endurance Cutter



Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz, Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, and Capt. Riley Gatewood, hold a pennant during the Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro (WHEC 724) decommissioning ceremony in Kodiak, Alaska, on April 24, 2021. In 1998, the cutter interdicted over 11.5 tons of cocaine on a Mexican flagged vessel, the Xolesuientle, to this day one of the largest single drug seizures in Coast Guard history. *COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Janessa Warschkow*

KODIAK, Alaska – The Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro (WHEC 724) was decommissioned during a ceremony Saturday at Coast Guard Base Kodiak and presided over by Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in an April 24 release.

The Douglas Munro was the Coast Guard's last remaining 378-foot Hamilton-class high-endurance cutter. The fleet of high-endurance cutters is being replaced by 418-foot Legend-class national security cutters, which serve as the Coast Guard's primary long-range asset.

Commissioned in 1971, Douglas Munro was the tenth of 12 high-endurance cutters built for long-range, high-endurance missions, including maritime security roles, drug interdiction, illegal migrant interception and fisheries patrols.

The cutter was named after Signalman 1st Class Douglas Albert Munro, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for acts of extraordinary heroism during World War II.

Munro was the officer-in-charge of an eight-craft amphibious landing force during the Guadalcanal Campaign and used his landing craft and its .30 caliber machine gun to shield and protect several hundred Marines who were under heavy enemy fire. He was mortally wounded during this effort, but his actions allowed for the Marines to be extracted by other landing craft. For these actions Munro was posthumously bestowed the Medal of Honor, making him the only person to receive the medal for actions performed during service in the Coast Guard.

“Today we say thank you and goodbye to the end of an era – an era of nearly 50 years when high endurance cutters took our service’s racing stripe around the globe, modeling the maritime rules-based order,” said Schultz during the ceremony. “Today we say thank you and goodbye to cutter Douglas Munro – the first cutter to be named after Coast Guard hero – Signalman First Class Douglas Munro.”

Over the past 49-years of distinguished service, Douglas Munro’s crews have served in a multitude of domestic and international theaters including the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, Persian Gulf and Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia and the Eastern Pacific. The cutters proud legacy of honorable service to the nation began in the early 1970s patrolling Ocean Stations Delta, Bravo and November, providing weather data to trans-Pacific flights, supporting oceanographic research missions and performing search-and-rescue operations.

The crew of Douglas Munro also patrolled the Pacific for decades as an enforcer of fisheries regulations. In 1998, Douglas Munro’s crew discovered and seized over 11.5 tons of cocaine from a Mexican flagged vessel, the Xolesuientle, in what remains to this day one of the largest single drug seizures in Coast Guard history. The following year, Douglas Munro’s crew seized the motor vessel Wing Fung Lung, which was

attempting to transport 259 illegal Chinese migrants to the United States.

In early 2005, at the beginning of a six-month, 37,000 mile global circumnavigation that included support to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, the crew of Douglas Munro was diverted to render assistance to countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004.

The legacy of Douglas Munro was epitomized on March 23, 2008 when the cutter's crew and their embarked MH-65 Aviation Detachment worked with a forward deployed Air Station Kodiak MH-60 helicopter crew to recover 20 survivors from the fishing vessel Alaska Ranger that sank in the Bering Sea early that morning. The 17th Coast Guard District commander at the time of the rescue, Rear Adm. Arthur Brooks, declared it "One of the greatest search and rescue efforts in modern history."

"Serving as the final crew aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro, the last 378-foot cutter in the Coast Guard has been an exciting and rewarding experience for myself and my shipmates," said Capt. Riley Gatewood, commanding officer of the Douglas Munro. "During my time aboard I have witnessed the sacrifices of the crew as they spent time away from their loved ones in service to their country. This dedication echoes the hard work put forth by our predecessors during the cutter's 49-years of service and embodies the ship's motto 'Honoring the past by serving the present.' While Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro is being decommissioned, I know that the legacy and service of Signalman 1st Class Douglas Albert Munro lives on in the Coast Guard men and women serving around the world today, and in the national security cutter Munro that continues to bear his name."