

**Coast Guard Foundation Tribute to the Coast Guard  
The National Building Museum  
Washington, D.C.  
June 6, 2007**

Remarks by Adm. Thad Allen  
Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

Thank you all for being here.

We in the United States Coast Guard continue to be blessed by this extraordinary event, this extraordinary venue and an extraordinary organization, the Coast Guard Foundation.

Thank you Secretary Mineta, thank you Admiral Loy, and thank you to the many individuals and corporations who have been so generous in their support for this event.

Sixty-three years ago today, the world held its breath. Fascism had moved to the edge of the English Channel.

Britain remained steadfast in the face of the firebombing of London. We held our breath.

The most massive force in the history of the world was poised to confront an entrenched, battle hardened enemy, who held the high ground above the beaches of France.

The required action was clear, the way difficult. The cause never in doubt.

Somewhere in the chaotic dawn as hundreds of thousands of ordinary men began an extraordinary day, a small Coast Guard manned landing craft approached Omaha Beach.

Coast Guard Historian Scott Price described the way into the beach.

Quote :

No clear channel existed where the commanding officer's charts indicated there would be, so he ordered the landing craft straight through the obstacles that had been covered by the incoming tide.

The bow soon touched bottom, and as the ship ground to a halt, so did its luck.

A mine exploded and ripped a gaping hole in the forward compartments, and then German batteries pummeled the (landing craft) LCI.

Many of the troops on board were torn to pieces before they ever got off the ship.

Those who were still able to disembark could not, because the explosions had destroyed the vessel's landing ramps.

Unquote

They persevered, they landed, many were lost, more survived, and they prevailed, but not without loss.

Tonight we honor the men and women who brought our world back from the abyss.

You were a generation who grew up enduring the hardships of the Great Depression and then fought the most destructive war in history.

When it mattered most, you gave the best years of your lives to the greatest mission this country has ever accepted.

You paved the path for those of us here tonight,

You charted the course for our Coast Guard (active duty, reserve, civilian, retired) ... men and women serving across the country and around the world today.

You served in many very different ways.

Secretary Mineta spent his war years as a child interned in a camp in Wyoming.

His family was forced to leave their home and business in San Jose, California, because his father was born in Japan.

He was among 120,000 Americans whose lives and livelihoods were forever changed by the fear and prejudice here at home.

Secretary Mineta eventually returned to San Jose. He fought injustice and stood for what is right - from his Army Service to his decades as a public servant. He has tremendous fortitude and tenacity. His dealings with the Coast Guard over the years have been no different. To this day, he continues to be one of our staunchest supporters and allies –

Thank you Mr. Secretary.

There are two very important people that are not mustered with us this evening. In the last year we lost two incredible patriots who etched personal stories into our Service's legacy.

Ray O'Malley passed away earlier this year in Chicago. He was one of only two ESCANABA crewmembers to survive its sinking by an enemy submarine in 1943 in the North Atlantic. 103 of his shipmates were lost that day.

Marvin Perret served as a landing craft coxswain at Omaha Beach in Normandy and then served in the invasion of Iwo Jima. Marvin spent his life keeping Coast Guard history alive and his legacy remains in the Higgins Boat exhibit in the World War II Museum in New Orleans. Marvin had planned on being here this evening but passed away last month and was laid to rest on Memorial Day Weekend.

Last year Marvin gave me this bosun pipe lanyard he made himself – it represents his spirit here tonight.

Regardless of the role each played, every member of this generation has left an enduring legacy of resilience, patriotism and devotion to duty that lives in today's heroes.

It is seen in places not envisioned in your youth.

For Coast Guardsmen it was seen in Viet Nam ...

Small boats caught in cross fires during riverine operations in the Mekong Delta,

The interdiction of arms in Operation Market Time

Gunfire Support from cutters in the Gulf of Tonkin,

Later it was seen in the operations of our Port Security Units in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the first Gulf War

And in Maritime Interception Operations in the Gulf of Aqaba enforcing the Iraqi quarantine between wars.

More recently it was seen in the waterside security in Guantanamo, Cuba where we have served continually since 2002.

And in 2004, in defending the oil platforms of the Northern Arabian Gulf where Nate Bruckenthal and his Navy shipmates Michael Pernaselli and Christopher Watts positioned their boat to confront an oncoming terrorist vessel only to have an improvised explosive device detonated.

A new generation, a new sacrifice ... We understand, we are grateful, we are inspired.

One year ago I stood here before you and tried to describe what it is like to give so much of yourself for the mission, the Service, and our country.

I talked about what happens to our people when the boats are moored, the aircraft are chocked, the tools stored, and the decks are clean and ready for inspection.

It is then that our people deal with the reality of their lives, their responsibilities to themselves, their families and their country ... many times privately. And many times they struggle as many still do in the Gulf Coast.

It is then that the Coast Guard Foundation “Rescues the Rescuers.”

You look out for us –

You make sure our folks are “okay “-

Your work strengthens our service and families

You help build our future.

There is a saying –

“No exercise is better for the human heart than reaching down to help another human being.”

If that is true, the Coast Guard Foundation has a big heart ...  
your contributions have been tremendous.

Scholarships

Recreational equipment

Computers

Special events for our Coast Guard

And everything you have done to support me since I became  
Commandant.

Thank you.

I'd like to close with a short story about my father ...

As many of you know, my father is a retired Coast Guard Chief and World War II veteran.

I wish he could be here tonight ... we tried to get him here but a family commitment precluded his attendance. But since he isn't here, I'll give him up!

What we try to keep as a family secret is his love for singing ... any time, any where, any place.

This made for interesting cross country trips as we moved between duty stations.

With limited radio reception in those days, the trick was to entertain ourselves by singing.

Given the number of transfers we have had over the years this allowed for the development of quite a repertoire.

In fact, I knew all of the verses to Semper Paratus by the time I learned to read.

One of my father's favorite songs was released in 1942 and became the first true country cross-over hit, selling 4 million records and topping the Hit Parade.

The song remains to this day a haunting, country anthem about war and patriotism.

The title was "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waiving Somewhere."

"Somewhere" in this case meant heaven or a kind of Valhalla ... where heroes go when they die.

The singer longs to join the fight as says in the second verse,

"In this war with its mad schemes of destruction  
Of our country fair and our sweet liberty,  
By the mad dictators, leaders of corruption,  
Can't the U.S. use a mountain boy like me?  
God gave me the right to be a free American,  
And for that precious right I'd gladly die.  
There's a Star-Spangled Banner waiving somewhere,  
That is where I want to live when I die."

The Coast Guard found that mountain boy in Cle Elum, Washington.

His name was Douglas Munro.

A Third Class Signalman, Munro volunteered for duty in an assault force assigned to land in Solomon Islands.

In September 1942 he led a group of landing craft which placed 500 marines ashore on Guadalcanal.

Later the marines came under intense fire from Japanese forces and were forced to retreat to water's edge with option for escape.

Munro led the landing craft back to the beach and in the face of withering fire evacuated the marines and their wounded.

As the last boat departed he placed his boat between the fleeing craft and enemy fire, providing cover until he was mortally wounded.

His last words were, "did they make it off?"

Well Petty Officer Munro, they did make it off and every year the United States Marine Corps celebrates your birthday.

There is even a Coast Guard Cutter that carries your name.

One last thing Petty Officer Munro.

You never knew, but you earned the Congressional Medal of Honor that day and you are certainly in that “somewhere” and there IS a Star-Spangled Banner waiving.

Pass on our regards to Ray O’Malley and Marvin Perrett, they are in good company.

Semper Paratus

God Bless America

God Bless the Coast Guard Foundation