

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Michael Leavitt's Veterans Day Remarks

at the

Coast Guard Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery

November 11, 2011

Good afternoon, Madam Secretary, Admiral Papp, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every Veteran's Day, I can't help but think about my dad, who served in the Army and was severely wounded while serving in Vietnam. When the lead vehicle came under fire, my dad distinguished himself by leading his platoon forward, exposing himself to enemy gunfire. Despite being wounded twice he once again exposed himself when he made a radio call for support and was wounded four more times and during all this, he continued to suppress the insurgents by providing accurate gun fire. Even after being shot six times, he returned to serve. I keep his Bronze Star Citation on my office wall...as a reminder of what it means to serve...and of the sacrifice it takes to serve.

But that is just one story from one person. The 600 acres around us holds more than 300,000 stories...and there so many more stories in cemeteries around the country, and overseas where our fallen Coast Guardsman, Sailors, Marines, Soldiers and Airman now quietly rest.

I want to share with you one more story about Signalman First Class Douglas Munro. After making plans for the evacuation of nearly 500 battle-weary Marines on Guadalcanal, Munro placed his craft as a shield between the beachhead and enemy fire. When the evacuation was nearly completed, Munro was instantly killed by enemy fire. For his service, he was awarded the Medal of Honor...our Nation's highest honor. Last month, on the anniversary of Douglas Munro's death, at his memorial site, Douglas Munro's nephew Commander Douglas Sheehan, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve reflected upon on his uncle's service and he shared a story. Last year Commander Sheehan's mother had passed away and it was during the memorial that he had met one of his mother's best friends. She told him that she would not have existed if had not been for Douglas Munro, because her father had been one of the Marines who was rescued by Douglas Munro in 1942.

I'd like to think that each of these tombstones marks a sacrifice like that of Douglas Munro. A sacrifice that allowed many others to safely return home. To raise families. And re-enter our workforce with their experience as veterans where...they continue to apply these same values that make our country the greatest nation on earth. This is precisely the legacy that today's veterans proudly continue.

We're here today to make sure that their stories, and their legacies are never forgotten. That their sacrifices and those of their families are remembered. And there are those who serve today, who continue to make sacrifices, along with their families... I ask that as you meet these brave men and women, you shake their hands and thank them for their service. Thank them for protecting our nation's freedoms.

I thank you all for being here today. Semper Paratus.