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U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

USCGC *Munro's* Part in the Search, Rescue & Salvage Operations of the Korean Airline Flight 007

(KAL-007)

Shot Down on 1 September 1983

by

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The following is a brief summary of the US Coast Guard Cutter *Munro's* involvement in the Search, Rescue and Salvage operation of KAL-007.

The Coast Guard Cutter *Munro* (WHEC 724) departed her home port of Honolulu, Hawaii on August 12th 1983 with Captain John Linnon as the commanding officer. The ship was scheduled for Alaska Fishery Patrol (ALPAT) and conduct operations with the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency (JMSA).

After our underway training with the Japanese we were guest of their country in the city of Tokyo. Our visit was to be between the third and ninth of September for R&R. On the 1st of September we received word that a Korean 747 airliner was shot down in the territory of the Soviet Union off the coast of Sakhalin Island (USSR) in the Sea of Japan. On the 5th of September our R&R liberty was canceled and we were underway to assist in the search and rescue of KAL-007. We arrived in the area of the search on the 7th of September. The 007 departed New York en route to Seoul, Korea. The plane was carrying 269 passengers and crew with 72 Americans on board. It is believed that the plane had drifted into the air space of the Soviet Union and that's why it was shot down.



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The *Munro* was called to assist because of their sonar capabilities, search abilities and the professionalism of the Captain and crew of the ship and the Coast Guard. The Seventh Fleet requested our presence and we were ordered by the Coast Guard to assist. The ship was outfitted with massive winches and equipment of side scan sonar for the search. The Cutter *Munro* was the only Coast Guard ship involved in the search along with about eleven naval ships, Korean and Japanese ships.

During the search the *Munro* rescued four crew members from a Navy Seahawk helicopter that crashed in the Sea of Japan and sunk in 3,000 feet of water. The *Munro* steamed with the full power of her turbine engines and arrived on scene within one hour of the ditch, the four rescued crew members only had minor injuries.

Heavy weather and Soviet interference hampered the search operations. The Soviet ships, up to twenty two at one time continually harassed the operation by forcing the U.S. ships to maneuver to avoid possible collision. As you can imagine the difficulty in maneuvering a ship while dragging a underwater side scanning sonar in order to avoid a collision.

On the 5th of November the search for KAL-007 was terminated (over sixty days of search) on this day the Soviets still had fourteen ships in the area doing what they've been doing all along, Harassing and hindering the quest for KAL-007.

On the sixth of November we steamed for Yokosuka, Japan for a much needed R&R. On the 20th of November we sailed into Honolulu, Hawaii to a warm "Aloha Welcoming." What started out to be a routine patrol of about sixty days turned out to be one hundred days.

It is my belief that the KAL-007 was shot down either within twelve miles of the Soviet Union's coast or it went down on the Soviet Union's soil. To my knowledge, no bodies were ever recovered. I believe that the estimated cost of the operation for the United States was approximately twenty two and a half million dollars.

The Cutter *Munro* played a key part in the overall operation of KAL-007. Because of the professionalism and seamanship of the boatswain mates, engineers and seaman the *Munro* was called on for small boat operations daily. They were used for everything from being a water taxi to couriers for the Fleet. It's been said (and from some Navy sources also) that the *Munro* was the "BACK BONE" of the whole operation in more ways than one.

Because of the Cutter *Munro*'s involvement in the KAL-007, the cutter and her crew was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation and letters of appreciation from the Minister of National Defense from the Republic of Korea.



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I was fortunate in being one of the cutter's crew members as a Chief Boatswain Mate. Despite the long search, long hours, harassment and inclement weather the morale of the crew was fairly high. This is because we had a skipper (Captain John Linnon) that was and still is a professional mariner who knows his crew's needs. The whole crew expressed that they would sail with him any day.

This is a story the way I remember it.

Written on 29 March 2004

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