



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

The Gold Dust Twins

***Commander Raymond Evans, USCG (Ret.) remembers
his friend and shipmate Douglas Munro***



BACKGROUND HISTORY

Douglas Albert Munro -- Cle Elum, Washington
Raymond Joseph Evans, Jr. -- Seattle, Washington

On 17 September, 1939 these two young men walked into the U.S. Coast Guard Recruiting Station in the Federal Building, Seattle and enlisted as Apprentice Seamen. Doug Munro came from the small mountain town of Cle Elum where his father was manager of the Milwaukee Railroad Electric Sub-Station. Ray came from Seattle. His father was a long time Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company employee in the Long Lines Division and had, back in 1925, been in charge of the telephone office in Cle Elum.

Since there was no training station in the Coast Guard in 1939, Ray was put in charge of a group of about 12 enlistees, including Munro, and placed on a bus to the Coast



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Guard Air Station at Port Angeles. Arriving there as raw boots they were put to mowing lawns, cleaning up and servicing aircraft.

Seven days into this routine and announcement was made asking for volunteers to fill seven vacancies aboard USCGC *Spencer* then enroute on permanent change of station orders from Valdez, Alaska to Staten Island CG Base, New York. The *Spencer* was just three years old and a smart ship. Doug and Ray volunteered and served aboard *Spencer* until early 1941 earning the Signaller 3rd Class rating during this time.

WAR HISTORY

The Coast Guard in 1941 was ordered to man three attack transports: the *Hunter Liggett*, *American Legion*, and *Joseph T. Dickman* which had been U.S. Army Transports. The word came out that signallers were needed on the *Hunter Liggett* and Doug and I, Ray Evans, after many days of pleading convinced CDR Harold S. Berdine, the Executive Officer, USCGC *Spencer* to let us go. On arrival aboard *Liggett* at the Brooklyn Army Base we found we were actually attached to the staff of Commander Transport Division 7, Commodore G.B. Ashe. The officers of the staff were Navy except for CDR Dwight Dexter, Personnel Officer who was Coast Guard. The Navy apparently felt that the Coast Guard did not have officers trained in handling vessels in convoy or in multiple ship groups so the Division Commander was Navy. All other personnel on the vessels, both officers and men, were Coast Guard.

When I learned that CDR Dexter had received orders to command the Naval Operating Base on Guadalcanal I volunteered for duty building and manning a beach signal station and landed on the island on 7 August, 1942 with the Marine invasion force. Landing was relatively unopposed as the Japanese forces drew back into the hills behind what became known as Henderson Field, and let the landing occur with little interference until later when the fighting became fierce.

Munro, on the other hand, made the landing on Tulagi Island, 20 miles across the channel from Guadalcanal, which was a very bloody action wiping out 80% of the Marine first wave, and taking several days of fierce fighting before the island could be declared secured. When that action was completed in about two weeks he was transferred back to Guadalcanal and the two 'Gold Dust Twins,' as they became known on the *Spencer*, were reunited.

During mid-September the Marines had been ineffectively trying to drive west across the Matanikau River but with little or no success. As I understand it now they had directed a force across the river high up on the mountains and on 23 September



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launched an attack by water to land at Point Cruz, charge inland and link up with the land force and encircle the Japanese. Our part in this came when CDR Dexter called Munro and I to him and directed us to take charge of a number of LCVP and LCT vessels to transport a battalion of Marines from the base at Lunga Point to Point Cruz and land them in a small cove on the eastern side of the Point.

The boats loaded, Munro and Evans were in separate LCVP's, each with an air cooled Lewis .30 caliber machine gun and ammunition. The flotilla proceeded to a point about one mile offshore of Point Cruz and rendezvoused with the destroyer USS *Ballard*, which laid down a covering barrage and then gave us the go ahead to land. The landing was marred by shallow water preventing the landing from occurring where planned. The Battalion Major was informed that as soon as they landed he should direct his troops to the left to compensate for the landing site but as it turned out he was killed instantly by a Japanese mortar round and did not so direct his troops. They charged through the narrow fringe of trees and jungle at the beach and emerged into a field rising steeply up to a ridge. They started up only to find a Japanese in single man pits with camouflaged lids behind them. They had charged right up the hill past these defensive positions and were then placed under a murderous field of fire and were forced into fighting their way back to the beach losing about twenty five casualties in the process.

Meanwhile the Battalion Major had requested that when the boats returned to base, one LCVP remained offshore for a short time to receive immediate wounded. I volunteered to do this while Munro led the other boats back to base. The coxswain, whom I believe was named [Samuel] Roberts, from Portland, Oregon and I lay to off the beach waiting.

Due to our inexperience we did not anticipate fire from the beach and allowed our boat to lay too close in. A sudden burst from a Japanese machine gun hit the coxswain and I slammed the combined shift and throttle lever into full ahead and raced the four miles back to the Lunga Point Base. Roberts was placed on an air-evac[uation] plane to Espiritu Santos, New Hebrides but I understand he died while enroute.

I should add that the Japanese gunner had punctured all three hydraulic control lines on the LCVP so that arriving at the base at full throttle, probably about 20 mph, I could not get the engine out of gear and ran full throttle up on the gently sloping sand beach. Scratch one LCVP.

As soon as I arrived back at the base, Munro and I were told that the Marines were in trouble and had to be evacuated from the same beach we had landed them on. So with approximately the same LCVPs and three or four LCTs we headed back to get them off.

On arrival Munro and I elected to stay in an empty LCVP with our two Lewis machine guns and furnish some sort of covering fire for the Marines on the beach as they boarded. As the LCVP we were in would be filled we transferred to a waiting empty



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boat, until at last, all the Marines had been loaded, including about twenty five walking wounded, and the last boat, an LCT and our LCVP turned and headed to sea. As we passed the end of the point we saw another LCT loaded with Marines stranded on the beach and unable to back off. Munro directed the LCT with us to go in, pass a tow line and get them off, which it did. During this procedure, which took about twenty minutes, there was no gunfire from the Japanese on the beach nor did we see any movement on the beach. When both LCTs were headed out to sea we fell in after them and were at full power when I saw a line of water spouts coming across the water from where the LCT had been grounded and realized it was machine gun fire. I don't think Munro saw the line of bullets since he was facing forward and did not at first react to my yelling over the engine noise. When he did he turned far enough to receive a round through the neck at the base of the skull. He was dead on arrival back at the Naval Operating Base.

Admiral William F. Halsey, USN, on recommendation I'm sure from CDR Dexter, now RADM Dexter (Ret.), recommended Douglas Munro for the Medal of Honor, the only such medal awarded to a Coast Guardsman to this day. It was subsequently delivered to his mother, Edith Munro, in an appropriate ceremony at which I was not present being still in the South Pacific. Edith Munro afterward joined the SPARs as a reserve officer and served as such until the war's end. Both she and Doug's father are now deceased.

ADM Halsey promoted me to Chief Signalman on his flagship in Noumea, New Caledonia after I was relieved at Guadalcanal. I subsequently served as Signalman aboard the *President Polk* making a supply run to Guadalcanal but the malaria I had been plagued with returned and I was transferred back to San Francisco on the *Polk*, a civilian transport under government contract. Shortly after returning from leave with my bride, Dorothy, I was awarded the Navy Cross in ceremonies at the Coast Guard Training Station, Alameda, California.

Doug was a vital, outgoing young man who liked everybody he met with a few exceptions. He was fun to be around and we had some great liberty times together. He was a hard worker and we studied together to become proficient as Coast Guard signalmen. We didn't want the Navy battleship signalmen to think we couldn't compete because we could, and did, all through the war. . . [Douglas Munro's Medal of Honor] was deserved and no was more pleased than I to have a high endurance cutter, USCGC *Munro*, named after him. I hope there is always a 'Munro' in the Coast Guard fleet.

Commander Ray Evans, USCG (Ret.)