

Remarks by the Honorable Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
Dedication of Serenity Park and Naming of
DDG 112 in Honor of Lieutenant Michael Murphy
Lake Ronkonkoma, NY
Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Dan, Maureen, and John, members of the Murphy family, Congressman Bishop, members of SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team ONE, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to join you in today's events honoring an American hero.

I would also like to recognize a special guest—Mrs. Natalie Healy, mother of another fallen hero, Senior Chief Dan Healy.

Thank you for coming to share this moment with us.

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This idyllic setting, the scene of so many childhood memories, and countless hours in the water when Michael Murphy was a boy, likely planted the seed that developed into his youthful dream of becoming a Navy SEAL.

Lake Ronkonkoma provides the backdrop to the story that brings us here today, and that will always be associated with an illustrious name in American military history.

Michael Murphy was a product of many beneficent influences in his life, not least of which were those provided by his family.

I have been struck by the strength and character of the Murphy family—their quiet dignity, their deep pride in a family member's extraordinary achievements, and their obvious love for a son who was a light of their life.

Much of the strength and success of our Navy SEALs comes from their families.

When asked about the source of their discipline, their determination, and their ambition to become the best of the best, Navy's SEALs invariably cite the values their parents inculcated in them as boys, and the support their families provided them during difficult assignments as our Nation's front-line warriors.

It has certainly been a privilege to learn about the Michael Murphy story, and to meet the extraordinary parents who raised him.

Michael Murphy epitomizes the value and the capabilities of our finest warriors—

Navy SEAL's.

The Michael Murphy story is one that was recently told in public ceremonies last October.

As a recipient of the Medal of Honor, Michael Murphy's name will occupy a place among the most admired and distinguished heroes our country has ever produced.

He embodied the SEAL creed.

He lived the values he preached.

He led by example.

When faced with the ultimate test, he demonstrated that his SEAL teammates were privileged to have served with a leader of truly outstanding character.

Although Michael Murphy's life has passed into the night of history, leaving an immense void in the hearts of all who knew him, his spirit lives on in the hearts of the warriors who serve in his beloved SEAL community.

Michael Murphy's claim on life and virtue inspired those around him, and showed all of us that the dark corners of history are also illuminated by greatness, goodness, and acts of simple decency.

Even as a small child, Michael showed signs of fierce tenacity, an unshakable sense of right and wrong, and uncommon courage.

The young child of two who, after having been nicked with the blade of an axe above his eye, reassured a terrified mother that it didn't hurt, grew up into a twelve-year old who confronted three bullies who were tormenting a disabled child.

The bullies were bigger, but Michael's sense of right and wrong was so strong that he came to the child's rescue.

It was always that way with Michael.

His parents, after the incident in school, dubbed him "The Protector," someone who defended the weak against those who would prey upon them.

Michael was driven by a desire to always do the right thing—regardless of the cost to himself.

He was the kind of person who, if you were in a spot—with a flat tire by the side of the road, or lost, or in distress—he would stop and help.

He was just that kind of guy.

And the world always seemed a more beautiful place because of him.

Michael's sense of duty to others also extended to his determination never to let others down—whether teammates on the playing field or teammates on the battlefield.

In high school, Michael would play injured—time and time again.

His team was counting on him, and he could not let them down.

Never complaining, he bore challenges silently, stoically.

Convinced that adversity builds character, he followed his own advice to others to “suck it up” when the going gets tough.

In BUDS training, the going got tough—very tough.

Michael was hospitalized for ten days with a painful injury to his shins while in BUDS, resulting in his being rolled from Class 235 to 236.

His agonizing condition would have ended the ambitions of lesser men, but they did not make many like Michael Murphy.

The only thing that saved him was his awesome tenacity—and the blessed arrival of the water phase of SEAL training.

Looking back now, we see in Michael's life experiences, the making of a hero—of a young man destined to make his mark in the world, with acts of kindness and courage, great and small.

Michael made his mark as a Navy SEAL, and never more so than on the 28th of June 2005.

His actions on that day drew on the long and unique tradition of Navy leadership.

The leader assumes responsibility for the welfare of his men, and he considers it a solemn duty to ensure their safety.

This was Michael's mindset on 28 June, when four Navy SEAL's—thousands of miles from the nearest body of water—found themselves in the mountains of Afghanistan, outgunned and under hostile fire.

In the face of mortal dangers, Michael decided to abandon a covered position and put himself at risk in order to try and save the team.

Michael's fellow SEAL's always thought of him as the type of leader they would follow to the ends of the earth.

On that day, Michael showed why.

Michael knew that by seeking higher ground, he was risking it all.

But it was the only way he knew how to live.

His teammates were in a spot—a truly dire situation.

Michael would come to the rescue—just as he always did—in life and in his final act of heroism.

It was at that moment that God took The Protector into his loving arms.

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We are accustomed to looking into distant history for examples of great heroes—larger than life figures whose achievements fill us with admiration and respect.

It is easy to think of heroes from earlier ages, heroes whose wondrous deeds were performed in bygone eras.

It is more difficult to imagine, on the other hand, that the neighbor you used to watch swimming in the lake, or the boy who used to deliver your newspaper, or the classmate you used to play football with, ended up with a place among the most honored heroes in our nation's history.

And yet today's heroes belong, by any standard, to another greatest generation, a generation of heroes that our children and grandchildren will read about with wonder and awe.

It is therefore most appropriate that the heroes in our own time be recognized, and that their stories be told.

At a time when the Nation is crying out for heroes who might also serve as exemplary role models in life, here we have in Michael Murphy the genuine article—a hero who qualifies on every level.

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One of the great privileges I have as Secretary of the Navy is to honor great heroes by naming ships after them.

So today, it gives me great pleasure to announce that DDG 112—our newest destroyer—will be named after Michael Murphy.

Michael Murphy's name—which will forever be synonymous with astonishing courage under fire—will now be associated with one of the U.S. Navy's most technologically advanced, most powerful, and most capable warships.

Every Sailor who crosses the brow, every Sailor who hears the Officer of the Deck announce the arrival of the Commanding Officer, and every Sailor who enters a foreign land representing our great Nation will do so as an honored member of USS MICHAEL MURPHY.

Michael Murphy's life is an example of what one of America's finest had to offer—a life dedicated to sacrifice and service.

In Michael Murphy, we have a sense of the inspirational words of Longfellow, who spoke to us with timeless beauty:

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.”

Michael Murphy has left behind him on the sands of time great and noble footprints that will inspire and hearten all who serve in the ship that bears his name.

May God bless and protect him, his family, his fellow Navy SEAL's, and all those who will have the honor of serving on USS MICHAEL MURPHY.

And may God continue to bless America.

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Now I would like to make a very special request.

There is a time-honored tradition in the United States Navy of christening our ships.

It is the role of the ship's sponsor to perform the ceremonial duty of breaking a bottle of champagne on the hull of the ship, formally christening her for all to see.

The sponsor then becomes part of that ship's history, charged with carrying on the

spirit of the ship, whatever her destiny.

The ship's company may change many times over the course of a ship's life, but the sponsor remains the same.

I cannot think of anyone more appropriate to serve as the sponsor of USS MICHAEL MURPHY, or anyone who could better carry on the spirit of that ship, than Michael Murphy's mother.

Maureen, would you kindly accept this honor?

[Wait for Response from Maureen]

Thank you Maureen for accepting this great honor.