

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #51

Francis T. Cassidy Editor

2009



VWOA President Alan Ehrlich presents the Award Plaque to Rear Admiral J. Robert Lunney NY Naval Militia (Ret.)

Shortly after the **2009 VWOA AWARDS LUNCHEON** was celebrated on **Sunday, June 7, 2009** our VWOA President contacted our guest speaker and requested a copy of his talk, hoping to share this with the VWOA Members who did not attend the VWOA Awards Luncheon. Rear Admiral J. Robert Lunney NY Naval Militia (Ret.) gave his consent to Alan.

The Marconi Memorial Historic Preservation Award Plaque

Veteran Wireless Operators
Association
Honors
Rear Admiral J. Robert Lunney
NY Naval Militia (Ret.)

Presented June 7, 2009



VETERAN WIRELESS OPERATORS ASSOCIATION

Eighty-Fourth Annual Banquet

Sunday, 7 June 2009

Seamen's Church Institute, New York City

RADM J. Robert Lunney, NYNM (ret.)

Guest Speaker

Having served in the U.S. Navy Amphibious Forces-Pacific, WWII, I reenlisted, on separation, in the Naval Reserve. While attending college under the GI Bill I sailed in the Merchant Marine at various times and later was commissioned as a Naval Reserve/Merchant Marine Officer. The Korean War began on 25 June 1950 and that July 12 officers and 35 crew were flown to Norfolk, VA to take the S.S. Meredith Victory out of the laid-up fleet in the James River. The Meredith Victory, a merchant ship operated by Moore-McCormack Lines, had been chartered to the Military Sea Transportation Service. During the Korean War the ship operated under military orders and most of the time it was part of a Navy Task Force.

We sailed from Norfolk on 28 July and after an expedited passage through the Panama Canal we completed loading an Army cargo of military vehicles in Oakland, CA. After discharging in Yokohama, Japan, we were combat loaded with tanks, ammunition and personnel from the 32nd Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division, U. S. Army. Sailing in a 22 ship convoy, part of Joint Task Force 7, we participated in the Inchon Landing on 15 September 1950. After a brief enemy air

attack on the harbor, and under the protective fire of the 7th Fleet, we off loaded into LST's and landed our units safely at Blue Beach. We then returned to Yokohama with 13 North Korean prisoners who surrendered to our ship at Inchon.

After several shuttle trips between Japanese and Korean ports the Meredith Victory was called to expedite delivery of a full load of 10,000 tons of jet fuel in drums from Tokyo, Japan to the Marine Air Wing, Yonpo Airfield at Hungnam, North Korea. This was during the Chosin Reservoir Campaign under the command of Major General Edward M. Almond, Commander X Corps. Hungnam, a port on the East Coast of North Korea, is approximately 300 miles south of the Russian city of Vladivostok. The approaches to the port were through a heavily laid minefield. During September and October 1950 the Navy had lost three minesweepers to enemy mines off Wonsan, just south of Hungnam. Indeed, every conceivable type mine was found, acoustic, magnetic, contact, pressure and ship counter mines. After advising the sweeper controlling the harbor entrance of our cargo we were provided charts through the swept channel. We were then ordered to maintain 2,500 yards behind the sweeper as it guided us into the inner harbor. However, as the sweeper increased speed and got farther and farther ahead we realized that they wanted to be as far away from 10,000 tons of jet fuel as possible.

This was now 14 December 1950 but we were unable to discharge as the Marines were evacuating Yonpo under heavy enemy pressure. We were then ordered south to Pusan to discharge the jet fuel. On 19 December, with about 300 tons of jet fuel still in our lower holds, we received emergency orders to proceed back to Hungnam where we arrived again through the mine fields, on the evening of the 20th. By then the port was encircled by communist forces estimated at 100,000 Chinese and North Koreans. On 9 December, General MacArthur, in the face of overwhelming enemy forces, had issued orders to evacuate the entire X Corps by sea to Pusan and other ports in the South.

Army elements, principally the 3rd Infantry Division, were deployed in a series of bunkers approximately 500 yards apart on the edge of Hungnam. The X Corps Command Post was located in a cave along the beach. The main line of defense was a perimeter 5,000 yards from the center of the port with an outpost extending 1,000 yards beyond. Seven strong points were established within the port, the perimeter was constantly being probed by the enemy and at times substantial attacks were made but the frantic pace of out-loading continued. As all artillery units were taken out by 22 December, the perimeter became dependent on naval gunfire. Thousands of North Korean refugees were pressing toward the water front at Hungnam, their last avenue

of escape from the threat of annihilation by communist forces.

Army representatives serving under General Almond requested Captain Leonard P. LaRue, Master of the Meredith Victory, one of the last ships in the harbor, if he would volunteer to evacuate the remaining refugees from the beach. He was asked to gather his officers together, but without consultation he promptly and quietly agreed to take out as many as we were able.

In the meanwhile, on 20 December, unknown to us, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington had made a tentative allocation of 20 atomic weapons for employment by Strategic Air Forces in retardation of possible Soviet advances in the Far East-Pacific. Each service was to submit lists of known atomic targets which should be destroyed to retard Soviet advances in the event of general war. A later message stated that rather than retarding Soviet advances the primary purpose of using atomic weapons would be to reduce Soviet sources of war potential. The targets were increased from 20 to 26 and included Vladivostok, Port Arthur, Peking, Mukden, Harbin and Tsingtao..

At the same time General Headquarters, Far East Command, Tokyo, was developing plans for a General Emergency. The plans were to conduct a withdrawal of all UN Forces from Korea including Republic of Korea troops and

UN prisoners of war. Fortunately atomic weapons were not necessary and it was decided not to withdraw but to regroup and continue to defend South Korea.

On the evening of 22 December, nested next to a Liberty ship loading military cargo, we commenced embarking the Korean refugees atop the remaining jet fuel. Most of the military had been pulled out and parts of the city were aflame from enemy gunfire. While loading the refugees Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) were placing explosives throughout the port and the pier adjacent to us. At all times we had the protective fire overhead from the U.S. 7th Fleet, including the heavy cruisers USS St. Paul (CA-73), USS Rochester (CA-124) and the battleship, USS Missouri (BB-63) in addition to carrier, destroyer and rocket ship support. The constant naval air and gunfire support allowed us to embark 14,000 refugees, including 4,000 infants and children, plus 17 wounded. Soon after we departed the entire port was blown up,

The refugees were loaded like cargo, we lowered them into our five hatches on pallets. They were placed into every cargo hold and open deck. We had little food or water for them – the holds were not heated nor were they lighted. They brought all their earthly possessions with them – children carried children – mothers breast fed their babies with another child strapped to their backs – old

men carried children together with whatever food they had saved. The winter was bitter cold and a real problem we encountered were fires started by the refugees to keep warm and heat food. Unknowingly, they set the fires atop drums of the jet fuel, so it was with great trepidation that we were able to put them out. We had no interpreter, but they must have had some understanding that we were taking them to safety.

We departed Hungnam on the afternoon of 23 December, the last ship to leave with refugees, and after negotiating the minefields arrived safely in Pusan on Christmas eve. However, Pusan was extremely overcrowded with huge numbers of UN forces and refugees. We were ordered not to disembark our precious cargo. Just as in Bethlehem on Christmas eve at the birth of Christ, “ there was no room at the inn”. On Christmas day 1950 we were ordered to Koje Do, an island about 38 miles SW of Pusan, where on 26 December we disembarked all the refugees, plus 5 babies born enroute from Hungnam. Because there was no pier at Koje we safely unloaded the 14,005 refugees into two LST’s, one on each side of our ship, for transport to the island.

The battle of the Chosin Reservoir involved about 20,000 UN troops, made up of approximately 17,000 men of the 1st Marine Division and attached British Royal Marines (the 41 Independent Commando), plus the

Army's 7th and 3rd Divisions, all of whom had faced communist forces estimated to have been 10 divisions. The communist orders were to annihilate the X Corps "to the last man". The historic battle was fought in the mountainous terrain of North Korea in sub-zero winter conditions.

The Campaign has been termed by historians as one of the most savage battles in modern warfare. It was cited by President Reagan in his first inaugural address as being among the epics of military history. A total of 17 Medals of Honor and 70 Navy Crosses were awarded to the campaign – the most for a single battle in modern military history. Time Magazine described it as, "unparalleled . . . an epic of great suffering and great valor".

A great humanitarian feat occurred that Christmas in 1950 when a total of over 90,000 Korean refugees were saved from North Korea as the UN forces evacuated. Never in recorded history have combatants rescued so many civilians from enemy territory in the midst of battle. It is estimated that over one million descendants of these stoic and courageous Koreans whom we rescued are living productive lives in Korea today.

The Korean Presidential Unit Citation awarded to our ship states that our rescue was a, "true example of Christian faith in action". By a special act of the U. S. Congress

the ship and crew were decorated with the Gallant Ship award for their, "courage, resourcefulness, sound seamanship and teamwork". The Guinness Book of World Records has certified that the Meredith Victory, "had performed the greatest rescue operation ever by a single ship."

In 1954 Captain LaRue, master of the Meredith Victory, a WWII veteran of the Murmansk run, left the sea and joined the Benedictine Order, St. Paul's Abbey, Newton, NJ, where he took the name Brother Marinus. Once on a Christmas visit with Brother Marinus I brought my son, Alexander, and asked Brother to reflect back to his experience during this humanitarian rescue. He remembered that each shell from the naval gunfire over our ship caused the deck plates to vibrate. But what concerned him most was the possible shortfall of one of those shells onto our ship still laden with 300 tons of jet fuel. I then asked him how, in the face of such danger and the risk of losing his ship and all his men, he was able to make the decision to voluntarily take his ship into the beach. As he thought on that fateful day, he promptly and quietly responded, "the answer is there in the Holy Bible, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'."

THE END

VWOA President Alan Ehrlich also provided to the Editor some of the photographs taken with his camera. Identification of each photo was also provided by Alan. **Please Enjoy.**



Eugene Kauder, Alan Ehrlich – VWOA President, Mrs. Joan Lunney, RADM J. Robert Lunney and CAPT. Stan Schwartz



RADM J. Robert Lunney explaining the Korean map details of the evacuation of 14,000 North Korean refugees from Hungnam Harbor

Also reported by Alan were photos of CAPT. OLAV AUNE & his wife LIV AUNE aboard the Queen Mary 2 on a recent trip they made.



RADM J. Robert Lunney, Rabbi Meyer Hager of Wall Street Synagogue & CAPT. Stan Schwartz



CAPT OLAV AUNE on board the Queen Mary 2 With the VWOA Plaque previously presented to the ships Master COMMODORE WARNER



LIV AUNE on board the Queen Mary 2 with the WVOA Plaque located on the Starboard Side, Deck Two, near Stairway A

WENDELL'S NEWS CORNER

----- Original Message -----

From: [John Alexander](#)

To: [Wendell Benson](#)

Sent: Wednesday, July 29, 2009 6:39 AM

Subject: Andrea Doria

Hi Wendell

thanks your item on the collision. brings back memories.we were (Gen. Hodges) 450 miles east of the collision on our way back from the Med. I was on watch and heard the original SOS.

we responded but at our speed 17 kts. we were too far away to assist. when we got to the site, we saw the bouy that marked the sinking.

also, on our next trip..we took on board the R/O from the Thomas as a relief opr. he told us the story (don't recall his name) about how the last passenger coming down the side of the ship into his lifeboat (was a hefty woman) and the last step she slipped and fell on his wrist.. at the time he did not seek medical attention. the result was, he had a minor crack in his wrist and it froze it so he could barely send morse...he got off the next and I found out he had to leave the service because his wrist was not flexible enough to send..

just thought you mite be interested.
best 73

We at the WVOA Newsletter would like to hear from you and try to pass along to the rest of the WVOA stories of events that you have experienced and that you feel the rest of the membership would enjoy hearing about. Send us a picture or two and we will try to include it in one of our Email Newsletters.

We would prefer to hear from you by Email at:

ftcassidy@optonline.net or
wenben@nyc.rr.com