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# HE'S NEVER FORGOTTEN HIS CAPTAIN

*Editor's note: Ned Forney is an author who has been writing a book about the Heungnam Evacuation during the Korean conflict. Mr. Forney sent us this piece as additional information to our article published in the Fall, 2017 AMMV NEWS Magazine.*

By Ned Forney | November 26, 2017

On December 14, 2017, I'll have the privilege of joining J. Robert "Bob" Lunney at a lecture about the Heungnam Evacuation being held at The Korea Society in New York City. It'll be a memorable event, one that I've been looking forward to for months.

During two and a half years of researching and writing about Heungnam, I've had the pleasure of interviewing numerous veterans and civilians who participated in, or were rescued at, the historic military and humanitarian operation that took place in December 1950. Mr. Lunney, an 89-year-old retired lawyer and Rear Admiral in the New York Naval Militia, is one of them.

Sixty-seven years ago, during the darkest days of the Korean War, Bob, a 22-year-old World War II Navy veteran who'd joined the Merchant Marine to earn a little extra cash for college, found himself sailing to Korea. As an officer aboard the SS *Meredith Victory*, the Moore-McCormack Line cargo vessel that in late December rescued 14,000 North Korean refugees during a single voyage (a Guinness World Record), Lunney would be an eye-witness to the largest military seaborne evacuation of civilians, under combat conditions, in American history.

What he observed at Heungnam and throughout *Meredith Victory's* miraculous voyage to Goeje-do, an island off the southeast coast of Korea, changed him forever. He's proud of what *Meredith Victory's* crew did during the evacuation. "The idea of war isn't just about bombs and bad guys," he said during an interview a few years ago. "It's also about preserving the integrity of a nation and the dignity of its people - we [the crew] felt we had done that." But the true heroes at Heungnam, he humbly reminds people, were the refugees.

Since his rendezvous with history in 1950, he's become a dedicated and passionate spokesman for the ship, the U.S. Merchant Marine, and Captain Leonard LaRue, the *Mer-*



*Bob Lunney (left), South Korean President Moon Jae-in in 2017*

*edith Victory's* skipper. His loyalty to his former commander is extraordinary. Bob has spent years sharing the story of Captain LaRue, the courageous, selfless, and inspirational officer who made the decision to rescue as many refugees as possible during the waning hours of the Heungnam Evacuation.

LaRue, a religious man who would join the Benedictines in 1954 and live the remainder of his life as a monk at St. Paul's Abbey in Newton, New Jersey, made a lasting impression on his men. From his inner confidence, judicious disciplinary policies, and expert seamanship, to his humility, compassion, and heroism, LaRue, or Brother Marinus as he was called until his death in 2001,

was a man who inspired loyalty. Bob is his most fervent advocate.

Through newspaper and magazine articles, televised interviews, museum exhibits, and the support and friendship he gives those who are trying to keep the memory of Heungnam and the *Meredith Victory* alive for future generations, Bob Lunney has become *the* representative - a living symbol - of the most iconic ship at Heungnam. Without his dedication to the captain and crew of *Meredith Victory*, an important chapter of the evacuation's story would have been lost.



*Refugees waiting to flee Korea*