

Great sacrifice can produce great results

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By Ned Forney

This past weekend as Americans enjoyed cookouts, beach reading, shopping sprees, blockbuster movie openings and good times with family and friends, many also took time to remember America's military men and women who died in defense of U.S. freedom. It was, after all, Memorial Day weekend.

But there's another group of Americans, far from home and separated from loved ones, who also made it a point to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice fighting for the ideals Americans and other freedom-loving people around the world cherish.

This weekend I had the pleasure of meeting Lieutenant Colonel Scott “Bobcat” Koltick, USMC, and his family. They had traveled four hours from their home at Yongsan Garrison in Seoul to Geoje Island to be part of a ceremony at the Hungnam Evacuation Memorial, a monument to the December 1950 military and humanitarian operation.



Lt. Col. Koltick, a Marine aviator, Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, and Deputy Commander for Marine Forces Korea, was the honored guest of the event sponsored by the Hungnam Evacuation Memorial Committee, a group of former North Korean refugees and their descendants who make annual pilgrimages to Geoje Island to commemorate the Hungnam Evacuation, the largest military amphibious evacuation of civilians under combat conditions in U.S. history.

The unprecedented two-week-long operation, at the port city of Hungnam on North Korea's east coast, withdrew over 103,000 U.N. troops, mainly U.S. soldiers and Marines, and their equipment, supplies and vehicles, and 100,000 North Korean refugees who were fleeing from the approaching Chinese.

In his speech, Lt. Col. Koltick honored his brothers in arms who fought and died during the Korean War.

“When the U.S. Marines arrived in Korea in 1950, they experienced some of the fiercest fighting imagined ... they fought to stabilize the Pusan Perimeter . . . they led the advance from Incheon to Seoul, and fought to recapture the city of Seoul.”

He also talked about the brave men who lost their lives at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir "in some of the bitterest fighting U.S. Marines have ever had to endure" and gave recognition to the courageous refugees who made their way with the Marines through knee-deep snow and enemy fire to Hungnam. He concluded:

“Every day I spend in Korea . . . I am reminded that great sacrifice can produce great results.”

The Republic of Korea has evolved from a war-ravaged, impoverished country with few natural resources to

one of the world's most dynamic, wealthy, and promising democracies _ all in a span of less than 70 years.

As Americans reflect on Memorial Day, it is altogether fitting and proper that they honor those who sacrificed their lives for the United States and its allies, and remember the American men and women stationed on the front lines of potential flashpoints around the world who continue to protect what our fallen heroes fought for throughout history. These well-trained and dedicated soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are ready to fight the battles they hope will never come.

Semper Fi!

Ned Forney (ned@nedforney.com) lives in Seoul, where he is writing a book on the Chosin Reservoir Campaign and Hungnam Evacuation.