

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

Frederick H. Mueller, Secretary Washington 25, D. C.

Office of the Secretary

For Release at 12:00 noon, August 24, 1960

Remarks by Secretary of Commerce Frederick H. Mueller, Prepared for Delivery at Awards Luncheon Honoring the Captain and Crew of the "SS Meredith Victory" at National Press Club, Washington, D. C., on Wednesday, August 24, 1960

Our purpose here today is to honor a gallant, generous act, executed under enemy fire in Korea in December 1950. The awards to be presented were made historic by a special Act of the Congress and signed by the President earlier this year.

In 1953, President Eisenhower secured an armistice in Korea and the war ended. Today, no Americans are dying in distant battles.

But the times are still perilous. Wise, strong and brave leadership is vital. Remembering the heroic deeds of those gray days in Korea tends to focus our attention on the dangers posed by Communism--then and now.

The great challenge of our time is the survival and ultimate victory of freedom--the call to save freedom from Red slavery--from those who boast that eventually Communism will dominate the world.

It is significant that by commemorating this gallant ship, the SS MEREDITH VICTORY, her brave captain and her courageous crew, we honor those who were pioneers in saving people from Communist terror. Let us be dedicated to a similar purpose.

The actual citation that accompanies the presentation of these awards describes vividly the events in Korea which we are now honoring, and I would like at this time to read the citation to you:

"UNIT CITATION FOR SS MEREDITH VICTORY

"At the height of the epoch-making evacuation of Hungnam, Korea, by the United Nations Forces in December, 1950, the MEREDITH VICTORY was requested to assist in the removal of Korean civilians trapped and threatened with death by the encircling enemy armies. Most of the military personnel had been pulled out, and the city was aflame from enemy gunfire. Despite imminent danger of artillery and air attack, and while her escape route became more precarious by the hour, the MEREDITH VICTORY, her tanks full of jet fuel, held her position in the shell-torn harbor until 14,000 men, women and children had crowded into the ship. One of the last ships to leave Hungnam, the

MEREDITH VICTORY set her course through enemy minefields, and although having little food and water, and neither doctor nor interpreter, accomplished the three-day voyage to safety at Pusan with her human cargo, including several babies born enroute, without loss of a single life.

"The courage, resourcefulness, sound seamanship and teamwork of her master, officers and crew in successfully completing one of the greatest marine rescues in the history of the world have caused the name of the MEREDITH VICTORY to be perpetuated as that of a Gallant Ship."

The Chief of Naval Operations of the United States Navy, Admiral Arleigh Burke, has written that this ceremony today is especially important to him because he, too, was in Hungnam in 1950.

Admiral Burke has recounted these events in a moving passage which I should like to read to you:

".....I was in Hungnam in late December and I have vivid memories of the conditions which existed at that time in that much battered port. In those days we were evacuating our troops and we in the Navy had guaranteed to supply all the artillery necessary to prevent a successful Communist attack on the Hungnam perimeter while our ground forces were loaded out.

"I remember the thousands of weebegone Koreans who were hungry, destitute and fearful, but who at the same time had that strong desire for freedom and the willingness to make sacrifices for freedom. This is a very powerful desire which is so prevalent in all peoples who have suffered under a dictatorship in which liberty is suppressed and in which there is no human dignity or respect.

"That these people might live in freedom and that they might have hopes that their children could also live in freedom, required great effort and drastic measures by sympathetic men. The captain, the officers and crew in MEREDITH VICTORY were sympathetic men; they did take the required drastic measures; they were successful, and as a result of their extraordinary efforts many people are now free who otherwise might well be under the Communist yoke. Many unknown Koreans owe the future freedom of their children to the efforts of these men whom you are honoring on August 24th."

Admiral Burke, one of the great naval leaders of our time, makes it clear that what we are doing here today is not only to pay deserved tribute to those who served with distinction in a past war. The meaning of this presentation also is found in the courage and wisdom it gives us to do our part in saving freedom wherever and whenever it is threatened.

It is, therefore, a great privilege for me to present these awards today.

As Admiral Ford indicated in his introduction of the honored guests, this occasion was made possible by legislation sponsored by Senator Jacob Javits and Congressman Paul Fino, both of New York. The awards encompassed by this legislation are threefold: first, there is a plaque to the ship herself; second, a citation ribbon bar to each member of the crew; and third, a Merchant Marine Meritorious Service Medal, our Merchant Marine's highest award, to the ship's master.

At the time the MEREDITH VICTORY was in Hungnam she was operated by the Moore-McCormick Lines and was under charter to the Military Sea Transportation Service of the United States Navy. The ship is now in our National Defense Reserve Fleet under the Maritime Administration. Therefore, it is to Admiral Wilson, the Maritime Administrator, that I present this plaque, with the instruction that at an appropriate time it be prominently affixed to the SS MEREDITH VICTORY and forever be preserved among our Merchant Marine's honored memorabilia.

At the time of the evacuation in Hungnam, the MEREDITH VICTORY had a crew of forty-seven. Each of these men, or their next of kin, is to receive a citation ribbon bar. I am pleased to present to those crewmen who are here today such a citation and a ribbon bar. These former crewmen are: Major M. Fuller, Albert W. Golembeski, William R. Jarrett, Robert J. Lunney and Dino Savastio.

Finally, we turn to the skipper of our gallant vessel, then Captain Leonard P. LaRue, of Philadelphia, who left the sea in 1951 and since 1954, Brother Marinus, serving in the Benedictine Order at St. Paul's Abbey in Newton, New Jersey.

It is with pride that I present the Merchant Marine Meritorious Service Medal to Brother Marinus, a man of courage and conviction, a man who, unlike the Communist aggressors he met in Korea, walks humbly before his God.

I am proud to have had the opportunity to pay tribute to a gallant ship, her captain and her crew.

Communism is a formidable foe. But if we are mindful of the spirit shown at Hungnam and provided that we are blessed with wisdom and leadership, eventual victory for freedom will be attained, and peace with justice will be ours, and Khrushchev's grandchildren may yet live in freedom.

- 0 -