

The Refugee Evacuation from Hungnam: 9-24 DECEMBER 1950

BY CHARLES H. BRISCOE



The axis of advance arrows for the X Corps offensive into North Korea.

The success of the amphibious landing at Inch'on had reversed the fortunes of the United Nations (UN) forces on the battlefield in Korea in the fall of 1950. Reestablishment of South Korea's government in Seoul on 29 September 1950 allowed General (GEN) Douglas A. MacArthur, United Nations Commander in Korea and Commanding General, Far East Command (FECOM), with U. S. Presidential approval, to formulate a plan to extend UN operations into North Korea.¹ MacArthur announced his intention to conduct a second amphibious landing at the North Korean naval base of Wonsan.

The FECOM Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group concept called for the U.S. X Corps to re-embark on naval transports at Inch'on, sail around Pusan to Wonsan Harbor and assault Korea's east coast by 20 October 1950. The Republic of Korea (ROK) I Corps would drive north up the east coast in support of X Corps. After establishing a beachhead, X Corps would occupy northeast Korea and attack west across the mountains toward P'yongyang while the Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) attacking north from Seoul headed to the Communist capital. Dismissing concerns about splitting his forces (Eighth Army and X Corps) by terrain and distance, MacArthur believed this assault, coordinated from Japan, was in no danger of NKPA counterattacks or intervention by Chinese forces.²

With well-constructed minefields blocking the harbors of Wonsan and Hungnam in North Korea, Major General (MG) Edward M. "Ned" Almond was quite frustrated. His two-division amphibious invasion force was stymied, with half on land at Pusan and the other half at sea. The 1st Marine Division

MG Edward M. "Ned" Almond commanded the X Corps in Korea, 1950-1951.



SSI for X Corps, MG Edward M. Almond had X Corps personnel wear the SSI upside down to differentiate Korean War soldiers from the WWII veterans.

was “yo-yoing” north and south in the Sea of Japan off the east coast of Korea. In the meantime, the ROK I Corps had attacked northward along that same coast and had captured Wonsan. By 20 October 1950, they were advancing rapidly on Hamhung, the industrial center of North Korea, and the port of Hungnam.³ I Corps established six provincial governments north of the 38th Parallel, but guerrilla operations that followed in the wake of the attacking ROK forces caused them to collapse by the end of October.⁴

Despite having no American ground forces ashore to command in North Korea, MG Almond decided to establish a X Corps headquarters presence on land. A small, advanced command post (CP) was shuttled into Yonp’o airfield near Wonsan aboard twelve C-119 *Flying Boxcars*. Navy helicopters carried the American corps commander ashore daily. Each afternoon Almond returned to spend the night on the amphibious flagship USS *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7) with half of his headquarters staff.⁵

This article explains the evacuation operations conducted by X Corps from the North Korean east coast ports of Hungnam, Wonsan and Sonjin from 9-24 December 1950. General MacArthur had directed Lieutenant General (LTG) Walton H. Walker, the EUSA commander, to form a UN civil assistance command. Therefore, the United Nations Public Health and Welfare Detachment became an integral part of EUSA. However, since General MacArthur elected not to subordinate X Corps under Eighth Army, the responsibility for civil affairs in X Corps rested with MG Almond.

As a result, the X Corps decision to support the evacuation of almost 100,000 refugees from North Korea was accomplished using organic CA assets. They faced a more complicated refugee problem than EUSA and the UN civil assistance teams during the withdrawals south in December 1950. (See “The UN Occupation of P’yongyang” and “Do What You Can!”: UN Civil Assistance, Chinnamp’o, North Korea, November-December 1950” articles published in *Veritas*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2010).

At noon on 20 October 1950, GEN MacArthur gave MG Almond responsibility for all Allied operations in

northeast Korea. This authority extended to the ROK I Corps, scattered along roads north of Wonsan, the 1st Marines offshore, the 7th Infantry Division (ID) boarding ships at Pusan, and the 3rd ID in Japan being readied to reinforce the X Corps.⁶ Before the American troops could land, he spent a lot of time evaluating civil rehabilitation needs. Almond showcased his presence by touring the area and announcing plans to create local democratic governments. He felt that every effort within reason should be made to convince the populace that the United Nations effort to establish democratic practices in the North Korea was sincere.⁷

Three days later, MG Almond began speaking to city leaders and soliciting their concerns. Wonsan officials requested medical supplies, land reallocation, lumber and oil to rebuild the fishing industry, South Korean *won*, support for the refugees, and help finding their missing relatives. After passing out candy and cigarettes, he repeated the routine in Hamhung on 31 October, five days after the Marines came ashore. The superficiality of his ceremonies, proclamations, and promises quickly became apparent as the troops landed and immediately marched north. The limited logistics were needed to support the offensive, not to rebuild North Korean infrastructure. That would have to wait for the occupation.⁸

Shelby L. Stanton, author of *Ten Corps in Korea 1950*, labeled these city conferences as “cosmetic forgeries” and criticized the whirlwind effort by X Corps Civil Affairs (CA) teams to organize four city and twenty-four province government councils by December 1950.⁹ General Almond later recalled in 1952 that provincial governments had been established in 14 of 15 counties.¹⁰ Stanton claimed that they did little to restore public order. The lightly armed civilian police proved no match for Communist guerrilla bands already reinforced by North Korean military stragglers.¹¹

There were only two small CA teams assigned to the Corps G-1 (Personnel) section. One was headed by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) James A. Moore, the Corps CA Officer responsible for Hamhung, and the other by LTC Lewis J. Raemon, the Occupation Court Officer responsible for public safety in the Hamhung-Hungnam area and CA in Hungnam. The 3rd and 7th IDs each had CA teams and the 1st Marine Division had an attached Army CA team, but these elements were focused on tactical problems. They assisted the Provost Marshal and military police (MPs) with refugee and disease control and prevented infiltration by saboteurs and guerrillas.¹² Once the Corps headquarters was ensconced in Hamhung, the offensive north absorbed MG Almond.

The isolation of X Corps was compounded by a daily growing separation of units as MG Almond spurred them forward to attack along three axes that “diverged like the splayed fingers of a hand.”¹³ Because the enemy appeared beaten, units were “deployed more in the manner of a quail hunt than a military campaign.”¹⁴ By 26 October 1950 when the 1st Marine Division landed at Wonsan along the east coast of North Korea, that country’s capital,



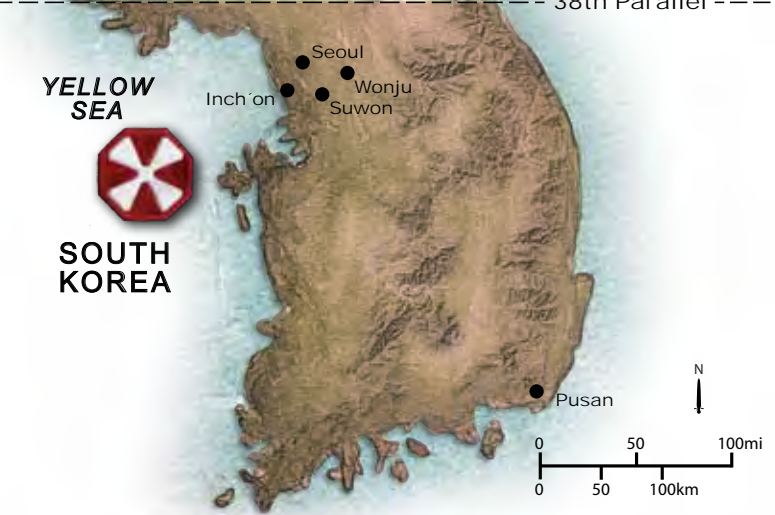
MG Edward M. Almond awards Legion of Merit to USMC COL Edward H. Forney at Hungnam on 14 December 1950. Note: MG Almond is wearing the X Corps SSI upside down to distinguish Korean War soldiers from WWII veterans.

P'yongyang, eighty miles to the west, had been controlled by the EUSA for ten days. Two very rugged north-south mountain chains separated the two major combat elements of GEN Douglas A. MacArthur's UN command on the Korean peninsula. As the two ROK divisions charged north in trail along the east coast, the 7th ID did likewise to the north-northwest, and the 1st Marines attacked to the northwest. By late November, the advances were so rapid that X Corps elements were spread out across three hundred miles of North Korea. High, rugged mountains disrupted communications and denied mutual support when Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) intervened in overwhelming numbers to halt UN advances that threatened the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹⁵

Massive Chinese attacks against the Eighth Army and X Corps on 26 and 27 November 1950 radically changed the military situation in North Korea. The Communist counterstroke wrecked General MacArthur's offensive that had been poised to end the war in just a few days.¹⁶ General Almond stated, "The new conflict was recognized as undeclared war by the CCF (Communist Chinese Forces) in great strength and in organized formations."¹⁷

Now, the preservation of the UN combat forces on both sides of the peninsula called for orderly withdrawals that emphasized saving equipment and vehicles as well as troops. As American and ROK units pulled back, anti-Communist North Korean civilians who openly supported the several UN civil assistance teams in the west and X Corps CA teams in the east by serving as city and province officials, law enforcement, and laborers were suddenly at great risk. Flight south to safety was the preferred option.

The return of Communist officials with a strong military force prompted hundreds of thousands of anti-Communist North Korean civilians to flee south. Having already endured harsh Communist rule for five years, these refugees were "voting with their feet," according to two seaman aboard a ship supporting the request for help.¹⁸ This flood of humanity was a major problem for X Corps.



When X Corps withdrew from North Korea they abandoned some 23,000 square miles of liberated territory.

From the start, X Corps realized the magnitude of the problem and factored air and sea evacuation of anti-Communist civilians in its planning for withdrawal from Wonsan, Hamhung, and Hungnam. But, since General MacArthur decided to withdraw on 11 December 1950, scarcely two weeks were available for the final planning and evacuation of 100,000 troops and their equipment. X Corps Operations Order No. 10, the scheme of withdrawal, however, was in the hands of troop commanders that day.¹⁹ It was empathetic staff officers, in particular USMC COL Edward H. Forney, the X Corps Shore Control Officer at Hungnam, Dr. Bong Hak Hyun, the civilian CA advisor to MG Almond, and Major (MAJ) James Short, X Corps History Section, who had garnered the general's support to rescue the North Korean refugees after UN combat forces were evacuated.²⁰

Dr. Bong Hak Hyun, a pathologist trained at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, was the interpreter for the ROK Marine brigade commander when MG Almond established his corps headquarters in Hamhung. It had a very large anti-Communist Christian





Masses of Refugees Evacuated From Hungnam

1. Roads south that led to Hungnam and the sea were flooded with refugees. 2. Fleeing North Korean refugees with only the possessions that they could carry on their backs or pile onto carts jammed the roads to Hungnam. 3. Infantry division MPs tried to control the thousands of North Korean refugees struggling to reach safety inside the Hungnam perimeter. 4. The Allied military force was hard-pressed to turn back the large numbers of North Korean refugees fleeing Hamhung along the railroad to Hungnam. 5. & 6. North Korean refugees waited apprehensively to board U.S. Navy LST 845 at Hungnam. 7. Some of the 14,000+ panic-stricken North Korean refugees stand shoulder to shoulder on the main decks of the SS Meredith Victory - December 24, 1950.

The 1st Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) was set up in this schoolhouse in Hungnam before being evacuated aboard the SS *Towanda Victory* on 18 December 1950.



population, and Dr. Hyun pressed for their evacuation. LTC James A. Moore, X Corps CA Officer and Hamhung team chief, someone who did everything strictly by the book, became annoyed with Hyun's pleas for help and snapped, "Doctor, this is war, and in a war the military comes first. That port facility in Hungnam is damn small. We don't even know whether the military personnel can be evacuated. Don't ask for the impossible."²¹

Fortunately for the North Korean refugees General Almond would decide to evacuate "as many loyal and non-Communist citizens as shipping space would allow." He did not believe this humanitarian act would interfere with the movement of X Corps troops, equipment, and supplies as planned. "As we loaded our ships with equipment and materials, particularly the LSTs in loading tanks out, there was a lot of vacant space between tanks and on deck," noted Almond²² How to do this rested on the shoulders of Marine COL Forney.

The X Corps evacuation of UN forces from Sonjin, Wonsan, and Hungnam, North Korea, in December 1950 was estimated to take ten days. It was not considered to be an amphibious operation in reverse. Unlike the Allied evacuation at Dunkirk, France in late September 1940, all X Corps soldiers, equipment, and supplies [105,000 men (five infantry divisions—three American and two ROK), 17,500 pieces of equipment, and 350,000 tons of bulk cargo] were to be evacuated.²³ When X Corps and the ROK I Corps left North Korea they abandoned some 23,000 square miles of liberated territory.²⁴

One division of the ROK I Corps had advanced to within thirty-eight miles of Manchuria. Its three regiments were to withdraw by land and sea to Hamhung while the other division's three regiments were to pull back to the fishing port of Songjin for sealift back to Samch'ok in South Korea.²⁵ Evacuation was dictated by how fast ships and aircraft could be loaded in the face of a situation where military manuals and planning guides did not exist.²⁶ Artillery, naval gunfire, and air strikes created a "ring of fire" to neutralize serious Communist threats to an orderly withdrawal.²⁷



Major Harold F. Hamit, 1st MASH commander, poses in front of his tent headquarters in Hungnam, December 1950.

Yonp'o airport, south of Hungnam, remained open within the constantly shrinking defensive perimeter. The 44th Construction and 73rd Combat Engineer Battalions built two emergency, C-47 capable airstrips, one on the Hungnam beach and the other three miles north of the city near Pongung.²⁸ One hundred and twelve Air Force and ten Marine aircraft ferried 3,600 troops, 196 vehicles, 1,300 tons of cargo and hundreds of Korean civilians out of Yonp'o.²⁹ But, airplanes lacked sufficient carrying capacity and the harsh winter weather in Korea limited their availability.

Rail traffic was not hindered by the season, however. On the afternoon of 15 December, General Almond announced, "We'll evacuate four thousand to five thousand civilians from Hamhung by train." Almost 60,000 people swarmed the train station hoping to get out, but the CA personnel and ROK MPs maintained control until the train left at 2 a.m. Allied troops were hard-pressed to turn back the large numbers of refugees intent on following the train tracks or using backcountry trails to flee south towards Hungnam behind the withdrawing soldiers.³⁰

MOVING THE NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES:

Almost 100,000 North Korean refugees were transported from Hungnam, Songjin, and Wonsan to the south by sea. The breakdown by ship and port of embarkation (POE) were:

<u>Vessel</u>	<u>Evacuees</u>	<u>Port of Embarkation</u>
<i>Lane Victory</i>	7,000	Wonsan
BM 501 (ROK)	4,300	Sonjin
<i>Yonayama Maru</i>	3,000	Hungnam
<i>Torbata Maru</i>	6,000	Hungnam
<i>Mada Ket</i>	6,400	Hungnam
<i>Meredith Victory</i>	14,500	Hungnam
<i>Virginia Victory</i>	14,000	Hungnam
LST 668	10,500	Hungnam
LST 666	7,500	Hungnam
LST 661	9,400	Hungnam
LST 059	8,000	Hungnam
LST 081	4,000	Hungnam
LST 074	3,500	Hungnam ⁴¹

**“This great exodus of military forces and civilian refugees was made possible by extremely rapid planning, the closest cooperation between the Army, Navy, and Air Force, adherence to logical plans during the execution phase, and diligent work by junior leaders, soldiers, sailors, and civilian workers.” x
—X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation⁴⁸**

Korean laborers hired by X Corps CA teams reopened the railroad line from Wonsan to Hungnam while X Corps assembled hundreds of freight cars. This enabled the movement of 8,900 tons of ammunition and supplies north to Hungnam for evacuation.³¹ Simultaneously, the ROK I Corps units that advanced the farthest north along the coast withdrew to Hungnam by rail, ships, and trucks.³²

Ships, however, were the key to evacuation success. Minesweepers enlarged the anchorages at the east coast ports to give warships more effective shooting positions and to enable the cargo vessels to “heave to” in the outer harbors.³³ Wherever they could reach land, fishing sampans and junks, operating like ferries, carried refugees further south along the coast to escape the resurgent North Korean and intervening Chinese armies.³⁴

On 10 December the evacuation of Wonsan was complete after outloading 3,874 troops, 7,000 Korean civilians, 1,146 vehicles, and 10,013 tons of cargo by ship. While Army forces secured the beachhead from threatening NKPA forces, it was a Navy show and Wonsan served as a small-scale rehearsal for Hungnam.³⁵ “We incorporated the lessons of Wonsan in the evacuation and redeployment

plans,” commented Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet Amphibious Commander.³⁶

Despite its small size, Hungnam was a good harbor. While there were only seven berths on the docks, “double-banking” four more ships on the outboard side of each pier allowed for docking multiple ships at once. The engineers constructed wooden plank causeways across interior banked ships to the outermost vessels. This allowed eleven ships (four double-banked) to be unloaded and loaded simultaneously from the piers at Hungnam.³⁷ In addition, eleven Landing Ship, Tank (LSTs) could be beached at two separate sites in the harbor.³⁸

Hence, the vast majority of maritime movement would leave from Hungnam (87,400 soldiers). Songjin was used to evacuate 16,500 ROK troops, vehicles, equipment, and supplies.³⁹ The bulk cargo at Hungnam included 29,500 55-gallon drums of petroleum, oil, and lubricants, 8,635 tons of munitions, and 1,850 tons of food. Ammunition and food stores were outloaded between 18-23 December.⁴⁰ The USS *Consolation* (AH-15) hospital ship anchored in Hungnam harbor to handle casualties. Its presence enabled the Army’s 1st Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) to redeploy early with the Corps troops.⁴¹

The most significant decision concerning the evacuation was made by MG Almond when he directed that all civil government officials and their families be evacuated along with as many anti-Communist citizens as possible.⁴² As refugees converged on the three ports, CA personnel organized them into groups of a hundred at Sohojin, a suburb of Hungnam, and put one member in charge. Then, they were moved into holding areas for questioning by Military Police (MP) and Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) linguists and given food and water. All available fishing craft and small ROK Navy vessels were used to evacuate them until the larger ships became available.⁴³

Thus, 98,100 North Korean refugees plus the babies swaddled on their mothers’ backs, were transported from Hungnam, Songjin, and Wonsan to the south by sea. “Sardines were never packed as intimately as the first installment of 50,000 Koreans jammed into three Victory ships and two LSTs. It became standard practice to embark at least 5,000 on an LST, not counting carried children. The record for one ship was 14,500 refugees,” said author Lynn Montross.⁴⁵ The total evacuation operation was accomplished by the vessels making multiple round trips totaling 105 cargo ship loads and 89 LST loads.⁴⁶

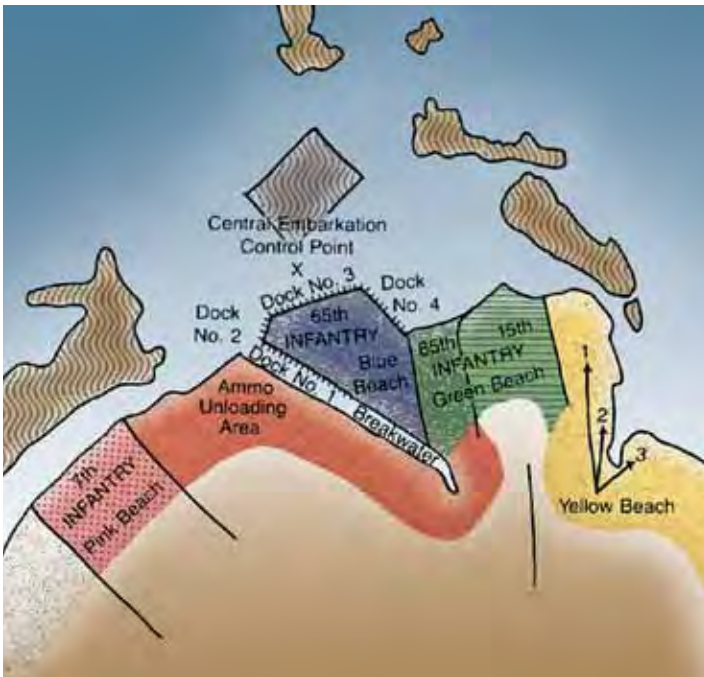
The SS *Meredith Victory*, the ship that carried the most Korean refugees from Hungnam, was one of 150 vessels that supported the rescue of American and ROK troops and North Korean refugees. It was 450 feet long and 50 feet wide with five cargo holds, each with three decks. Based on the uncertain threat ashore the *Meredith Victory* was “double-banked” alongside the other vessels at the pier. The ship faced out to sea and kept its boilers at full steam pressure during the twenty-six hours spent loading. To load, sixteen Koreans stood shoulder-to-shoulder on wooden pallets as they were lowered like cargo into the bottom holds where the fuel drums were stored. When





Troops and Equipment Evacuated

1. The sanctuary of Hungnam and the Sea of Japan was a welcome sight to withdrawing X Corps troops. 2. The magnitude of the logistics problem associated with the evacuation from Hungnam was enormous. 3. & 4. A field of 55 gallon fuel drums at the beach landing sites at Hungnam. 5. Despite the vast quantities of vehicles, equipment and supplies and troops to be evacuated from Hungnam, the Control Group expedited the process and maintained continual flows with lots of coordination. 6. North Korean refugees volunteered to unload trucks to speed up the evacuation. 7. Hungnam city and port buildings were used to house troops awaiting evacuation. These were destroyed when Allied forces left on 24 December 1950. 8. American troops entering Hungnam aboard trucks before the facility is blown up with demolitions. 9. Marines boarding USS *Bayfield* (APA-33) at Hungnam. 10. Operating a winch in a snowstorm off Hungnam in December 1950. 11. One of 1,400 USMC vehicles is swung aboard a merchant ship at Hungnam dock on 14 December 1950. Some transports made two and three round trips before the evacuation was completed. 12. A U.S. Marine Corps' ambulance jeep is hoisted aboard ship at Hungnam, North Korea, 12 December 1950.



Hungnam harbor showing piers and loading beaches.

each compartment filled, the hatch boards were put in place and the next level was loaded with humanity. After the holds were fully packed, the overflow of people spilled onto the main deck where they stoically endured below freezing temperatures and frigid ocean spray that instantly iced surface structures.⁴⁷

Large numbers of male refugees volunteered to augment civilian stevedores contracted by X Corps CA personnel to speed-up loading at Hungnam, Wonsan, and Sonjin. Junior CA leaders, officers, and sergeants worked most closely with the anti-Communist North Korean citizens in the cities to recruit reliable workers.⁴⁹ Throughout the evacuation CA personnel supported Marine COL Edward H. Forney, who coordinated the loading of ships in the port.

COL Forney's operational force was the 2nd Engineer Special Brigade (ESB) commanded by COL Joseph J. Twitty, who acted as the base and port commander. It was 2nd ESB soldiers who organized and supervised military and civilian personnel (1,000 Japanese contract stevedores and as many as 5,000 North Korean laborers) who loaded the ships.⁵⁰ Seven beach landing sites (Pink, Blue, Green One & Two, and Yellow One, Two & Three) accommodated the LSTs.⁵¹ The Control Group provided the flexibility needed where set plans were extremely difficult to develop and carry out. By keeping a reserve of cargo ships and LSTs, COL Forney accommodated large numbers of refugees seeking transport from North Korea.⁵²

"We thought the Wonsan evacuation gave us a handle on how many Koreans wanted to leave, so we planned shipping for 25,000. At least that many followed the Marines down from the Chosin Reservoir. Those who had not gotten out at Wonsan soon reappeared at Hungnam. Virtually overnight, 50,000 North Korean

refugees had assembled wanting to leave. That soon doubled. The temperatures never got above freezing and they suffered terribly. Colonel Forney maintained warming fires along the beach and I had rice delivered from the ships' stores. It was only enough for survival," stated Rear Admiral Doyle.⁵³

Understated was how cold and miserable it was throughout the evacuation. "They stood in masses, their worldly possessions strapped to their backs, children clutching at the hands of parents, hunger, fear, and despair etched deeply in the faces of all" read a 3rd ID after action report.⁵⁴ High winds with gale force gusts up to twenty-seven knots buffeted loading operations and wind chill lowered the temperatures into the teens throughout 21 December. Just before midnight, the Control radio-teletype facility exploded in flames, destroying almost all of the communications equipment and injuring several soldiers.⁵⁵

When the time approached to evacuate refugees, X Corps sent wires to the ports of Inch'on and Pusan requesting all available shipping. Having gotten the refugee evacuation started, CA team members LTC Raemon and LT Dodge were relieved of that responsibility and boarded their assigned ship, the USTS *SGT Miller* on 19 December 1950. The next day MG Almond left his bunker at Hungnam for the USS *Mt. McKinley*. 3rd ID CA personnel, assisted by ROK Marines and Navy, and the X Corps Provost Marshal rear detachment continued to coordinate the loading of refugees. 3rd ID leaders at every level became involved in the refugee problem—from guarding and feeding them to moving groups to assembly areas prior to boarding ships.⁵⁶ The refugees carried sufficient rice and barley rations from

CA-controlled stores at the Hungnam rice mill for the duration of the voyage south. By 24 December 1950, more than 98,100 refugees had been evacuated from the three North Korean ports.⁵⁷

As the last of the evacuation vessels made ready to sail out of Hungnam harbor at 2:34 P.M. on 24 December 1950, one full day ahead of schedule, all the bridges, airfields, port facilities, and other buildings of military value had been rigged for destruction.⁵⁸ As the defensive perimeter had been reduced, engineer demolition

teams systematically rendered unusable anything that could benefit the Communists. Bridges were dropped, roads cratered, railroad tunnels blocked, and more than 300 railcars and locomotives burned, blown up, derailed, or pushed into rivers. The explosive charges were being placed on loading cranes, piers, and sea walls as the last refugees boarded vessels.⁵⁹

But, as Rear Admiral James Doyle reflected, "Had there been sufficient shipping, twice that (number) could have been saved. For when the last ship sailed, I estimated that as many Koreans remained (behind), vainly hoping for transport."⁶⁰ The waiting refugees were quickly scattered



2nd Engineer Special Brigade (ESB) SSI

by thundering naval gunfire barrages that were followed by the massive explosions of timed demolitions that blew the Hungnam waterfront sky-high in volcanic-like eruptions of flame and rubble.⁶¹

Captain Leonard P. LaRue, the master of the SS *Meredith Victory*, said, "With this cargo of souls, we steamed out to the open sea toward Pusan on the southeast coast of Korea, about 450 sea miles, or about 28 hours journey away."⁶² The ship arrived in Pusan on Christmas Eve, only to be denied entry because the port was filled to capacity with evacuees and retreating U.S. and ROK military. Authorities ordered the ship to Koje-do, an island fifty miles to the southwest. To help calm the refugees, ROK MPs and interpreters were put aboard.⁶³ The SS *Meredith Victory* was one of many ships lying off Koje-do on Christmas waiting to be unloaded. The ROK Navy and the recently arrived UN civil assistance team from Chinnamp'o were caught completely by surprise.⁶⁴

Offloading human cargo at sea was a tricky affair. ROK LSTs were lashed alongside the *Meredith Victory*. Winch-operated cargo cranes raised pallets of sixteen refugees, starting with those on the deck, and then those in the hold, to swing and carefully lower the human cargo into the LSTs. The whole operation was done while the two vessels pitched perilously in the rolling sea, hulls separating and banging together constantly. As the pallets left the *Meredith Victory*, the Koreans aboard gave a half bow of thanks to the crew. "There was no overwhelming joy on their faces because they had only begun their journey to freedom," commented the ship's Staff Officer, J. Robert Lunney.⁶⁵

The Allied military humanitarian effort received high praise from Syngman Rhee, the President of South Korea.⁶⁶ Initial efforts by MG Almond to gain support from anti-Communist Christian populations in Wonsan, Hamhung, and Hungnam can be likened to CA-arranged councils with village elders and assessments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines today that have yielded little because resources were not immediately available to support viable current needs. Candy and cigarettes were short-lived enticements that got polite listening.

Once American forces landed, General Almond, the operational commander, focused totally on his mentor's final offensive much like our leaders did on combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq several years ago. Reconstruction was seen as part of the occupation or "post-conflict" phase. Whether it was guilt for having sold out the North Koreans supporting the CA-instituted local governments in late October 1950 with a "promissory bill of goods" or just common decency, in the end, MG Almond could not have provided a better demonstration of UN sincerity and appreciation to those willing to support democratic principles than evacuating 100,000 refugees before Christmas 1950. And, it should not be forgotten that X Corps staff did the planning and evacuations in just two weeks while tactical unit commanders protected these operations within a constantly shrinking defensive perimeter.



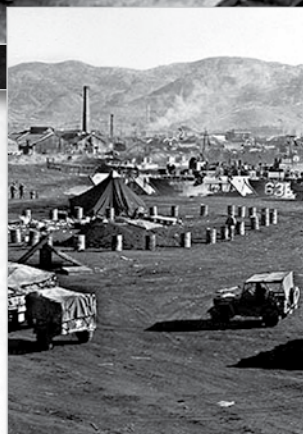
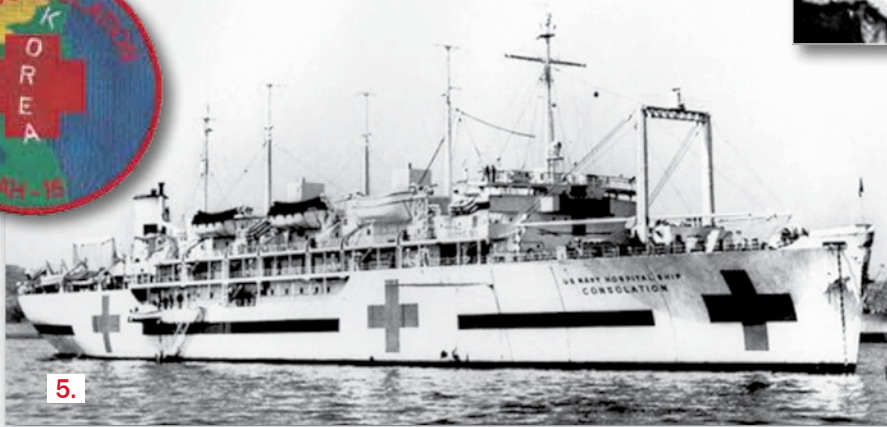
**U.S. Merchant
Marine Staff Officer
J. Robert Lunney
aboard the
SS *Meredith Victory*.**

The evacuation of 98,100 civilians by ship from the three ports in North Korea, after the successful redeployment of all X Corps units, was a major accomplishment. Years later retired LTG Edward Almond gave due credit for the evacuation, "I would say that the success [of the evacuation] was due 98 percent to common sense and judgment and that this common sense and judgment being practiced by all concerned was turned over to General Forney who organized the activities in line form. I mean *Colonel* Forney; he should have been a *General*."⁶⁷ ▲

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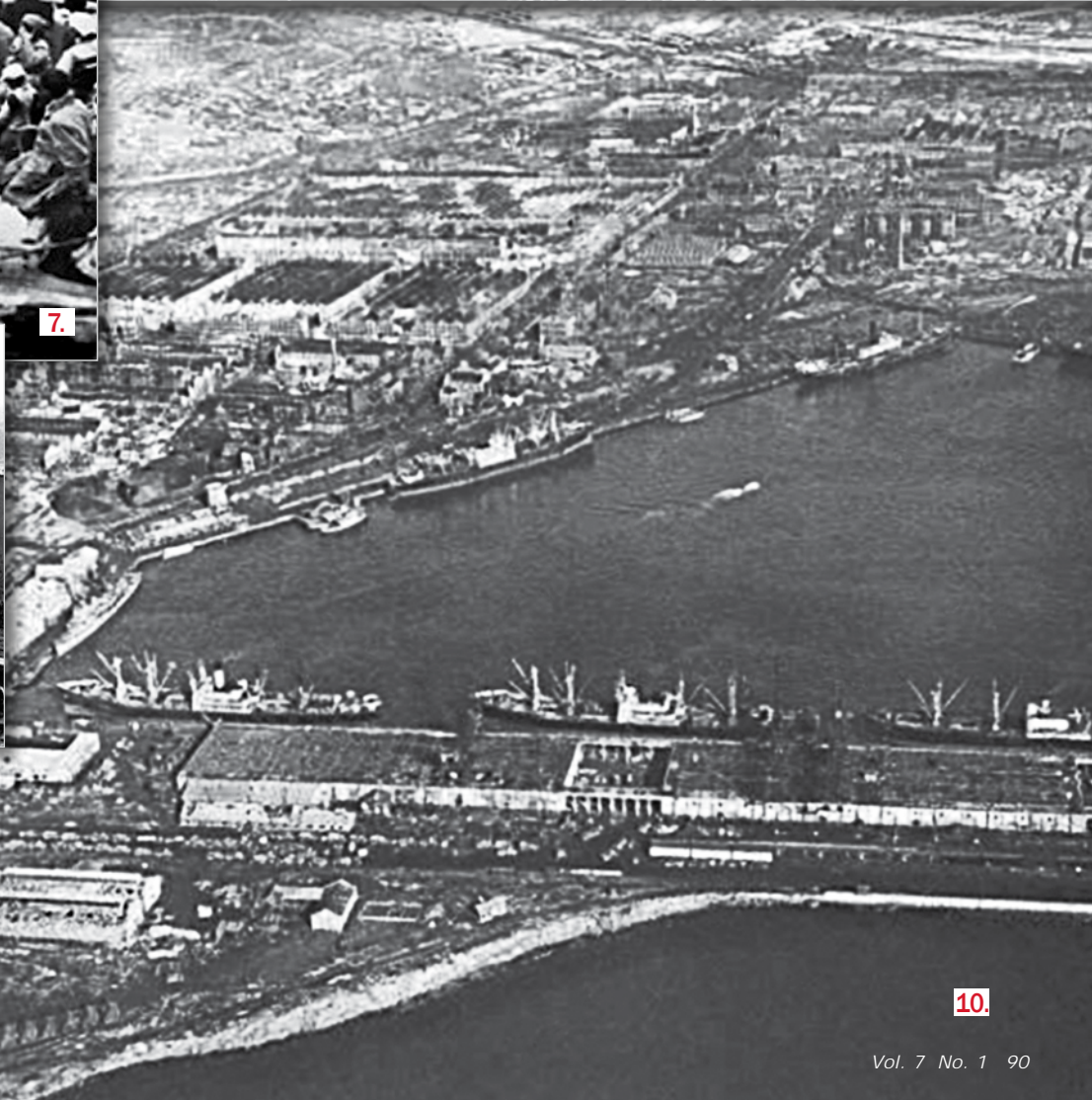
Endnotes

- 1 Shelby L. Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea, 1950*, 2nd edition (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 125; U.S. Army. Far East Command. X Corps. *Big X in Korea* (1951), 1, 2, 8.
- 2 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 126. This was part of X Corps Operations Order #4, dated 4 October 1950.
- 3 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea, 1950*, 145.
- 4 Edward M. Almond, "Conference on United Nations Military Operations in Korea, 29 June 1950 – 31 December 1951" (Washington, DC: National War College, 1952), 18.
- 5 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea, 1950*, 145; *Big X in Korea*, 8.
- 6 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 149; One 3rd Infantry Division preparatory task before combat was to equip, train, and integrate KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to U.S. Army) conscripts into its infantry regiments. Few draftees spoke any English, no English-speaking Republic of Korea (ROK) officers accompanied them, and interpreters were not provided. "They were civilians in the truest sense of the word. Most were wearing typical Korean peasant clothing and had never worn shoes. We gave demonstrations for everything from how to put on and wear the buckle top, combat boots to basic infantry skills. And, when we got to Wonsan, we did an unopposed amphibious landing, off-loading the ships into landing craft using cargo nets. It was a real circus," recalled retired COL James H. Morris, a 15th Infantry Regiment veteran. Retired COL James H. Morris, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 15 December 2010, Fort Bragg, NC, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited by name and date.
- 7 X Corps Commanding General's Diary Extracts, dated 21 October 1950, quoted in Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 150. MG Almond's obsessive desire that farmers be paid in cash for requisitioned food caused him to lecture Brigadier General (BG) Song Yo Chan, the ROK Capital Division commander on 21 October 1950.



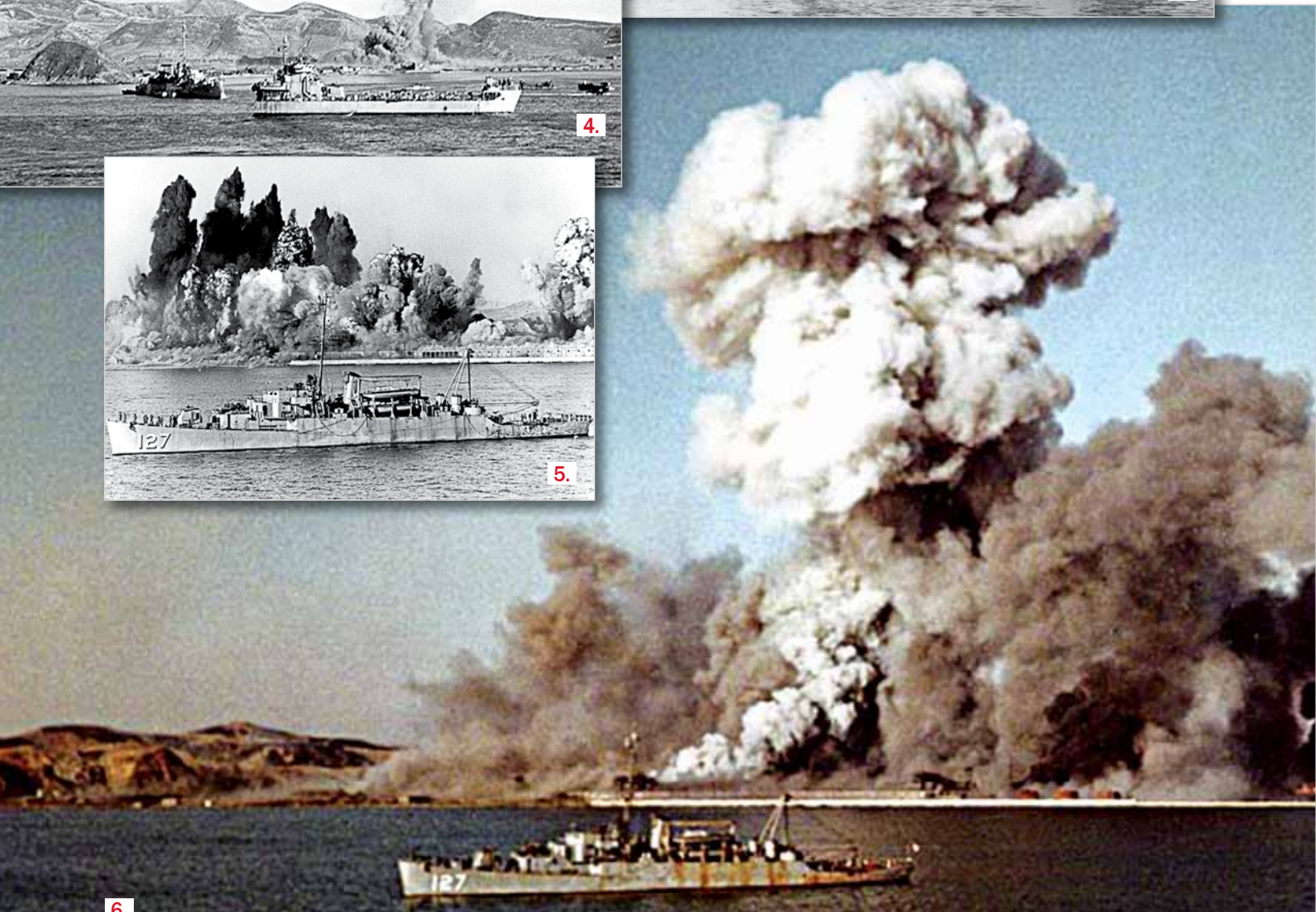
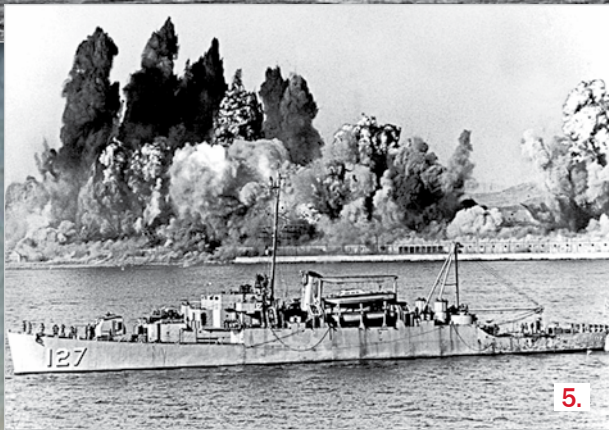
Hungnam, Small But Good With Double Banking

1. Snow covered the port of Hungnam the week before Christmas 1950. 2. The USS *Mt. McKinley* (AGC-7), the amphibious flagship, served as headquarters for MG Edward Almond before going ashore in late October 1950. 3. Hungnam was jam-packed with ships in the final week of the evacuations. 4. & 9. A truck convoy approaches the beach landing sites at Hungnam. 5. The hospital ship *USS Consolation* (AH-15) remained in the Hungnam harbor after the 1st MASH departed. 6. The Hungnam harbor was stacked with ships on 13 December 1950 waiting "to be called" in to begin outloading troops, equipment, and supplies. 7. Refugees packed themselves aboard these fishing boats in Hungnam harbor. 8. Shipping off Hungnam, 10 December 1950, as the evacuation of troops and supplies commenced. 10. Aerial view of Hungnam port facilities.



Hungnam Demolished

1. U.S. Navy demolition teams rig explosives to a pier at Hungnam. 2. Underwater Demolition Teams "Frogmen" studied the situation prior to destroying North Korean minefields in Wonsan harbor, 26 October 1950. 3. As the last troops of the 3rd Infantry Division leave Hungnam, smoke columns rise hundreds of feet into the air from the burning port facility and abandoned supplies. 4. The USS *Begor* (APD-127) on left and last LST off Hungnam as the demolition begins. 5. The USS *Mt. McKinley* (AGC-7), the amphibious flagship, served as headquarters for MG Edward Almond before going ashore in late October 1950. 6. USS *Begor* (APD-127) in foreground of Hungnam harbor on 24 December 1950 as explosions ravage the port facility.





1.

2.



Imagery shown around maps (above) depicts the harsh climate and terrain during the Hungnam evacuation.

X Corps in North Korea, October-December 1950

These original X Corps maps appeared in the "Big X in Korea" yearbook, circa 1950 and depicted the X Corps movements and involvement in North Korea from Oct 1950 through Sept 1951. 1. In October 1950 X Corps was assigned operational responsibility for Northeast Korea. Some elements drove north along Korea's east coast while others prepared for new amphibious landings, that later became unnecessary. 2. In December 1950 plans for amphibious evacuation through the port of Hungnam were mapped out. These plans called for a speedy withdrawal in successive phases starting just south of Hamhung and concluding in an arc encircling Hungnam.

- 8 X Corps Commanding General's Diary Extracts, dated 21 October 1950, quoted in Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 150. Retired LTG Edward M. Almond caveated X Corps support in 1952: "In order to provide something tangible to alleviate the misery and poverty of the conquered people, every effort was made by the military to assist materially with transportation, gasoline, and oil, and with food and medical supplies." Almond, "Conference on UN Military Operations in Korea," 18.
- 9 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 1950, 151.
- 10 Almond, "Conference on UN Military Operations in Korea," 18.
- 11 X Corps Commanding General's Diary Extracts, dated 21 October 1950, quoted in Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 150.
- 12 U.S. Army. Headquarters X Corps. Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 9-24 December 1950, 29, 30, hereafter cited as X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation; Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 323, 329.
- 13 Vice Admiral James H. Doyle and Arthur J. Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," *Proceedings of the Naval Institute* (April 1979), 47.
- 14 Glenn C. Cowart, *Miracle in Korea: The Evacuation of X Corps from the Hungnam Beachhead* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 105.
- 15 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 47; *Big X in Korea*, 9.
- 16 Lynn Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation: Amphibious Landing in Reverse," *The Marine Corps Gazette* (December 1951) as reprinted by the *Korean War Educator* at http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/branch_accounts/marine/p_hungnam_evacuation accessed 2 September 2010.
- 17 Almond, "Conference on UN Military Operations in Korea," 20; *Big X in Korea*, 11.
- 18 Bill Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles: 14,000 Lives and One Miraculous Voyage* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2000), 104. Staff Officer J. Robert Lunney and Third Mate Henry J.B. Smith served aboard the *SS Meredith Victory*.
- 19 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 4 of 9; *Big X in Korea*, 15.
- 20 Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles*, 94. MG Edward M. Almond's aide de camp, CPT Alexander M. Haig, Jr., remembered his guidance after flying above the assembling refugees: "We can't leave those people. Take care of that, Haig."
- 21 Bong Hak Hyun, "Christmas Cargo: A Civilian Remembers the Hungnam Evacuation," *Korean and Korean-American Studies Bulletin* 8:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1997) at http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/tps/1950_ko.htm accessed 2 September 2010.
- 22 Retired LTG Edward M. Almond interview by CPT Thomas G. Ferguson, 1975, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA, Section V, 23-24 in Richard W. Stewart, *Staff Operations: The X Corps in Korea, December 1950* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, April 1991), 6,7, 25 of 26 (e/n 39). <http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csi/stewart/stewart.asp> accessed 17 November 2010.
- 23 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 2- 3.
- 24 Almond, "Conference on UN Military Operations in Korea," 22.
- 25 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 3 of 9.
- 26 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 2- 3.
- 27 *Big X in Korea*, 15.
- 28 X Corps Special Report Hungnam Evacuation, 19.
- 29 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 6 of 9.
- 30 Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles*, 98.
- 31 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 6 of 9.
- 32 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 9.
- 33 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 48.
- 34 Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles*, 30, 31, 112 photo section.
- 35 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 5 of 9.
- 36 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 48.
- 37 Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles*, 32, 104; Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 53.
- 38 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 5 of 9.
- 39 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 19.
- 40 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 4.
- 41 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 19; Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 53; "Medical Team Overcomes Major Problems in Korea," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 144, no. 12, (November 18, 1950), 1012; Harold F. Hamit, "Last Days at Hungnam," in Arthur W. Wilson (editor), *Korean Vignettes: Faces of War: 201 Veterans of the Korean War Recall That Forgotten War: Their Experiences and Thoughts and Wartime Photographs of That Era* (Portland, OR: Artwork Publications, 1996), 241.
- 42 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 4.
- 43 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 25.
- 44 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 4.
- 45 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 7 of 9. It was the *SS Meredith Victory*, carrying 300 tons of aviation fuel that managed to squeeze 14,000 Korean refugees aboard. Rosanne Fohn, "Voyage of Mercy: Merchant Mariners Rescue 14,000 Korean Refugees Facing Death," *USAA Magazine* (November/December 2002) reprinted in the *Mariners Weather Log* (Spring/Summer 2003), vol. 47, no. 1 at http://www.vos.noaa.gov/MWL/spring_03/voyage.shtml accessed 2 September 2010.
- 46 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 4. Lynn Montross listed the total number of ship loads as: 6 APA (Attack Transport), 6 AKA (Amphibious Cargo Ship) 12 TAP (US Navy Troop Ship), 76 time-charter ships, 81 LST (Tank, Landing Ship) and 11 LSD (Dock, Landing Ship) loads. Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 7 of 9.
- 47 Fohn, "Voyage of Mercy," 2, 3 of 5.
- 48 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 4.
- 49 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 48.
- 50 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 5; Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 53. USMC COL Edward E. Forney had brought Mobile Training Group (MTG) Able to train Army units in Japan on amphibious operations prior to the Korean War. When General Douglas A. MacArthur activated X Corps to conduct the In'chon landing, Forney was selected to be Deputy Chief of Staff for Amphibious Planning. After getting Marine officers attached to all primary staff sections, the assignments became semi-permanent. Forney, capable of getting along with anyone without compromising himself, was appointed by MG Edward M. Almond on 9 December 1950 to be the Control Officer for the Hungnam evacuation. As such, he was responsible for operating the port, withdrawing units to the staging areas, embarking the troops, outloading equipment, supplies, munitions, and fuel, and evacuating the refugees. Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, who was charged with the entire redeployment operation stated, "Forney ran the shore end of the evacuation, and he did it magnificently. He was an expert at loading ships." Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 49, 50, 51; Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 4 of 9.
- 51 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 7 of 9.
- 52 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 7; Stewart, *Staff Operations: The X Corps in Korea, December 1950*, 6 of 28 at <http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csi/stewart/stewart.asp> accessed 17 November 2010.
- 53 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 50.
- 54 Gilbert, *Ship of Miracles*, 124.
- 55 Stanton, *Ten Corps in Korea*, 312.
- 56 Stewart, *Staff Operations: The X Corps in Korea, December 1950*, 16 of 28 at <http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csi/stewart/stewart.asp> accessed 17 November 2010.
- 57 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 25; Exact numbers of refugees evacuated from Hungnam are difficult to substantiate because some totals only address those carried by U.S. Navy assets. Glenn Cowart sets the number at 86,000 by the U.S. Navy. Cowart, *Miracle in Korea*, 95.
- 58 X Corps Special Report on Hungnam Evacuation, 28; *Big X in Korea*, 17.
- 59 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 55; Cowart, *Miracle in Korea*, 26 (photos 6 & 7).
- 60 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 55.
- 61 Montross, "The Hungnam Evacuation," 8 of 9.
- 62 Fohn, "Voyage of Mercy," 3 of 5.
- 63 Fohn, "Voyage of Mercy," 3 of 5.
- 64 Retired LTC Loren E. Davis, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 31 January 2006, Fort Bragg, NC, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 65 Fohn, "Voyage of Mercy," 4 of 5.
- 66 Doyle and Mayer, "December 1950 at Hungnam," 55.
- 67 BG Edwin H. Simmons, *Frozen Chosin: U.S. Marines at the Changjin Reservoir*. (Washington, DC: US Marine Corps Historical Center, 2002), 127 at www.usmc.mil/.../U.S.%20Marines%20in%20the%20Korean%20War%20PCPN%2010600000 accessed 17 November 2010.