

## Foreword

David Bruhn's recently published *Turn into the Wind Vol. II*, includes the most conspicuous role undertaken by the U.S. and Commonwealth Navies during the Korean War, that played by the light fleet carriers. His latest book, *Guns Up: Naval Action in the Yellow Sea off Korea, 1950-1953*, covers the operations of U.S., Commonwealth, and other Allied Navy surface combatant ships in the Yellow Sea and complements the description of the carrier operations off the west coast of Korea as described in his earlier book.

Destroyers and frigates assigned to the West Coast Blockading and Escort Force (Task Force 95) screened the U.S., British and Australian carriers, usually stationed about seventy miles west of Inchon. These duties, which involved protection of the carriers and rescue of pilots and aircrew forced to bail out or ditch as a result of combat damage, were more benign than operations closer to shore. Those included shore bombardments and the support of mine countermeasures operations and assistance to guerilla forces.

During the war a total of 76 ships of the Commonwealth Navies and the Fleet auxiliary services served in the war zone for varying periods. These comprised 32 Royal Navy warships (five carriers, six cruisers, seven destroyers, 14 frigates); nine of the Royal Australian Navy (one carrier, four destroyers, four frigates); eight destroyers of the Royal Canadian Navy; six frigates of the Royal New Zealand Navy; two headquarters ships; one hospital ship; 16 Royal Fleet auxiliaries and two merchant fleet auxiliaries.

At the outbreak of hostilities, the *River*-class frigate HMAS *Shoalhaven* was deployed as the Australian naval contingent to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, while HMAS *Bataan* was en route to relieve her. Both ships were allocated to United Nations (UN) forces on 29 June 1950 and were immediately included in the Commonwealth Naval Force commanded by Rear Admiral William Andrewes, RN, which was later augmented by ships from Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and France. Over the next three years and into the tense post-Armistice period, the RAN maintained two ships on station, as well as deploying an aircraft carrier, a total of some 4,500

personnel. Post-war, the RAN continued Armistice patrols until 1955, including a second tour by the light aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney*. Fifty-seven officers and men received decorations for their war service.

The four destroyers deployed by Australia during the war were: *Bataan*, *Warramunga*, *Anzac* and *Tobruk*; the four frigates were: *Shoalhaven*, *Murchison*, *Condamine* and *Culgoa*. The planned deployment period was a 12-month cycle with eight months in Korea and four months on passage. Given the shortages at the time of both ships and manpower, the planned deployment cycle was not achieved. The destroyers averaged some 10 months in the war zone, with *Warramunga* spending 13 months, as a relief ship was not available. The four destroyers each deployed to Korea twice. The frigates each deployed once with *Murchison* and *Condamine* spending nine months in the war zone and *Shoalhaven* and *Culgoa* three and four months respectively.

Three days after the New Zealand government agreed to contribute to the UN naval forces, two frigates sailed from Auckland, arriving Sasebo on 1 August 1950. A few hours later they were deployed escorting ships between Japan and the South Korean port of Pusan. New Zealand's involvement in the Korean War lasted three years, during which time they maintained two frigates continuously in the war zone. This involved the six *Loch*-class frigates, HMNZ Ships *Pukaki*, *Tutira*, *Rotoiti*, *Taupo*, *Havea* and *Kaniere* and about half the manpower of the Royal New Zealand Navy – approximately 1,350 personnel – served in them.

There were no traditional naval battles – control of the seas was firmly held by the UN forces which exploited that control. The RAN destroyers and frigates blockaded the coast, landed and supported raiding parties, supplied isolated UN forces, bombarded coastal targets and escorted larger ships. There was a constant threat from Soviet-built sea mines, especially during the evacuations of Hungnam and Wonsan in December 1950.

Mine clearing was particularly hazardous on the west coast due to the large tidal movements and the tendency of moored mines to 'walk.' Thirteen UN ships were sunk or damaged by Russian-made North Korean mines in 1950. *Warramunga's* Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Geoffrey Gladstone, DSC RAN (later Rear Admiral), was awarded both a bar to his Distinguished Service Cross and the U.S. Bronze Star for his skill and bravery during his contribution to the

minesweeping operations to open the port of Chinnampo in November 1950.

The RAN first engaged the enemy when *Bataan* bombarded a shore battery northwest of Inchon on 1 August 1950. *Warramunga* and *Bataan* took part in the Inchon landing and later returned there to harass advancing Chinese forces after their intervention in the war. On 5 February 1951 *Warramunga* ambushed a North Korean force that, by deception, attempted to lure her inshore.

In September 1951 the *Murchison* operated in the restricted, fast-flowing tidal waters of the Han River, engaging enemy batteries at close range and taking several hits. In addition to combat operations, RAN ships were also involved in humanitarian operations providing food and other supplies to islanders on the west coast who were struggling to survive in the midst of a war zone.

For the last two years of the war, RAN ships in Korean waters continued to protect the islands off the west coast of North Korea that were in South Korean possession.

Korea was the first and last occasion where the UN moved together to wage a large-scale war. From a maritime point of view, everything was in its favour during the Korean war – the physical configuration of the country made it singularly susceptible for the exercise of sea power.

Except for the mining there was practically no enemy opposition at sea. Attacks from the air against ships were negligible and although there was always the possibility of submarine attack, no attacks were detected. Apart from mines, the only serious opposition to ships was from shore batteries during inshore operations and generally speaking, the ships gave more than they received. Korea showed the need for an active and up-to-date minesweeping force, forcibly emphasising the value of amphibious forces and last but not least, showed that the naval gun was not an obsolete weapon.

Perhaps the major lesson from the war, was the certainty that the UN Army could not have existed in Korea without the Navy – the Navy got it there and kept it there.

In *Guns Up*, Commander David Bruhn has provided a comprehensive and interesting description of the many and varied operations undertaken by the UN maritime forces operating in the treacherous Yellow Sea waters in support of the Army ashore. This book is an important contribution to our understanding of what went on in this 'forgotten war.'

Commodore Hector Donohue AM RAN (Rtd)