

## Foreword

*For Canadian destroyers, Korea was a peculiar war. Having come out of World War Two as an effective anti-submarine navy, our ships suddenly found themselves engaged in the monotony of interminable carrier screening missions and hazardous blockade or island defence patrols. They were often called upon to complete these operations in the limited visibility of snow squalls and biting winds, among the rocky shoals and mud flats of the Korean west coast. It is no small wonder our sailors were happy when the so-called United Nations' 'police action' was over and our ships could return to Canada.*

—Fred R. Fowlow, former Supply Officer aboard  
HMCS *Athabaskan* during the Korean War.<sup>1</sup>



Royal Canadian Navy Ensign 1911-1965



United Nations Flag

The headlines of Victoria's *The Daily Colonist* of July 6, 1950, read "Ontario Escorts Three Destroyers Headed for Pearl Harbor." As a boy of 10 with a keen interest in the Royal Canadian Navy, I distinctively remember that day over 70 years ago when the cruiser HMCS *Ontario* lead the tribal destroyers HMCS *Cayuga* and *Athabaskan* and the V-class with the tribal name HMCS *Sioux* out of Esquimalt Harbor. *Ontario* would soon return to base after refueling the others at sea but they would continue to a final location not formally announced to their crews, but strongly rumored to be Korea.

Canada was proud to serve in Korea with its Commonwealth, U.S., and ROK Partners. Significantly, for the first time, combat operations, although basically commanded by the U.S. Military, was under aegis of the United Nations. This is an organization since its inception that Canada as a middle power has always firmly supported. It is noteworthy, as detailed in this book, ten nations participated in the naval actions in Korea—a consensus in military action that perhaps may never be repeated.

It may have been one of the UN's finest actions in defending a small independent nation from unwanted attack and invasion – a nation that until 1991 was not even one of its members. In that year she and her fervent northern enemy were both granted membership. Sadly, their bitter conflict has not yet been resolved but the UN action has permitted those in the south to survive and prosper in freedom while those in the north starve beside their missiles and bombs.

Fortunately, in spite of conflicting Cold War demands in Europe and in the midst of a restructuring of her naval forces back to a specialist ant-submarine force, Canada was able to quickly respond to the Korean conflagration by the rapid deployment of destroyers from her west coast. Decisive and rapid government action to support the war was important, because arrival of the destroyers in theater required a voyage of thousands of miles across the Pacific from their base at Esquimalt on southern Vancouver Island. Mobilization and demobilization voyages for later deployments of HMCS *Iroquois*, *Huron*, *Haida*, and *Nootka* based at Halifax Nova Scotia were even longer, the first three completed two circumnavigations of the globe while *Nootka* one.



Canadian postal stamp tribute to *Tribal*-class destroyers, circa 1942

As a boy and youth, who had a dream of a naval career, I did gain some personal knowledge of some of the RCN vessels which served in Korea. My dad and myself often trolled for salmon in Parry Bay near Victoria on Vancouver Island and I remember passing closely to HMCS *Cayuga* and *Athabaskan* my favorite vessels. Our friends and good next-door neighbors were Angus and Nan Rankin. Commander Rankin was the captain of HMCS *Sioux* on her final and Canada's last tour of duty in Korea, which lasted until 1955.

Although my desire to serve in the RCN was not realized, I have also felt a kinship with the sea. The Royal Canadian Navy and other Commonwealth navies are patterned on, and closely linked to the Royal Navy. It's been said, at least in years past, that one would be hard pressed to find an establishment in England to which one goes to "bend an elbow" without a painting of a ship or the Royal Navy. The memorizing of naval ships' names there is a passion similar to the American one of recalling names of their movie stars – it was one I inherited from my dad.

In Canada, like in Britain, there is much interest in naval matters. I was aware of the deployments of our ships to Korea, their distinguished participation in "train busting" on the east coast, and even the strange involvement of Ferdinand Waldo ("Fred") Demara, the Great Imposter, who untrained in medicine, performed lifesaving surgery on HMCS *Athabaskan*. However, many of their fine contributions on the west coast service were new to me, prior to my involvement with and review of the *Guns Up* manuscript.

The RCN destroyers, like those of the other Commonwealth navies, alternated carrier screening duties, with patrol, shore bombardment, and island protection duties. Using its boat, carrying a demolition party, HMCS *Athabaskan* rendered enemy moored mines, exposed at low tide, safe by blowing them up with attached charges. HMCS *Nootka* also helped combat the threat of Soviet mines emplaced by North Korea by capturing one of their minelayers. This stealthy vessel, used in offshore channels, was a large junk, whose superstructure had been removed, leaving a mere 18 inches of freeboard to lessen the chance of visual detection. To ensure quietness when engaged in nefarious activities, the craft had been propelled by oarsmen, in lieu of a noisy engine disclosing its presence to passing UN patrol vessels.

## NAVAL GUNFIRE ACTION

*It is safe to say that throughout the duration of the Korean War, Canadian warships sent off thousands of rounds of 4-inch and 40 mm rounds into enemy troop concentrations, at moving trains, garrisons, the inshore 'gunboat navy' comprised of mine laying junks, guerilla troop transports and shore-based gun emplacements. In one forty-day patrol period HMCS Athabaskan expended 1,050 rounds of 4-inch and 590 rounds of 40 mm.*

— Fred R. Fowlow, former Supply Officer aboard  
HMCS *Athabaskan* during the Korean War.<sup>2</sup>

Facing almost no naval threat from the North, other than its liberal use of mines and infrequent aircraft attacks, RCN destroyers focused on adversaries ashore. Enemy shore artillery fire, bent on the destruction of ships, added to the dangers posed by the mines, and geography, encountered while protecting the flanks of ground forces ashore. Canadians are proficient in operating in high northern latitudes, offering bitter cold, pack ice, and navigation in constricted waters. Extreme tidal changes, fast running currents, and other impediments associated with combat duty in the Yellow Sea, such as exposed mudflats and barely concealed rocks were, however, a new experience.

The book's title, *Guns Up*, reflects the preponderance and also frequency of naval gunfire operations in Korea: against enemy targets; in support of friendly ground forces, and anti-Communist guerilla raids ashore; and in ongoing efforts to interdict enemy logistics. The latter activity frequently resulted in duels with shore artillery, particularly on the east coast. Many ships experienced hits or near misses. HMCS *Iroquois* suffered the only RCN members killed in action in Korea, when "B" gun deck was hit by an enemy round. Lt. Comdr. John Quinn and Able Seaman Elburne Baikie died instantly. Able Seaman Wallis Burden died several hours later of his wounds. Ten other crewmembers suffered wounds caused by shrapnel fragments and the blast.

## LEST WE FORGET

### RCN Destroyers that served in the Korean War

Pacific Coast Command	Ship Class	Atlantic Coast Command	Ship Class
HMCS <i>Athabaskan</i> (DDE219)	<i>Tribal</i>	HMCS <i>Haida</i> (DDE215)	<i>Tribal</i>
HMCS <i>Cayuga</i> (DDE218)	<i>Tribal</i>	HMCS <i>Huron</i> (DDE216)	<i>Tribal</i>
HMCS <i>Crusader</i> (DDE228)	C-class	HMCS <i>Iroquois</i> (DDE217)	<i>Tribal</i>
HMCS <i>Sionx</i> (DDE225)	V-class	HMCS <i>Nootka</i> (DDE213)	<i>Tribal</i>

### Summary of Personal Honours and Awards

Commonwealth Awards	No.	U.S. Awards to RCN	No.
Distinguished Service Order (DSO)	1	Legion of Merit	7
Order of the British Empire (OBE)	3	Distinguished Flying Cross	1
Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)	9	Bronze Star Medal	1
Bar to the DSC (Second Award)	1		
Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)	2		
British Empire Medal (BEM)	4		
Mention in Despatches (MID)	32 <sup>3</sup>		

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