

## Foreword

I wasn't even a gleam in my father's eye at the start of the Korean War but I learned of some aspects from two remarkable people in my life. As a recently-arrived English schoolboy in the USA in the mid-1960s, I was picked on by Harry Apetz, my enthusiastically anglophile Social Studies teacher at Bellevue Junior High School near Seattle, and regaled with his tales of serving in the U.S. fleet off Korea. He was effusive in his admiration of the impressive sortie rate achieved by the Royal Navy's smaller but more efficient aircraft carriers.

The other influential figure in my life was Lt Cdr Robbie Robinson MBE RN who was wounded as a junior signalman in the cruiser HMS *Exeter* during the Battle of the River Plate in 1939 and was later 'filleted' (his word) by underwater explosions as a frogman clearing obstructions in the shallows off Dieppe and Normandy. As a Chief Petty Officer, he was a demolitions specialist attached to 41 Independent Commando Royal Marines and participated in the infamously bloody retreat of UN forces from the Chosin Reservoir. He was less than impressed to be told on returning to his young bride in the UK that he was now top of the roster for sea service.

But for the revelations of these two veterans, both of whom have since 'crossed the bar,' I would have known little about the Korean War and might even have believed it was almost exclusively a land campaign involving the odd air battle as depicted in the Commando-type action comics I read as a child. However, after qualifying as an MCDO (Minewarfare & Clearance Diving Officer) in the Royal Navy I found myself lecturing prospective Commanding Officers of warships and submarines about the hazards to be expected from the use of cheap but highly effective mines, and how to deal with them in terms of active and passive mine countermeasures and material, tactical and personal self-protective measures. I cheerfully advised them at the end of each day, "Every ship (or submarine) can be a minesweeper - once!".

One of the most compelling visual aids I used in my lectures was the vivid image of the ROK (Republic of Korea) Navy's minesweeper YMS-516 (formerly the Royal Navy's *BYMS 2148*) being blown asunder by a North Korean mine off Wonsan in October 1950. It was the delayed

landing of an amphibious assault force at Wonsan owing to enemy mining, that triggered this famous quotation by Rear Admiral Allen 'Hoke' Smith USN, the Commander of Task Force 95:

The U.S. Navy has lost control of the seas in Korean waters to a nation without a Navy, using pre-World War I weapons, laid by vessels that were utilized at the time of the birth of Christ.

As ever, David Bruhn has produced a work of historical consequence that sheds fresh light on a little-known area of maritime warfare. He has interwoven his narrative with fascinating snippets that help bring to life the actions of a wide range of units from different allied nations and the bravery of the personnel who manned them. The U.S. Navy, Royal Navy and the navies of the Commonwealth nations of Australia, Canada and New Zealand are given the coverage their predominance deserves but David also pays tribute to the plucky efforts of the embryo ROK Navy which had to overcome enormous odds to field any ships at all. The French and Colombian navies are given their due, too, and there are lessons of interoperability that remain valid to this day. This is manifested in the current deployment of USMC fifth generation F-35B Lightning aircraft, together with those manned by their RN and RAF peers, on board HMS *QUEEN ELIZABETH*, one of the Royal Navy's new 65,000-ton aircraft carriers, during exercises in the North Sea.

Perhaps most significantly of all, David shows what a close-run thing the Korean War was in being waged at all, let alone in its pursuit and outcome. He also explains how the operations of the UN forces ships offshore in their support of the land forces, plus the performance of their aircraft over land and sea, probably tipped the balance between humiliating defeat on the one hand and victory on the other, or at least the uneasy cease-fire that has survived for the past 70 years. Long may it continue.

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