

## Preface

*One lesson that I taught my crew which I had learned from World War II, was that if you wanted to make good gunners out of mediocre gunners, simply take them under enemy fire.*

—Comdr. James A. Dare, commanding officer of the destroyer USS *Douglas H. Fox* (DD-779).<sup>1</sup>

*I have been much impressed by the way in which the navies of so many nations are co-operating in the Korean War. In spite of the differences in language and customs, warships of different nations are operating as one against the common enemy.*

—Words of praise from Adm. Sir Roderick McGregor, GCB, DSO  
Royal Navy First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff,  
following an inspection tour to Korea.<sup>2</sup>

*I have only the highest praise for the manner in which our allies contributed to the war effort of the UN Navy. Their co-operation was all that could be desired and they performed every task assigned them, no matter how difficult, with zeal and ability that always evoked my admiration.*

—Vice Adm. Charles Turner Joy, USN,  
commander, Naval Forces Far East.<sup>3</sup>

Photo Preface-1



The Flag of the United Nations, New York, 1950.  
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 97167

Well before daylight on 25 June 1950, six North Korean infantry divisions and three Border Constabulary Brigades, supported by Soviet-made T-34 tanks, heavy artillery, and the North Korean Air Force, swarmed south across the 38th parallel, touching off the Korean War. The Soviet-supported North Korean Army advanced rapidly overland against poorly trained and ill-equipped Republic of Korea (ROK) forces while, along South Korea's east coast, a Border Constabulary Brigade carried out amphibious landings. On 26 June, two more North Korean divisions moved south across the 38th parallel.<sup>4</sup>

On 30 June, President Harry S. Truman committed U.S. troops to enforce a UN Security Council resolution, asking member nations to provide necessary assistance to South Korea. Twenty-one nations committed themselves to support South Korea which was not yet a member nation; sixteen supplied fighting units and five sent military hospitals and field ambulances.<sup>5</sup>

The first U.S. troops to fight in defense of South Korea engaged North Korean military forces at Osan, 30 miles south of Seoul, with tragic results. Task Force SMITH (540 men of the U.S. Army 24th Infantry Division, quickly dispatched from occupational duties in Japan) was crushed, on 5 July, by the North Korean 4th Division. In response to this devastating defeat, a UN Command was created, on 7 July, under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur.<sup>6</sup>

The following week, Lt. Gen. Walton Walker, the commander of the U.S. Eighth Army, was assigned responsibility for all ground operations in Korea. Following heavy losses at the hands of the North Korean 3rd and 4th Divisions, American and ROK troops were forced to retreat further south to the Naktong River, the last natural physical barrier to Pusan.<sup>7</sup>

## **REPEAT OF DUNKIRK SEEMINGLY POSSIBLE**

On 4 August, driven south by the North Korean Army, three American and five South Korean army divisions were forced to make a final stand along the 145-mile-long Pusan perimeter, the last UN toehold in Korea. The situation was so grim that six days earlier, General Walker had issued a "Stand or Die" order to the troops. The alternative was to be pushed to the sea and annihilated.

When the first elements of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade arrived at Pusan from San Diego, on 2 August, fear abounded in the city. It was a similar condition to one that had existed in World War II, when German troops drove the British Expeditionary Force to the water's edge at Dunkirk, France. Pinned against the sea, the British and

other Allied soldiers of the Force would have been destroyed, were it not for a heroic, and successful evacuation effort ordered by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In addition to efforts by the Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force, hundreds of private craft made the Channel crossing to save “the sons of England.”<sup>8</sup>

### **ASSISTANCE FROM THE SEA REQUIRED**

With the rapidly deteriorating situation on the peninsula where, it appeared, the Eighth Army might be driven into the sea, it seemed only the UN naval forces had the power to reverse the situation. Facing the distinct possibility of imminent military defeat on land, Vice Adm. C. Turner Joy, USN, commander, Naval Forces Far East (ComNavFE), ordered Task Force 95 (the Blockade and Escort Force) to bombard the important railway lines running the length of North Korea’s eastern seaboard. Down this coastal route, fed by six rail lines from Manchuria and the connecting Trans-Siberian line, flowed all the war material for the two major approaches to the Pusan perimeter.<sup>9</sup>

### **ORGANIZATION OF UN NAVAL FORCES**

On 25 June 1950, at the outset of the Korean War, Vice Adm. Turner Joy had only one cruiser, four destroyers, four amphibious ships, one submarine, ten minesweepers, and the Australian frigate HMAS *Shoalhaven* under his command. This situation changed within forty-eight hours, as Adm. Arthur W. Radford, commander in chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, transferred operational control of the Seventh Fleet (essentially all of the USN ships in the western Pacific) to Vice Admiral Joy. The following month, all United Nations naval forces committed to assisting South Korea were also placed under the operational control of commander, Naval Forces Far East (Joy). This mix of ships was quickly organized into four separate task forces:

- TF 77 (Carrier Strike Force)
- TF 95 (Blockade and Escort Force)
- TF 96 (Naval Forces, Japan)
- TF 90 (Far East Amphibious Force)<sup>10</sup>

During the interim period, before the assignment of all UN naval forces to ComNavFE, other steps were also being taken to increase naval strength in the theater. On 27 June, as directed by commander in chief, Pacific Fleet (CincPacFlt), Vice Adm. Struble, at Buckner Bay, Okinawa, reported for duty to commander in chief, Far East, Gen. Douglas MacArthur. One day later, the British Admiralty placed Royal

Naval units in Japanese waters at the disposal of Vice Admiral Joy, who requested that the British ships rendezvous at Buckner Bay. Requiring additional ships, CincPacFlt formed Task Force Yoke under Rear Adm. Walter F. Boone, USN. Serving as commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group, Seventh Fleet, Boone's job was to scrounge up as many ships as possible on the U.S. West Coast and at Pearl Harbor, for the Korean campaign.<sup>11</sup>

On 5 July, ComNavFE (Vice Admiral Joy) implemented President Truman's order for a blockade of the Korean coast and, five days later, he directed that the blockade be extended northward to include the ports of Wonsan (east coast) and Chinnampo (west coast). That same day, Adm. Forrest P. Sherman, chief of Naval Operations (CNO), directed CincPacFlt to sail Task Force Yoke when ready. On 11 July, the CNO authorized activation of ships from the Reserve Fleet. As part of this process, a Patrol Frigate Activation program was begun at Yokosuka, on 15 July, to put some of the ships lent the Soviets after World War II, and later returned to U.S. custody at Yokosuka, back in service.<sup>12</sup>

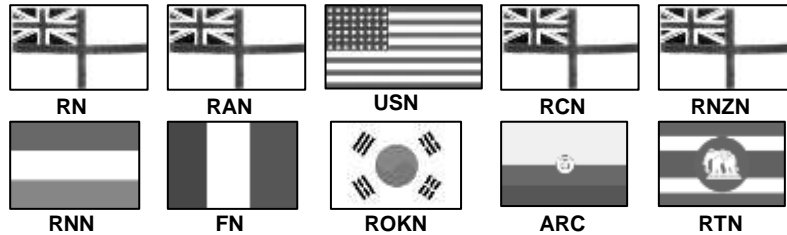
On 24 July, ComNavFE established Escort Element (CTE 96.50) under Capt. Alan D. H. Jay, RN—consisting of the frigates HMS *Black Swan*, HMS *Hart*, and HMAS *Sboalhaven*. An escort force was needed to shepherd transport ships and merchantmen being surged to Pusan, on Korea's southern coast, to deliver desperately needed combat troops, war material, and supplies.<sup>13</sup>

While bolstering support for United Nations forces in Korea, ComNavFE concurrently needed to disrupt supply lines running down Korea's east coast to enemy troops advancing southward. The major part of this effort was shore bombardment by ships offshore, and strikes by carrier aircraft. Additionally, on 27 July, Admiral Joy directed harassing and demolition raids by Task Force 90, utilizing UDT (Underwater Demolition Team) and Marine reconnaissance personnel against selected North Korean east coast military objectives.<sup>14</sup>

## **UNITED NATIONS NAVAL FORCES**

The naval forces of the U.S., Britain, Australia, and Republic of Korea in the theater of war, were soon augmented by additional warships of these countries, as well as ones dispatched by Canada, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, and later Thailand and Columbia.

Surface combatant ships of the UN Naval Forces were assigned to support the Carrier Strike Force (TF 77); the Blockade and Escort Force (TF 95); Naval Forces, Japan (TF 96); and the Far East Amphibious Force (TF 90). More about these duties in later pages.



The United States Navy and Royal Navy were able to commit the largest number of powerful ships to the UN Naval Force; smaller navies made contributions relative to their size. A summary of the UN Naval Force surface combatant ships follows (336 vessels total). The fire power of the Royal Navy ships was much greater than those of the Republic of Korea, which had more vessels. The ROK Navy aggressively employed its smaller ships and craft in offshore and, more often, critical and difficult inshore combat operations.

**U.S. Navy (USN) – 211**

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4	Battleships	5	Fast Transports (converted destroyers)
9	Cruisers	13	Patrol Frigates
172	Destroyers	4	Patrol Escorts
4	Destroyer Minesweepers		

**Royal Navy (RN) – 37**

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6	Cruisers	24	Frigates
7	Destroyers		

**Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) – 54**

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5	Patrol Frigates	2	Gunboats
6	Submarine Chasers	2	Patrol Gun Boats
5	Patrol Craft Sweepers	19	Yard Minesweepers (ex-YMS/BYMS)
4	Motor Torpedo Boats	11	ex-Japanese Minesweepers (JMS)

**Royal Australian Navy (RAN) – 8**

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4	Destroyers	4	Frigates
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**Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) – 8**

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8	Destroyers
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**Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZ) – 6**

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6	Frigates
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**Royal Netherlands Navy (RNN) – 4**

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3	Destroyers	1	Frigate
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**Royal Thai Navy (RTN) – 4**

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4 Frigates

**Colombian Navy (ARC) – 3**

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3 Frigates

**French Navy (FN) – 1**

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1 Frigate

Information about, and the identities of the Republic of Korea Navy ships may be found in Chapter 2 and in Appendix A. Chapter 4 is devoted to the ships of the other countries, with the exception of those of the United States.

## **BATTLE HONOURS AND BATTLE STARS**

The ships of the Royal Navy and the other Commonwealth Nations, with successful war service, earned “Battle Honors KOREA.” Those of the United States that garnered one or more battle stars were able to garnish the ribbon boards on their deckhouses. (It is unknown to the author, whether any of the other nations—Columbia, France, Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand—authorized similar campaign awards for eligible ships of their navies.)

Because His/Her Majesty’s warships (whether RN, or units of other Commonwealth nations) do not carry Army regimental colours, battle honours are instead displayed on a battle honour board. Traditionally teak, this solid wooden board is mounted on the ship’s superstructure, carved with the ship’s badge and scrolls naming the ship and the associated honours. The board is either completely unpainted, or with the lettering painted gold. To pay tribute to past ships of the same name, their honours are displayed as well. Battle Honours (which date back to the year 1588, when ‘ARMADA 1588’ was authorized) are awarded for six types of action:

- Fleet or Squadron Actions
- Single-ship or Boat Service Actions
- Major Bombardments
- Combined Operations
- Campaign Awards
- Area Awards<sup>15</sup>

Photo Preface-2



Battle Honours board of the Royal Australian Navy light cruiser HMAS *Hobart* (D63), depicting the ship's battle honours and badge. Since she was the first HMAS ship with this name, her honours resulted from her war service only.  
Australian War Memorial photograph 300798

Photo Preface-3



Ribbons board on the bridge wing of the battleship USS *New Jersey* (BB-62). Her Korean Service Medal ribbon, with four battle stars, is the one located on the right in the fourth row from the top.  
Courtesy of John Werda

U.S. Navy ships and units had to meet one of the following criteria to be considered to have participated in combat operations:

- Engaged the enemy
- Participated in ground action
- Engaged in aerial flights over enemy territory

- Took part in shore bombardment, minesweeping, or amphibious assault
- Engaged in or launched commando-type raids or other operations behind enemy lines
- Engaged in redeployment under enemy fire
- Engaged in blockade of Korean waters
- Operated as part of carrier task groups from which offensive air strikes were launched
- Were part of mobile logistic support forces in combat areas<sup>16</sup>

The officers and men of U.S. Navy ships awarded battle stars were eligible to affix one or more stars to their Korean Service medal or ribbon worn on uniform blouses, and their ships to display same on their bridge wing ribbon boards.

## **KOREAN WAR ENGAGEMENTS**

Battle stars were authorized for the following ten engagements. The catch was, only one star was authorized for each engagement, no matter how many qualifying actions by a particular ship. Thus, the number of stars earned by a USN ship was related both to qualifying actions, and to time spent in theater.



1. North Korean aggression
2. Communist China aggression
3. Inchon landing
4. 1st U.N. counteroffensive
5. Communist China, spring offensive
6. United Nations summer-fall offensive
7. 2nd Korean winter
8. Korean defense, summer-fall (1952)
9. 3rd Korean winter
10. Korea, summer-fall (1953)<sup>17</sup>

Two hundred eleven U.S. Navy surface combatant ships collectively garnered 814 battle stars—on average, a little less than four apiece. A summary of those earned by each ship may be found in Appendix B. The top twenty-three ships, identified below, each earned 7-9 stars. While appreciating their efforts, it is important to note that



Battle Honours KOREA awarded to Commonwealth ships, might encompass several engagements, and/or combat actions.

## U.S. NAVY SURFACE COMBATANTS AWARDED THE MOST BATTLE STARS IN THE KOREAN WAR



USS *Manchester* (CL-83)  
USS *Chevalier* (DDR-805)

USS *Theodore E. Chandler* (DD-717)  
USS *Wiltie* (DD-716)



USS *Endicott* (DMS-35)  
USS *George K. Mackenzie* (DD-836)  
USS *Hammer* (DD-718)  
USS *Hanson* (DDR-832)

USS *Saint Paul* (CA 73)  
USS *Southerland* (DDR-743)  
USS *Taussig* (DD-746)



USS *Brinkley Bass* (DD-987)  
USS *Duncan* (DDR-874)  
USS *Eversole* (DD-789)  
USS *Gloucester* (PF-22)  
USS *Henry W. Tucker* (DDR-875)  
USS *James E. Keyes* (DD-787)

USS *John A. Bole* (DD-755)  
USS *John W. Thomason* (DD-760)  
USS *Leonard F. Mason* (DD-852)  
USS *Lofberg* (DD-759)  
USS *Rupertus* (DD-851)  
USS *Thompson* (DMS-38)<sup>18</sup>

DD: destroyer  
DDR: radar picket destroyer  
DMS: high-speed minesweeper  
(converted destroyer)  
CA: heavy cruiser  
CL: light cruiser  
PF: patrol frigate



**Korean Service Medal, and Ribbon with one battle star**

Before delving into the text of the book, an overview of a few ship types of the U.S. Navy sent to Korea (which had the largest and most diverse group of warships) might be useful. Their introduction, to a degree, also serves as a primer on the duties in which they engaged. No explanations accompany the photographs of the battleship, cruiser, and destroyers, only captions.

Photo Preface-4



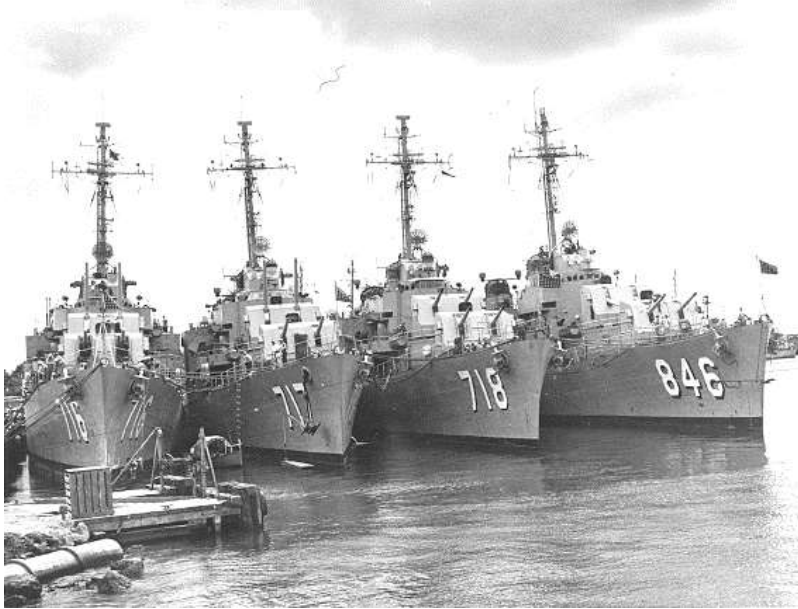
Battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-63) firing a salvo from her No. 2 turret, while bombarding Chongjin, North Korea, October 1950. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph 80-G-421049

Photo Preface-5



A sailor aboard USS *Manchester* (CL-83) observes the enemy coastline as the cruiser, shore bombardment completed, departs Wonsan Harbor. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 97187

Photo Preface-6



Destroyers USS *Wiltsie* (DD-716), USS *Theodore E. Chandler* (DD-717), USS *Hammer* (DD-718), and USS *Ozburn* (DD-846) anchored at Pearl Harbor, circa 1949. These four ships collectively earned 31 battle stars in the Korean War. Navy History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 96199

## **PATROL FRIGATE ACTIVATION PROGRAM**

Thirteen patrol frigates served in the Korean War, a relatively modest portion of the UN forces. Brought out of “mothballs” at Yokosuka, they were pressed into service by the U.S. Navy when need for warships, whatever size, was greatest in the early dark days of the war. Three of these ships were subsequently transferred to the Republic of Korea, and two each to Thailand and Columbia. These seven ships continued their combat service in the Korean War, as part of the UN naval forces, but under the flags of their respective nations.

In WWII, American and Canadian shipbuilders constructed ninety-six, 304-foot patrol frigates, of a design (S2-S2-AQ1) that was based on the Royal Navy’s *River*-class corvette. Two of these ships (of 301 feet in length) were built by Canadian Vickers. Of this fleet, 37 were almost immediately transferred to the U.S. Dept. of Commerce for service as weather ships. Another 21 (built in Providence, Rhode Island, by the Walsh-Kaiser Co.) were re-designated *Colony*-class frigates and delivered

to the RN at the builder's yard. Of the remaining 38 USN patrol frigates, when the war ended, 28 were transferred to the USSR; six went to other nations, and four were scrapped.<sup>19</sup>

Thirteen of the ships transferred to the Soviet Union at the end of WWII, and subsequently returned to U.S. custody, served in the Korean War. They had been decommissioned in 1945 at Cold Bay, Alaska, and loaned to the USSR under the Lend-Lease Program, then returned to the U.S. Navy, in late 1949 and early 1950, and laid up in the Pacific Reserve Fleet, Yokosuka. On 15 July 1950, following the outbreak of war in Korea, the USN began a patrol frigate (PF) activation program at Yokosuka.<sup>20</sup>

Photo Preface-7



USS *Bayonne* (PF-21) under way in Far Eastern waters, circa 1950-1953.  
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 56362

The patrol frigates taken out of the Reserve Fleet for war service are identified in Appendix C. The six PFs not transferred to Allied navies remained a part of the U.S. naval forces, until transferred to the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force in 1953, near war's end or following it.<sup>21</sup>

### **UNNAMED AMPHIBIOUS CONTROL VESSELS**

The smallest U.S. Navy surface combatants in Korea were four unnamed 180-foot ships. The USS *PCE(C)-822*, *PCE(C)-886*, *PCE(C)-896*, and *PCE(C)-898* were remnants of a class of 68 patrol craft escort

vessels built and delivered to the U.S. Navy and an additional 17 delivered under the Lend-Lease Program to Allies during World War II.<sup>22</sup>

Propelled by diesel engines to a modest top speed of 15 knots, and originally armed with a dual-purpose 3"/50 gun, three 40mm guns, five 20mm guns, two depth charge tracks, and ten K-Guns, PCEs were an inexpensive substitute for larger and more valuable destroyers and destroyer escorts. The PCE was designed for general escort work; some were converted to PCE(R), rescue escorts, while others were converted to amphibious control vessels, PCE(C).<sup>23</sup>

The PCE(C)s that served in the Korean War were employed in this role, leading UN landing forces to hostile beaches, and employing their guns as necessary in protection of assault forces.<sup>24</sup>

Photo Preface-8



USS PCE(C)-896 replenishing at sea.  
U.S. Navy photo from *All Hands* magazine, January 1956

## HIGH-SPEED TRANSPORTS

Four 306-foot fast transports comprising Transport Division 111 based at Yokosuka—*Horace A. Bass* (APD-124), *Begor* (APD-127), *Diachenko* (APD-123), and *Wantuck* (APD-125)—served in Korea. Laid down in their builders' yards in World War II as *Rudderon*-class destroyer escorts,

they had been modified to serve as troop transports, capable of carrying and launching amphibious forces.<sup>25</sup>

The resultant high-speed transport combined the hull and (reduced) armament of a warship, with the superstructure of a troop transport. To accomplish this dual role, only the forward mount was fitted of the two 5-inch guns that a destroyer escort (DE) would carry. Elimination of the after mount allowed a substantial length of the main deck to be enclosed to house 160 troops. Another change involved adding a cargo hold aft, with a crane capable of handling light vehicles and equipment. Finally, the three-tube centerline torpedo mount found on the destroyer escort class, was removed to free up space for port and starboard side boat stations capable of launching and recovering four thirty-six-foot landing boats.<sup>26</sup>

Photo Preface-9



High speed transport USS *Wiantuck* (APD-125) under way.  
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #L45-301.02.01

Although unable to carry out a DE's anti-submarine mission, having no torpedo tubes, the high speed transports (APDs) still had fire power necessary for the missions in which they engaged. In addition to its main armament (one 5-inch gun), each high-speed transport boasted three twin 40mm gun mounts, aimed either optically or through the ship's fire control radar system, and additional smaller 20mm mounts aimed optically by their gunners.<sup>27</sup>

## APD EMPLOYMENT IN KOREA

*The sailors became very protective, possessive even, of "their" raiders. To the ship's crew it became a matter of pride, if not outright honor, that the ship not let the raiders down when the going got tough on the North Korean coastline. This principle was irrevocable, whether the raiders be American, Korean, or British Royal Marine Commandos, all of whom entered the unique world of APD operations.*

—Crewmember of a high-speed transport, describing the special bond between ship's company and the raiders they carried to perform special operations ashore.<sup>28</sup>

Photo Preface-10



Lt. Dan F. Chandler briefs Underwater Demolition Team members on a Wonsan beach, 26 October 1950. The frogmen were there to destroy a North Korean minefield. National Archives photograph #80-G-421429

APDs operating singly or in pairs (with commander, Transport Division 111, normally embarked), engaged in nearshore combat operations. These missions involved carrying American frogmen (UDT members), CIA-led Korean guerillas, and British Royal Marine Commandos to hostile shores, and bringing them safely back to base. The frogmen used a variety of demolitions in their work, but the standard charge was the Mark-135 Demolition Pack, which contained twenty pounds of C-3

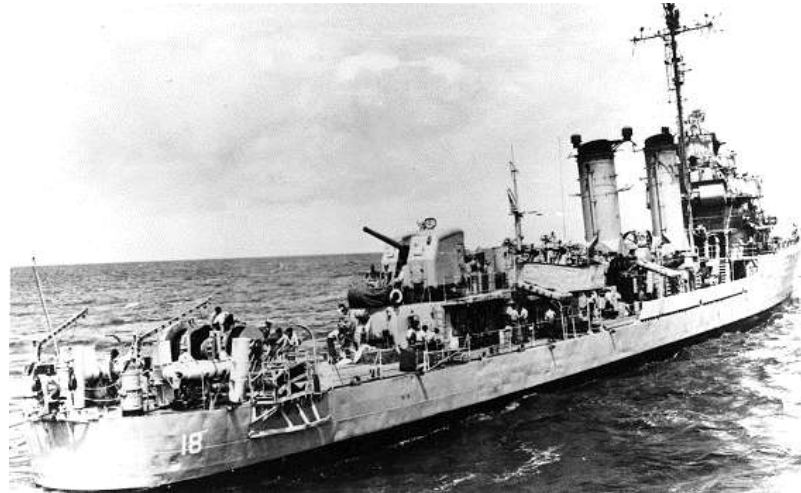
plastic explosive. Individual weaponry taken by the UDT members (frogmen) behind enemy lines included submachine guns, pistols, and knives for the close-quarters combat that characterized most raiding missions.<sup>29</sup>

Korean guerillas inserted across North Korean beaches were sent ashore in small teams, at night, to conduct limited reconnaissance missions, establish Escape and Evasion networks, and to collect local intelligence, particularly on the railway system. For the most part, they were North Korean civilians, screened and recruited by the CIA from among the numerous refugee camps around Pusan. Those selected were taken to the CIA's guerilla training base on the small island of Yong-do, located ninety miles south-southwest of Pusan. There, the Koreans were put through an accelerated training program by a small number of U.S. military personnel "on loan" to the Agency from their respective services.<sup>30</sup>

High-speed transports and embarked frogmen of UDTs 1 and 3 also engaged in mine clearance. Aided by Russian advisors, North Korea mined the major harbors within its control, including the east coast ports of Wonsan and Hungnam; and Chinnampo, the west coast port of entry for the North Korean capital city of Pyongyang.<sup>31</sup>

## FAST MINESWEEPERS

Photo Preface-11



A U.S. Navy Fast Minesweeper (DMS) with the number "18" painted on her hull, while representing the fictitious minesweeper USS *Caine*, during the filming of the movie *The Caine Mutiny*, circa 1954, starring Humphrey Bogart, Jose Ferrer, Van Johnson, Fred MacMurray, and Robert Francis. The ship is probably the USS *Doyle* or *Thompson*.



Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 84548

A small group of former U.S. destroyers also participated in the Korean War as fast minesweepers: *Carmick* (DMS-33), *Doyle* (DMS-34), *Endicott* (DMS-35), and *Thompson* (DMS-38). Built as 348-foot *Bristol*-class destroyers, they were later re-equipped and designated fast minesweepers. *Thompson* served as a destroyer after World War II, but she later joined her three sister ships to comprise Mine Squadron One.<sup>32</sup>

Ordered to Korea to help combat the mine threat, *Thompson* and *Carmick* departed San Diego, on 4 October 1950, and arrived at Sasebo on the 21st. Lengthy mine clearance operations at Chinnampo ensued, for which the two fast minesweepers received the Navy Unit Commendation for their actions during the period 28 October-20 November 1950. Opening the port proved fortuitous, in respect to forthcoming events. Following the intervention of Communist China in the Korean War, in late November 1950, its 250,000 ground forces threatened to cut off and destroy UN units operating in the mountains of North Korea. To prevent that possible catastrophe, on 9 December, Gen. Douglas MacArthur ordered evacuation by sea of the U.S. Tenth Corps.<sup>33</sup>

These evacuations were carried out by naval forces at Hungnam and Chinnampo, on the east and west coasts, respectively. At Chinnampo, while UN warships shelled advancing Communist troops, *Thompson* escorted troopships out of the harbor in dense fog and through treacherous tidal currents to assist in the evacuation.<sup>34</sup>

## ENEMY MIGS, MINES, AND SHORE ARTILLERY

Photo Preface-12



Soviet MiG-15 jet fighter during an air battle in which it was shot down over North Korea by F9F-2 Panther fighters from USS *Leyte*, 23 November 1950. National Archives photograph #80-G-424091

Simultaneous to the entry of Chinese ground forces into the war, came a new threat when Russian pilots, dressed in Chinese uniforms, entered the skies over the Yalu. The appearance of the Soviet MiG-15 came as a huge surprise to the UN coalition forces. On 9 November 1950, MiG-15 planes attacked F9F Panther jet aircraft from USS *Philippine Sea* in the first engagement between planes of this type. On 18 November, eight F9Fs of the Fast Carrier Task Force engaged eight to ten MiG-15s, shooting down one and damaging another five.<sup>35</sup>

The Korean War was peculiar in that there was, initially, no effective enemy opposition on the seas. North Korea, unable to contest UN control of the seas by air, ship, or submarine, did so by other means—sea mines set adrift, and laid in harbor approaches, and ports; and shore artillery firing on Allied ships. Cruisers and destroyers regularly closed the coast when functioning as seagoing heavy artillery. This was necessary to provide naval gunfire support to Allied ground troops ashore; and when shelling railway bridges, tunnels, and trains (and other targets) to sever logistic support to the enemy.<sup>36</sup>

Confronting mines and engaging in duels with shore guns was dangerous work. Five U.S. Navy ships were sunk by mines (four of them minesweepers) during the war, and others were damaged. Between 13 September 1950 (when three U.S. Navy destroyers were hit by enemy gunfire at Inchon while conducting pre-landing shore bombardment) and 11 July 1953, there were 87 incidents in which USN ships were damaged in action. In the last action, the heavy cruiser *Saint Paul* (CA-73) suffered severe under water damage from a 76-90mm hit from a shore battery at Wonsan. Summary information about USN ship damage and personnel casualties may be found in Appendix D.<sup>37</sup>

## **FOCUS OF THE BOOK**

*Guns Up* is devoted to operations of United States, Commonwealth, other Allied Navy, and Republic of Korea warships in the Yellow Sea. The book complements descriptions of carrier operations off the west coast of Korea, found in my book, *Turn into the Wind, Vol. II, U.S. Navy, Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy, and Royal Canadian Navy Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers in the Korean War and through end of service, 1950-1982*. As previously noted, while larger U.S. Navy fleet carriers mainly kept to the deeper Sea of Japan off Korea's east coast, their svelte sisters—the light aircraft carriers USS *Bataan*, HMS *Glory*, HMS *Ocean*, HMS *Theseus*, HMS *Triumph*, and HMAS *Sydney*—were consigned to the Yellow Sea.



**HMS Triumph**  
Battle Honour  
Korea 1950



**HMS Theseus**  
Battle Honour  
Korea 1950-51



**HMAS Sydney**  
Battle Honours  
Korea 1951-52  
Malaysia 1964  
Vietnam 1965-72



**HMS Glory**  
Battle Honour  
Korea 1951-53



**HMS Ocean**  
Battle Honour  
Korea 1952-53



**USS Bataan**  
7 Battle Stars

Photo Preface-13



Light fleet carrier USS *Bataan* off the west coast of Korea, being screened by the Australian destroyer HMAS *Bataan* (foreground) and other surface combatants. A rare photo showing two ships named for the same battle. (RAN)

The four British and single Australian light carriers operated off Korea's west coast, alternating duty with the American light aircraft carrier *Bataan* (CVL-29), or escort carrier USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116), USS *Barioko* (CVE-115), USS *Rendova* (CVE-114), and USS *Sicily* (CVE-118). At the end of an operation period, when relieved by its successor, the carrier on station proceeded to Sasebo, Kure, or Kobe, Japan, for re-supply, maintenance, and crew rest.

Destroyers, frigates, and patrol frigates assigned to the West Coast Blockading and Escort Force (TF 95) screened the British, American, and Australian carriers, usually stationed about sixty miles southwest of Haeju. These duties, involving protection of the carriers, and retrieval from the sea of pilots and aircrews forced to bail out or ditch as a result of combat damage, were more benign than those that took them closer to shore—those being shore bombardment, and the support of mine clearance operations and guerilla forces. Destroyers and frigates, operating in shoal waters, provided protection to west coast islands on which guerilla forces were based, and from which they launched operations behind enemy lines.<sup>38</sup>

### **CRITICALLY IMPORTANT NEARSHORE ISLANDS**

A long string of islands originating off northwest Korea, extended down around the peninsula to Pusan in the southeast. Some of these islands were of great tactical importance to Allied forces. Friendly, guerilla-held islands were ideally suited for radar units and signal intercept stations, and also served as bases for other elements. They offered safe haven for helicopter teams and boat crews dedicated to rescuing downed airmen. Islands behind enemy lines, in particular, served as springboards for guerilla actions and agent insertions.<sup>39</sup>

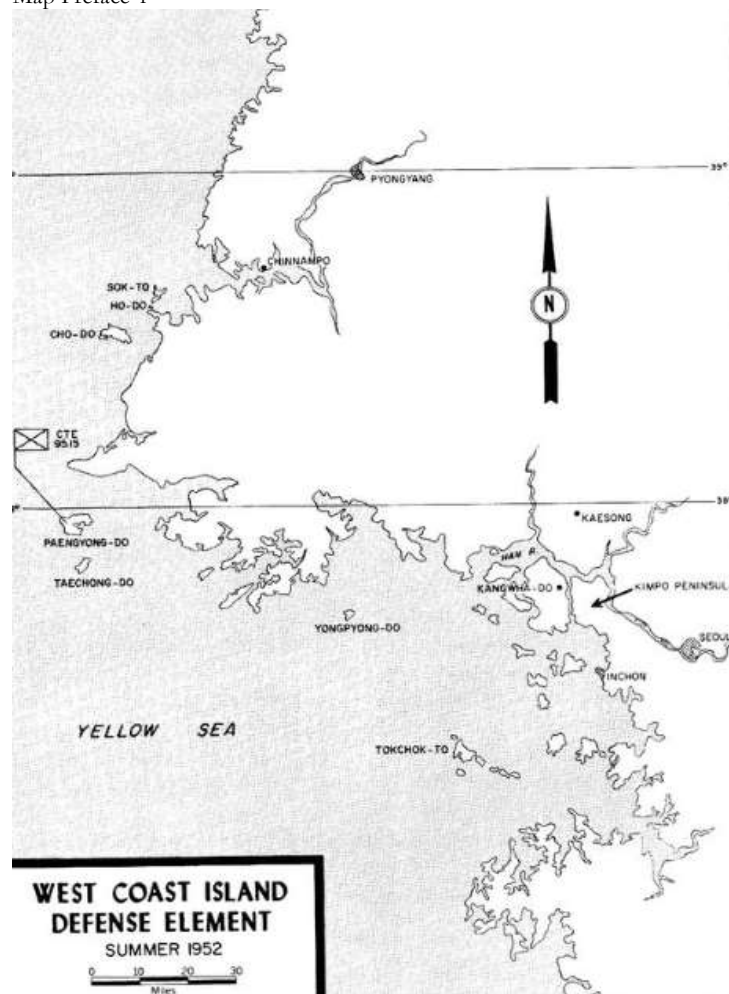
Additionally, guerillas occupied key terrain that controlled several Yellow Sea choke points. Their control of these islands limited enemy movements around the mouth of the Yalu River, into the port cities of Chinnampo and Haeju, and within the important Han River Estuary. Allied control of the sea, increased with the guerilla assistance, forced all supply support for the enemy front lines to move overland or by rail, making them vulnerable to air attacks and naval gunfire.<sup>40</sup>

This changed, in November 1951, when Communist forces overwhelmed 1,000 defenders on the western islands near the mouth of the Yalu and seized them. In recognition of the vulnerability of critical islands to amphibious assault, additional support for the Republic of Korea Marines and guerillas holding the outposts was soon forthcoming. On 6 January 1952, commander, Blockade and Escort

Force became responsible for the defense of all islands north of the 38th Parallel along both coasts. Total responsibility for the sea, air, and land elements of northern island defense was now vested, for the first time, in a single commander.<sup>41</sup>

The following map shows the location of the headquarters of U.S. Marine Col. James T. Wilbur, commander, West Coast Island Defense Element (CTE 95.15). Paengyong-do Island, on which he was based, lay just below the 38th parallel.<sup>42</sup>

Map Preface-1



Islands off northwest Korea, above and below the 38th parallel  
*The Sea Services in the Korean War, 1950-1953*<sup>34</sup>

## SHIP DUTY AND CONDITIONS IN THE YELLOW SEA

Photo Preface-14



British destroyer HMS *Concord* (D63), photographed from HMAS *Bataan* (D191), at the entrance to Chinnampo on the west coast of North Korea. *Concord*, surrounded by pack ice, was carrying out a shore bombardment of the port installations of the town. Australian War Memorial photograph 042342

While the piston-engine aircraft aboard the carriers attacked enemy supply lines, fortifications, and troop positions, enemy MiG jet aircraft were a constant threat, some flown by Russians. Carrier air (and destroyers and frigates, operating independently from aircraft carriers) also provided protection to friendly islands, from which guerillas mounted offensive operations behind enemy lines.

Off the Korean west coast—ragged and heavily indented with numerous small islands—winters were cold, with occasional gales and blinding snow squalls, and the sweltering summers were hot and humid, with heavy rains and fog. Combat operations in coastal waters were made difficult by these conditions attendant to the geography and climate, along with extreme tidal changes, and associated shoal water, exposed mudflats, and fast-running currents that made navigation among the tiny islands that dotted the coastline, particularly perilous.

Ships carrying out gunfire assignments (shore bombardment of enemy targets or support of guerilla activities ashore) were often at

navigational peril, as they made their way to points that would bring targets under their guns. Lt. Rodney Agar, RN, gunnery officer aboard the destroyer HMS *Concord*, described these operations and of the wearing out of gun barrels over time, as a result of the ship's volume of fire:

On the west coast of Korea as one of the bombarding ships we would creep in at night among the islands, or by day carry out air-spotted shoots, in support of the Army's flanks. We eventually wore out our gun barrels and when the Gunner passed the 'plug bore' tests the plug just fell out of each barrel! [This refers to a tampion, a plug that goes into the muzzle of the gun when not in use to keep sea spray out of the barrel. In the USN, it is pronounced tom-kin.]<sup>43</sup>

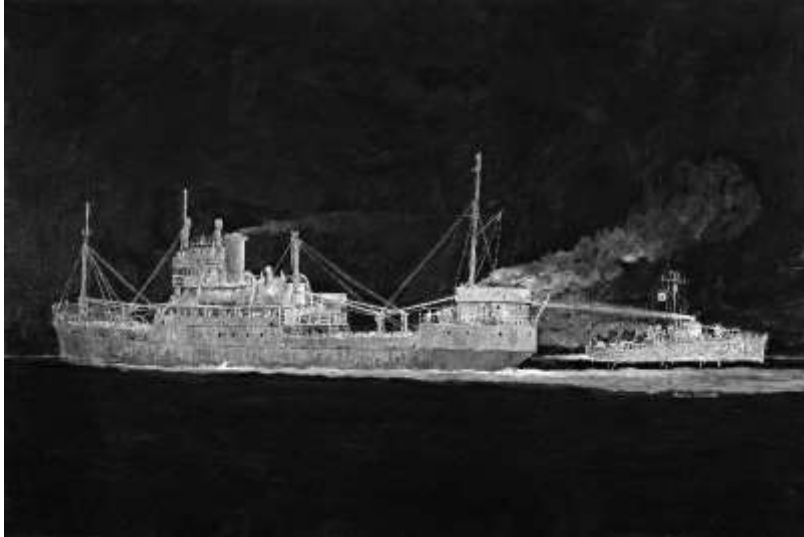
As previously described, conditions aboard ship were particularly arduous in the winter. In at least one ship, the food and water making capability was also marginal, as recalled by Comdr. Daniel Herlihy, RNZN (Retired). Herlihy had joined the Royal New Zealand Navy at age 17 in 1949 as a Seaman Boy, and was serving aboard the frigate HMNZS *Taupo* at the outbreak of the Korean War:

Onboard conditions were harsh. We had inadequate wet and cold weather gear – a British issue duffel coat that the wind whipped up, sea boots and stockings and a pair of long johns. We were grateful for the NZ Patriotic Board's present of woolen gloves and balaclava. Heating was poor and we were sleeping down below the waterline and it was cold. The inside doors of the upper deck would ice over in winter.

Food was out of the deep fryer but I was young and had no complaints. Washing conditions were tricky especially with water rationing in the summer despite the distillation units onboard ship.<sup>44</sup>

With this introduction in our wake, readers may now (vicariously) stand out to sea with U.S., Commonwealth, and warships of other Allied nations off the west coast of Korea.

Photo Preface-15



*Battle of Korea Strait* by Richard DeRosset depicts the sea battle, on the night of 25 June 1950, between the South Korean sub-chaser *Bak Du San* (PC-701) and a freighter, likely the SS *Kimball R. Smith*, in the Korea Strait between Pusan and the Japanese Island of Tsushima. The patrol craft was an ex-U.S. Merchant Marine Academy training ship; the freighter, a former U.S. Army coastal cargo ship on loan to the government of South Korea. *Kimball R. Smith* was serving as a training vessel, when her South Korean crew mutinied and defected to the north. On the night of the first day of the Korean War, the freighter, which was packed full of North Korean soldiers intending to capture the port of Pusan, was sunk due to heroic actions by the captain and crew of *Bak Du San*. Had access to Pusan been blocked by a Communist presence, Allied ships could not have delivered desperately needed troop reinforcements, and the war might have been quickly lost.