

# A Short Interlude

**N**ow began the long, eight-hour wait as the tide receded and rose and the sun began to set in the direction of the Yellow Sea. Not until then could the other Marine units storm Red and Blue beaches. The Navy-Marine task force did not stand idly by during this period. The troops on Wolmi Do improved their fighting positions and naval combatants and aircraft continued to pound the enemy on the mainland.

During this temporary lull in the battle, Admiral Struble's barge came alongside *Mount McKinley* and he asked if anyone would like to tag along with him for a closer look at Wolmi Do and the other beaches. "Certainly," replied MacArthur. Soon, the general, Almond, Shepherd and three other flag-rank officers joined Struble in his barge. After inspecting Green Beach, they moved over toward Red Beach. Shepherd reminded MacArthur that because the boat was less than 1,000 yards from shore, an enemy soldier might "take a pot shot" at the commander of all UN forces in the Korean theater. Struble promptly ordered his coxswain to return to the flagship.

Meanwhile, in response to the seizure of Wolmi Do, the

A Soviet-made 76.2mm anti-tank gun, emplaced by the enemy on one of the strategic hills overlooking the harbor of *Inchon*, rests in silence after the battle.

enemy headquarters in Seoul frantically ordered the 70th Regiment near Suwon and the 18th Division, then approaching the Pusan Perimeter, to head toward *Inchon*. But this action was tardy, because despite two days of bombardment and the garrison commander's warning on the 13th, North Korean authorities did not believe *Inchon* to be the site of the main amphibious as-

sault. No doubt thanks to the UN deception operations, Communist commanders were fixated on Kunsan until too late. The enemy reinforcements would not be able to reach the battle area by the evening of the 15th, when the Navy-Marine assault forces would hit Red and Blue beaches.

The NKPA garrison at *Inchon*, composed of the 226th Marine and 918th



NA 80-G-420387

Coastal Artillery Regiments, was a motley force that included some South Koreans forced into service. The 226th had been further weakened when headquarters earlier sent a large detachment toward Yonghung Do to knock out Clark's guerrillas. In addition, after the loss of Wolmi Do, the best-prepared position in the harbor, the 918th was in bad shape.

The North Korean defensive

effort was further hampered by attacks every hour and a half by eight Marine Corsairs, which dropped fragmentation bombs and napalm. The latter ordnance was especially effective against enemy troops, whether dug in or exposed. In addition, to keep pressure on the enemy, twelve Navy carrier aircraft rotated between Yellow Sea combat air patrol and strike operations inland.

One of the latter missions proved to be extremely lucrative. While flying along the road to Suwon, Ensign Eldon W. Brown, Jr., of VF-53 stitched a long row of neatly stacked wooden crates with machine gun fire. When the rounds impacted, there was a massive explosion, the force of which violently jolted Brown's plane. He climbed quickly, but an enveloping cloud of dust and debris passed him at 4,000 feet. In Incheon harbor, miles away, ships rocked at their anchors. *Mount McKinley* radioed the strike leader, Lieutenant Commander Joseph M. Murphy, and asked him, "What the hell happened?" Murphy replied dryly, "We just exploded some ammunition."

On that critical day, 15 September, aircraft carrier *Boxer* arrived on station and ready for battle, culminating two months of Herculean effort by her crew. During that time the ship crossed the vast expanse of the Pacific three times, fighting typhoon *Kezia* on the last passage, to transport badly needed aircraft to UN forces in the Korean theater. But this effort took its toll on a ship that was scheduled for an overhaul before the outbreak of war. Early on the 15th, a reduction gear in the engineering plant suffered a

Engine room personnel, often called the "black gang" or "snipes," had to use all their skills to maintain speed to make sure that their ships arrived on time off Incheon!



NA 80.G-419918



Navy LCVPs, loaded with Marines of the 5th Regiment, proceed in formation for the line of departure on the approach to Red Beach. The crudely built ladders standing erect in the bows of these craft enabled the Marines to scale the high sea walls barring their way to inland objectives. NA W&C #141B

major casualty. With no time to lose, the chief engineer and his engine room crew, or "snipes," used their skills and experience to coax 26 knots out of the damaged propulsion system. Through their efforts, Boxer was able to join Task Force 77 and launch her first air strike on time in support of the Incheon landing.

As the day wore on, elements of Naval Beach Group 1's Amphibious Construction Battalion—the Seabees—came in with the tide. Off Wolmi Do, they began building a pontoon dock and causeway, but the vicious tides carried away two sections. Despite this setback, the Seabees completed the pontoon causeway in time for the twilight assault. Meanwhile, other Seabees crossed Wolmi Do. They would advance with Taplett's men an hour after the Red Beach landing to determine the extent of damage to the harbor facilities and sea walls.

At 1445, for the second time that day, Doyle ordered his signalmen to communicate the order to the amphibious force, "Land the landing force." To prepare the beaches for the 1730 H hour, Higgins's destroyers and cruisers increased the tempo of their

fire. *Toledo* and *Rochester* slammed salvos of eight-inch rounds into the roads east of Incheon, creating a gauntlet of steel for enemy reinforcements trying to reach the city. The British cruisers blasted the area around Blue Beach while *De Haven* and *Lyman K. Swenson* shelled the buildings near Red Beach. The structures near the waterfront belched fire and smoke. Navy Skyraiders and Marine Corsairs, whose missions were coordinated by a team from Tactical Air Control Squadron 1 in *Mount McKinley*, added their firepower to the maelstrom.

Meanwhile, off Red Beach, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 5th Marine Regiment climbed down rope nets draped on the sides of *Henrico* (APA 45) and *Cavalier* (APA 37) and joined their comrades crowding into the LCVPs and LCMs bobbing alongside. In front of Green Beach, the men of the 11th Marines prepared to go ashore. Farther south, the 1st Marines squeezed into LVTs for the long ride over the mud flats to Blue Beach.

For many of these Marine veterans of World War II amphibious assaults, the Incheon operation was different. In the bottom of each landing craft were two long

planks that the men could use to reach shore if their vessels got stuck in the mud. Other landing craft carried wooden or aluminum ladders with hooks at the top for scaling sea walls. In other boats, Marines stood by with sledgehammers to pound grappling hooks attached to cargo nets into the sea walls.

During the 20 minutes before H hour, the shore bombardment force fired as many rounds as it had in the previous nine hours. *Rochester* and *Toledo* plastered the hills of Incheon, while the destroyers scoured the landing areas with air bursts. Like her two sisters off Blue Beach, *LSMR 403* sent 2,000 five-inch rockets, at the rate of 100 per minute, screaming over the heads of the Marines and sailors heading for Red Beach.

Despite all this firepower, the enemy dropped rounds into the wave of approaching boats. Before the fire of a destroyer off Blue Beach knocked out an NKPA gun, rounds from this weapon destroyed one LVT with a direct hit. *Gurke* and close air support planes quickly silenced a high-velocity gun on Observatory Hill that tried to duel with the Americans. Flying a massive ensign, the small, unarmored *LSMR 401* engaged another enemy weapon with her single five-inch gun. Even though the gun crew had to manually ram shells into the breach because of a mechanical problem, they kept up a high rate of fire that scorched paint off the barrel.