

H-Gram 055: The 70th Anniversary of the Korean War (Wonsan: October — November 1950), the 30th Anniversary of Desert Shield/Desert Storm (Part 4: November 1990), and the 20th Anniversary of the Attack on USS Cole (DDG-67)

8 October 2020

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This H-Gram focuses on the successful USMC/USN amphibious landings at the port of Wonsan on the east coast of North Korea on 26 October 1950, with continuing damage and loss to U.S. ships due to extensive North Korean minelaying preceding the landing. This H-Gram also covers U.S. Navy operations during Desert Shield in November 1990, particularly the provocative Iraqi Mirage F-1 flights in the Arabian Gulf. Also covered is the October 2000 terrorist attack on USS Cole (DDG-67).



Korean War Minesweeping. Four U.S. Navy minesweepers (AMS) tied up at Yokosuka, Japan, following mine clearance activities off Korea. Original photo is dated 30 November 1950. These four ships, all units of Mine Division 31, are (from left to right): USS *Merganser* (AMS-26); USS *Osprey* (AMS-28); USS *Chatterer* (AMS-40) and USS *Mockingbird* (AMS-27). Ship in the extreme left background is USS *Wantuck* (APD-125). Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-424597)

70th Anniversary of the Korean War

"We have lost control of the seas 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." — Rear Admiral Allen E. "Hoke" Smith (CTF-95) at Wonsan.

RADM Smith sent this message after two of the three operational steel-hulled minesweepers (Pirate (AM-275) and Pledge (AM-277)) in the U.S. Navy struck mines, blew up, and sank in quick succession with the loss of 13 crewmen, while trying to clear a path into the North Korean port of Wonsan, on the Sea of Japan, on 12 October 1950. Previously undetected North Korean shore batteries then fired on the sinking minesweepers and survivors in the water. The third minesweeper (Incredible (AM-249)) was disabled in the action. The surviving wooden-hulled small minesweepers (AMS-type) then had the arduous task of clearing a path through over 3,000 Soviet mines laid by the North Koreans off Wonsan (for which the commander of Mine Division 31, Lieutenant Commander D'arcy Shouldice, would be awarded a Navy Cross, and which would delay the landing of over 50,000 troops of X Corps (1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division) from 20 October to 26 October (even though Wonsan had been in the hands of South Korean troops since 10 October).

The threat was actually far more sophisticated than RADM Smith's message suggested, as Soviet Navy advisors provided over 4,000 mines to the North Koreans. Most of the mines were moored contact mines based on designs from the 1905 Russo-Japanese War (which worked just fine) but also included sophisticated bottom influence "magnetic" mines, sensitive enough to react to a wooden minesweepers engines. The Soviet advisors assembled the mines, trained the North Koreans, planned the minefields, and supervised the minelaying operations, including providing Russian navigators to the civilian craft pressed into service as minelayers. When the North Koreans withdrew in advance of the South Korean

offensive, they executed any of the civilian crewmen who had knowledge of the minefield locations.



Wonsan Landing, October 1950. LVTs, LCVPs, and an LCM beaching on the Kalmo Pando, at Wonsan, North Korea, to land elements of the First Marine Division, 26 October 1950. The LCM at left appears to be from USS Union (AKA-106). Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 96881)

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Forrest Sherman was perhaps even more blunt than RADM Smith, stating that the mining of Wonsan, "caught us with our pants down."

Following the landings at Inchon on 15 September 1950, the recapture of Seoul, and the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, senior U.S. and United Nations leaders debated whether to cross the former demarcation line at the 38th Parallel into North Korea. The Republic of Korea (ROK) Army just kept on going as the decimated North Korean army offered little resistance. The UN commander in Korea, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, decided to continue the attack across the 38th Parallel to complete the destruction of the North Korean army and force North Korea to surrender.

MacArthur's plan called for the U.S. Eighth Army to cross the border north of Seoul and advance on the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. In the meantime, X Corps, which had conducted the

Inchon landings and recapture of Seoul, would re-embark on ships, sail around the Korean Peninsula, and conduct an amphibious assault on the east coast of North Korea at Wonsan (Operation Tailboard). However, the route of the North Korean Army was so complete that ROK troops advancing up the east coast were in Wonsan ten days before the scheduled



Republic of Korea minesweeper YMS-516 is blown up by a magnetic mine, during sweeping operations west of Kalma Pando, Wonsan harbor, on 18 October 1950. This ship was originally the U.S. Navy's YMS-148, which had served in the British Navy in 1943-46. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-423625)

amphibious assault, which was therefore changed from an assault to an administrative landing. However, although the North Koreans had withdrawn, the mines kept fighting.

After the 12 October action, the mines would sink a ROK Navy minesweeper and a Japanese contract minesweeper, before a path was finally clear. As over 50,000 U.S. troops were getting seasick and dysentery during what became known as "Operation Yo-Yo," the surviving small minesweepers worked feverishly to clear the path, made more difficult by the discovery of the magnetic mines on 18 October. It took so long for the Marines on the ships (who went in first) to get ashore that they were met at the beach by Bob Hope and a USO troupe.

The good news from the Wonsan operations was that, except for the minesweepers (and dysentery), there were no casualties amongst the landing forces. The bad news was that although ten days had been allotted to sweep mines, it actually took 16. A subsequent opening of the west coast port of Chinnampo was also delayed due to the need to sweep large numbers of mines, which slowed the Eighth Army's offensive. An impact of the delays was that U.S. Army and Marine forces were still advancing (i.e., not in prepared defensive positions) when the massive Communist Chinese counter-offensive occurred in November, with yet another disastrous reversal for UN troops in Korea (which will be covered in the next H-Gram).



A Sailor stands watch at the bow of a ship on patrol in the Gulf during Operation Desert Shield/Operation Desert Storm. (National Archives photo)

For more on the operations as Wonsan and Chinnampo, please see attachment H-055-1. For background on the Korean War and operations from 25 June to 10 October 1950 please see H-Grams 050 and 054.

30th Anniversary of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, November 1990

On 8 November 1990, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney announced that in addition to the 230,000 U.S. forces that had arrived or were already en route to Saudi Arabia, additional U.S. heavy divisions, Marines, and ships would deploy to the region, including three more aircraft carriers, another battleship, another amphibious group,

and the maritime pre-position ship squadron from Norfolk. The next week, Secretary Cheney announced the activation of 72,500 more reservists to support Operation Desert Shield. Additional reserve forces would be called up over the next month, including 30 naval reserve units from 13 states and Washington, D.C., and reserve call-ups were extended from 90 to 180 days.

By the beginning of November, three U.S. Navy aircraft carriers were operating in the region. USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69) had returned to the U.S. after being relieved in the Red Sea by USS Saratoga (CV-60) and USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67), which were alternating between the Red Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean (Saratoga would set a record for Suez Canal transits on a single deployment). In the Arabian Sea, USS Midway (CV-41) had deployed from Japan and relieved USS Independence (CV-62) on 1 November and Independence returned to the U.S. west coast. Although not publicly named in the initial announcement, the carriers USS America (CV-66) and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) would deploy from Norfolk and USS Ranger (CV-61) would deploy from San Diego to arrive in the region by mid-January 1991, giving six aircraft carriers to support any offensive operations. The battleship Missouri (BB-63) deployed from Long Beach on 13 November to join the battleship Wisconsin (BB-64), already operating in the Arabian Gulf. The 13-ship Amphibious Group THREE, with the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade embarked, would depart San Diego on 1 December 1990.

Maritime Interception Operations in support of UN sanctions continued at an intense pace, aided by a growing armada of allied and coalition ships, some from countries that were not willing to contribute ground troops to possible war against Iraq but were perfectly happy to contribute ships to a UN effort, an operation that was greatly aided by the long history of U.S. Navy forward engagement and exercises with these countries. By the end of November, 4,217 merchant ships

had been intercepted and challenged, 517 ships boarded, and 19 ships diverted due to carrying prohibited cargo. On 26 November 1990, the Iraqi-flagged merchant ship Khawla Bint Az Zawra was intercepted by USS Philippine Sea (CG-58) and USS Thomas C. Hart (FF-1092) and two multinational ships, but refused repeated orders to stop until Philippine Sea fired warning shots. After being boarded and found not to be carrying prohibited cargo, the Iraqi ship was allowed to proceed into Aqaba, Jordan.

Between 15-21 November, 16 U.S. ships and 1,000 Marines conducted a highly publicized joint/combined exercise, Imminent Thunder, practicing an amphibious assault on the coast of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, intended to ratchet up the pressure on Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. (I will cover the planning for amphibious assault operations, the deception plan, and Iraqi minewarfare developments in a comprehensive fashion in the January and February 1991 installments of this series).

Also in November, Iraqi Mirage F-1 fighters armed with Exocet anti-ship missiles commenced provocative ship attack profiles down the Arabian Gulf, turning around just at an arbitrary line drawn across the Arabian Gulf by CENTCOM, north of which U.S. Navy air and surface forces were forbidden to cross. The line was completely ineffective in reducing the possibility of an inadvertent clash between the U.S. Navy and Iraq (before the rest of CENTCOM's forces were ready for war) but did provide Iraq a sanctuary to lay large numbers of mines and conduct other unobserved operations in international waters in violation of international law, which would have potentially severe consequences later.

On 29 November 1990, the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution authorizing the use of force unless Iraqi forces vacated Kuwait by 15 January 1991. For more on Desert Shield/Desert Storm - November 1990 please see attachment H-055-2.



Members of a Navy honor guard from the guided-missile destroyer USS Cole practice rendering colors before a memorial service at the USS Cole Memorial at Naval Station Norfolk. The Norfolk-based ship was damaged by a suicide bombing while refueling in the Port of Aden in Yemen, killing 17 and wounding 39 Sailors. (Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Julie Matyascik)

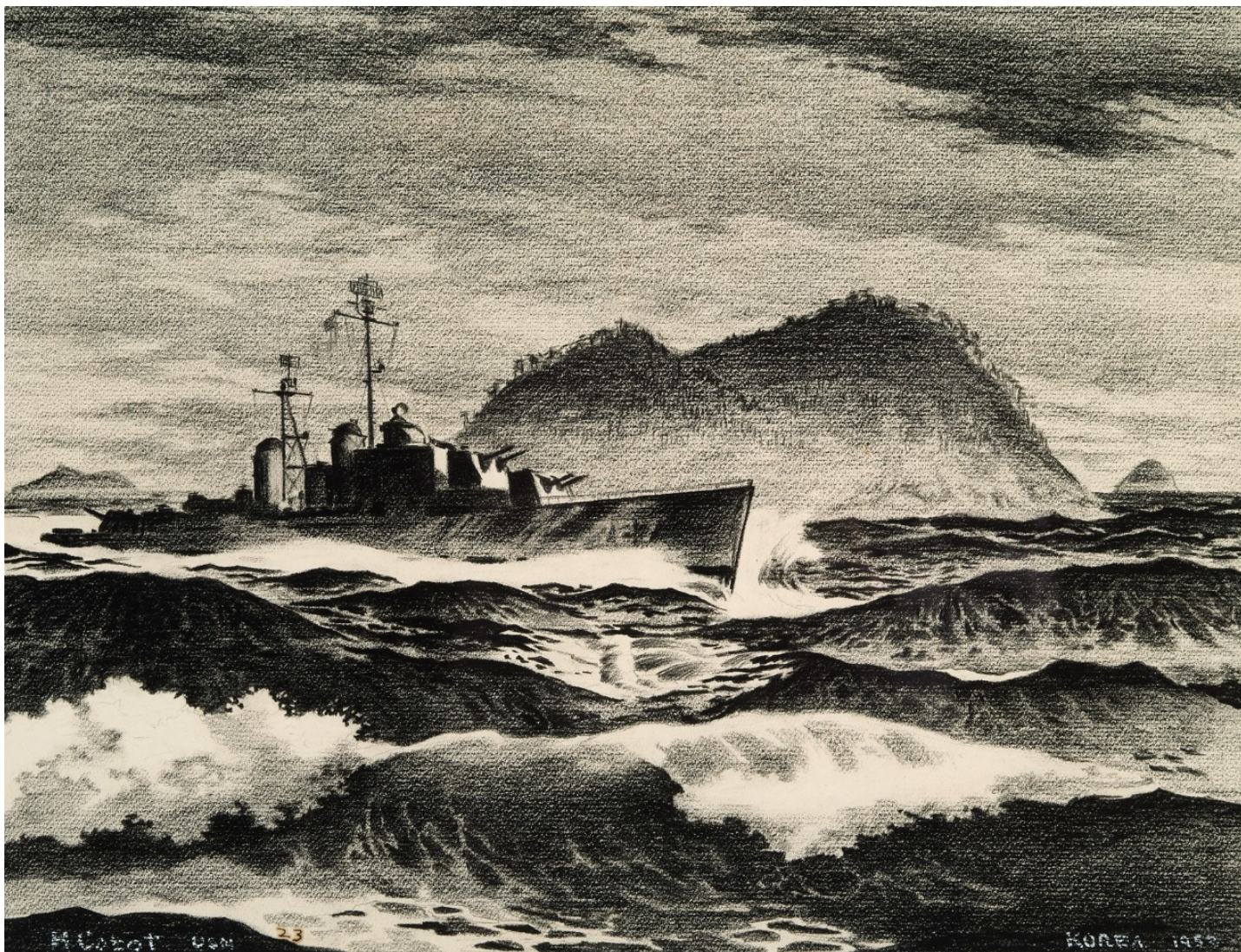
20th Anniversary of the Attack on USS Cole (DDG-67)

At about 1118 local time on 12 October 2000, two men in a 35-foot fiberglass boat approached USS Cole (DDG-67) in an unassuming manner, smiling and waving, while Cole was refueling in the harbor of Aden at Refueling Dolphin Seven, reachable only by boat. As the boat pulled alongside, a massive explosion from a probable shaped charge blew a 30- by 40-foot hole, extending 16 feet below the waterline, portside amidships, entering a machinery space and violently pushing the deck of the galley upward, killing many Sailors as they were waiting for chow. As a result of the explosion, 17 Sailors were killed and 37 wounded. Despite the severity of the blast, the keel was not broken and the ship remained afloat, although strenuous and extended damage control efforts over several days were necessary to keep the ship from settling. On 29 October, Cole was underway from Aden with her battle ensign flying, to be loaded aboard the semi-submersible heavy-lift ship M/V Blue Marlin (out of sight of shore). After repairs, Cole returned to active service in April 2002 and deployed again in November 2003, and continues to serve in the fleet today.

The terrorist group al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden, quickly claimed credit for the attack, and there was plenty of evidence that they did it. The post attack investigation also revealed that al-Qaida had attempted to attack USS The Sullivans (DDG-68) in Aden on 3 January 2000, but the attempt failed when the overloaded suicide boat stuck in the mud. The attack on the Cole provided warning of what was to come, had it been heeded.

For more on the USS Cole attack, please see attachment H-055-3.

As always, you are welcome to forward H-grams to spread these stories of U.S. Navy valor and sacrifice. Prior issues of H-grams, enhanced with photos, can be found here ... plus lots of other cool stuff on Naval History and Heritage Command's website.



United States Destroyer at Wonsan. Drawing, Pencil on Paper; by Hugh Cabot; 1952; Framed Dimensions 25H X 30W. (88-187-W)

H-055-1: Wonsan: October—November 1950

H-Gram 055, [Attachment 1](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

October 2020

Planning for Wonsan Landings

With the success of the Inchon landings on 15 September 1950, the subsequent recapture of Seoul, the breakout of UN forces (U.S. Eighth Army and Republic of Korea (ROK) Army) from the

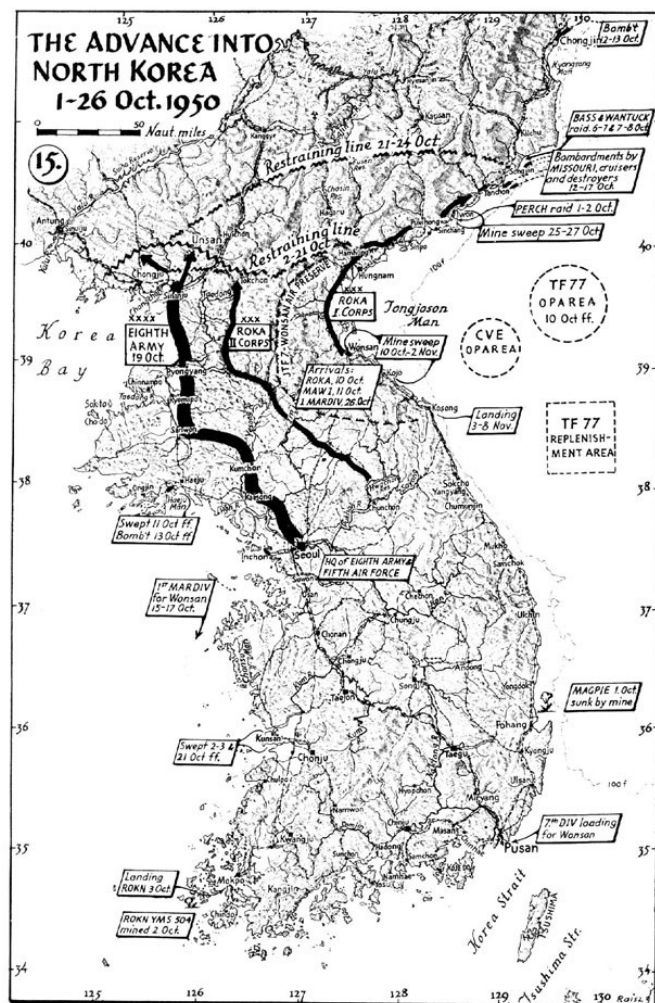
Pusan Perimeter, and the collapse of decimated North Korean forces in the south, the strategic situation on the Korean Peninsula on 1 October 1950 was dramatically altered from only one month earlier when North Korean forces were still attacking the Pusan Perimeter. U.S. Commanders were then faced with the classic military question, "and then what?"

The two basic options for concluding the war were to restore the status quo from before the war with North and South Korea at the 38th Parallel, or to continue offensive operations into North Korea to complete the destruction of the North Korean army. The first option still left a significant number of North Korean forces intact to cause trouble

later. The second option carried risk of intervention by Communist Chinese or Soviet forces, or even worse, that the war might expand to Europe or even into a global conflict. Since the Soviets had produced their own atomic bomb in 1949, the risk of expanded conflict was profound.

Concern that the Soviets were using the conflict in Korea to bog down the U.S. as a diversion before a major assault on western Europe drove policymaking at the senior levels of U.S. political and military leadership, and was the basis for conducting a "limited" war in Korea, much to the consternation of military leaders in Korea who had to fight it. As an example, the three newest and most-capable U.S. aircraft carriers (*Midway* (CV-41), *Franklin Roosevelt* (CV-42), and *Coral Sea* (CV-43)) never served in Korea, being held instead in the Atlantic and Mediterranean to guard against a Soviet attack in Europe).

At the August 1950 summit meeting between General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Army Chief of Staff (that led to the decision to go ahead with the Inchon landing plan), there was agreement that the aim of pursuing the destruction of North Korean forces was not necessarily limited to south of the 38th Parallel. In mid-September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) gave permission to General MacArthur to plan ground operations north of the 38th Parallel (air strike and naval bombardments had been going on north of the 38th Parallel since the very beginning of the war). On 27 September, the JCS authorized ground operations north of the 38th Parallel to complete the destruction of the North Korean army, with the caveat that no major Chinese or Soviet forces were present. In no case were U.S. forces to violate the Chinese or Soviet border and only Republic of Korea (ROK) forces were to be permitted to operate in the border areas. ROK President Syngman Rhee had already made clear his intent, now that ROK forces were on a roll, to continue the attack into North Korea with or without the UN or the U.S.



The Advance into North Korea, 1–26 October 1950. (from History of United States Naval Operations: Korea)

On 26 September, MacArthur directed planning for an Inchon-scale amphibious assault to take place on the east coast of North Korea at Wonsan, designated Operation Tailboard. The plan called for the U.S. Eighth Army to commence an assault in mid-October from Seoul into North Korea with the intent to take the capital of Pyongyang. The X Corps (1st Marine Division and 7th U.S. Army Infantry Division, which had conducted the Inchon landing and recapture of Seoul) would be extracted from ongoing operations to be re-embarked on Joint Task Force Seven (JTF 7) ships, transported around the Korean peninsula, to conduct an amphibious assault at Wonsan with D-Day set for 20 October 1950. Once ashore, the plan called for X Corps to attack westward and link up with Eighth Army to complete the

encirclement and destruction of North Korean forces.

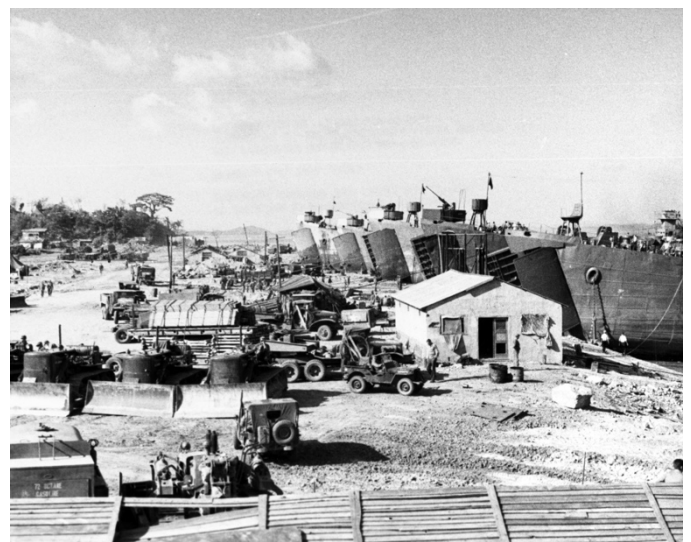
The logistics challenges of extracting X Corps from the Seoul/Inchon area, while simultaneously sustaining an offensive by Eighth Army into North Korea and the reintroduction of U.S. air forces back into South Korea, via the limited South Korean port facilities (not to mention all the blasted bridges and transportation infrastructure), were immense. Because of the daunting logistics issues, the commander of U.S. Naval Forces Far East (COMNAVFE), Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, opposed the Wonsan operation, as did some senior Army officers who thought it would be easier to attack overland the 115 miles from Seoul to Wonsan. Nevertheless, General MacArthur remained insistent on the Wonsan operation, and on 28 September the plan was sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), which approved it in short order, adding a restraining line at the 40th Parallel, north of which only ROK forces could go.

In the hangover after the 29 September liberation ceremonies in Seoul, a statement by Communist Chinese Foreign Minister Chou En-lai the next day was, in hindsight, not taken seriously enough. Chou stated that the Chinese would not tolerate foreign forces crossing the 38th Parallel. At the time, the bulk of the Communist Chinese army was arrayed along the Taiwan Strait in what appeared to be preparations to invade the Nationalist Chinese refuge on Taiwan. There was far more concern in Washington, D.C. that the Chinese would invade Taiwan than there was about whether the Chinese had meant what they said about North Korea. Despite this, the UN General Assembly (Communist China was not a member) went ahead and approved “all appropriate steps” to be taken to ensure stability in Korea, a somewhat vague direction interpreted as authorization for U.N. forces to operate north of the 38th Parallel. On 9 October, the JCS went so far as to authorize attacks against small-scale Chinese or Soviet forces inside North Korea, if encountered, so long as success was likely. The

border, however, remained inviolate, which the Communists would use to their advantage for the rest of the war.

In preparation for the Wonsan assault, Joint Task Force Seven (JTF 7) was re-formed, with Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble in command again. The plan was very similar to that of Inchon, with the arrival of the amphibious attack force to be preceded by patrol and reconnaissance aircraft, strikes by Task Force 77 carrier aircraft, naval gunfire, and minesweeping operations. JTF 7 would provide its own air support and have its own operating area, free of “interference” by the U.S. Air Force.

The task organization for Operation Tailboard, the amphibious assault on Wonsan, North Korea, was also very similar to that of the Inchon landings. The commander of U.S. Seventh Fleet, VADM Struble, was once again the commander of Joint Task Force Seven (JTF 7), this time embarked on battleship *Missouri* (BB-63). The mission of JTF 7 was to put ashore the X Corps, still under the command of U.S. Army Major General Edward Almond, which included the 1st Marine Division, under the command of U.S. Marine Major General Oliver P. Smith and the U.S. Army 7th Infantry Division.



Wonsan Landings, October 1950. LSTs loading First Marine Division equipment at Inchon in preparation for the Wonsan operation, 13 October 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-421523)

The Advance Force (Task Force 95) would lead the way in the attack and was commanded by Rear Admiral Allen E. Smith, embarked on light cruiser *Worcester* (CL-144). TF 95 included Task Group 95.2 (TG 95.2), the Covering and Support Group, under the command of Rear Admiral Charles C. Hartman, embarked on heavy cruiser *Helena* (CA-75). TG 95.2 included three heavy cruisers (*Rochester* (CA-124), *Helena* (CA-75), *Toledo* (CA-133)), one British light cruiser (HMS *Ceylon*), and six destroyers (three U.S., one British, one Australian, and one Canadian).

TG 95.2, the Minesweeping Group, commanded by Captain Richard T. Spofford, included one destroyer (*Collett* (DD-730)), one fast-transport (APD), two destroyer-minesweepers, three minesweepers (AM-steel hull), seven small minesweepers (AMS - wood hull), one repair ship (internal combustion engine) (ARG), one salvage ship (ARS), and eight Japanese contract minesweepers (JMS). Three ROKN auxiliary motor minesweepers (YMS) would subsequently join.

TG 96.2, the Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, commanded by Rear Admiral George R. Henderson, included one seaplane tender (AV), one small seaplane tender (AVP), three U.S. Navy and one Royal Navy patrol squadrons.

TG 96.8, the Escort Carrier Group, commanded by Rear Admiral Richard W. Ruble, included two escort carriers (*Sicily* (CVE-118) and *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116)), with embarked Marine fighter-bomber squadrons, and six destroyers.

Task Force 77, the Fast Carrier Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Edward C. Ewen, included four carriers (*Valley Forge* (CV-45), *Philippine Sea* (CV-47), *Boxer* (CV-21), *Leyte* (CV-32)), one battleship (*Missouri* (BB-63)), one light cruiser (*Manchester* (CL-83)), and 16 destroyers. This was the first time four *Essex*-class carriers operated together since World War II.

Task Force 79, the Logistic Support Forces, commanded by Captain B. L. Austin, included

units assigned from Service Squadron 3 and Service Division 31.

Task Force 90, the Attack Forces, was commanded by Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, embarked in *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7), with Commander X Corps and Commander 1st Marine Division also embarked. TF 90 included two amphibious command ships (AGC), two high-speed troop transports (APD), four patrol frigates (PF—one British, two New Zealand, and one French), one patrol escort, control (PCEC), nine attack personnel transports (APA), 15 civilian-manned personnel transports (T-AP), ten attack cargo ships (AKA), five dock landing ships (LSD), three “rocket ships” (LSMR), 48 tank landing ships (LST), including 30 Japanese-manned (Scajap) LSTs, 20 utility landing ships, and additional Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS) shipping.

As the forces for the Wonsan operation were assembling, and overcoming numerous logistics hurdles, the ROK Army 1st Corps was advancing so fast up the east coast route that it appeared likely they would be in Wonsan well before the amphibious assault. (The remaining North Korean forces in the east had taken to the hills and were not seriously contesting the ROK advance). Consideration was given to having the 1st Marine Division assault Hungnam (50 miles north of Wonsan) while the 7th Infantry Division would administratively land at Wonsan, as they had at Inchon. VADM Struble ultimately vetoed the idea due to logistics complications, but a major factor was an insufficient number of minesweepers to support landings in two different locations. On 10 October, JTF 7 issued orders reconfirming that all Operation Tailboard forces would land at Wonsan.



Wonsan Landings, October 1950. LVTs and other landing craft head for the beach to put elements of the First Marine Division ashore at Wonsan, North Korea, circa 26 October 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 96880)

Preliminary Raids, Movements for Wonsan, and Minesweeper Status, 6-10 October 1950

The Wonsan operation was preceded by two night raids on the North Korean coast railroad between Wonsan and Vladivostok, executed by British Royal Marine Commandos embarked on U.S. fast transports *Horace A. Bass* (APD-125) and *Wantuck* (APD-125), supported by destroyer *De Haven* (DD-727). On the night of 6-7 October, British commandos blew the railway tunnel at Kyongsong Man, less than 20 miles south Chongjin. The second raid targeted a railroad tunnel and bridge a few miles south of Songjin. Both operations were deemed successful.

Commencing 6 October 1950, JTF 7 forces began transit toward Wonsan, with the slower units getting underway first, including the minesweepers of TG 95.6, from Sasebo, Japan. On 8 October PBM Mariner flying boats shifted patrol operations from the Yellow Sea to the east coast of North Korea, with a focus on locating minefields. On 9 October, carriers *Leyte* (just arrived from the Atlantic on 8 October) and *Philippine Sea* departed Sasebo, in company with light cruise *Manchester* and eleven destroyers. The next day, heavy cruiser *Helena*

(with RADM Hartman embarked) in company with light cruiser *Worcester* (with RADM Allen Smith embarked) and British light cruiser HMS *Ceylon* departed Sasebo. On 11 October, VADM Struble, embarked in battleship *Missouri* got underway from Sasebo in company with carrier *Valley Forge* (CV-45) and a screen of destroyers.

On 10 October 1950, the Minesweeping Force (TG 95.6) commenced operations in the approaches to Wonsan. The same day ROK forces entered Wonsan and captured the airfield, which would be operating U.S. Marine squadrons by 14 October. The capture of Wonsan by the South Koreans eliminated most resistance with the good news that a combat amphibious assault, still scheduled for 20 October, would not be necessary. However, the North Korean mines didn't get the word.

Mine warfare had not been all that significant a factor in the Pacific War, although the minefields laid in Japanese home waters late in the war by B-29 bombers (using U.S. Navy mines) were highly effective. It was a different story in European waters, especially in naval operations in the Baltic and Black Seas between the Soviets and Nazi Germany. During the Russo Japanese War in 1904–1905, Russian mines sank two Japanese battleships, three cruisers, and four other ships, about the Russian's only successes in an otherwise dismal performance against the upstart Japanese navy. The effectiveness of mines was not lost on the Russians, who proceeded to refine doctrine and tactics and stockpile large numbers of mines. The great majority of Soviet mines in use by 1950 were moored contact-mines based on designs from the Russo-Japanese War, in keeping with the Russian philosophy of "better is the enemy of good enough." The old designs worked just fine (including in Iranian hands in the 1980s). Nevertheless, the Soviets also developed relatively sophisticated bottom influence ("magnetic") mines as well. (See H-Gram 053 for a more detailed description of Soviet mines used during the Korean War).

In keeping with their emphasis on mine warfare, the Soviets also maintained a fairly large minesweeper force. Of 213 minesweepers in Asian countries in 1950, almost half belonged to the Soviet Pacific fleet, including 50 ex-U.S. motor minesweepers provided late in World War II under U.S./Soviet Lend-lease (Project Hula). Even though the Soviet Union was a member of the United Nations, these minesweepers would of course be of no use to the UN forces in Korea. The U.S. Navy, on the other hand, had close to nothing in the way of minesweepers at the start of the war. In typical U.S. fashion, in the precipitous drawdown at the end of World War II, the extensive U.S. minesweeping forces were among the first to go to the scrapyard or to mothballs. Draconian budget cuts made it even worse, and in 1948 even the Mine Warfare Type Command was dissolved. There wasn't even a degaussing range west of Pearl Harbor.

Upon the outbreak of the Korean War, the entire minesweeping force of Naval Forces Far East (COMNAVFE) consisted of ten minesweepers of Mine Squadron Three (MINRON 3), commanded by Lieutenant Commander D'arcy Shouldice. Mine Division Thirty-Two (MINDIV 32) included four steel-hulled large minesweepers (AM-type), only one of which was in commission and the other three in reserve. Mine Division Thirty-One (MINDIV 31) included six wooden hulled small minesweepers (AMS-type). By mid-August, two of the reserve minesweepers, *Pirate* (AM-275) and *Incredible* (AM-249), had been reactivated, but *Mainstay* (AM-261) was still "down for parts." There were a dozen more minesweepers in the Pacific; two at Guam and the rest spread between Pearl Harbor and West Coast ports.

The first reinforcement to COMNAVFE's minesweeping force was the arrival of destroyer-minesweepers *Endicott* (DMS-35) and *Doyle* (DMS-34) in late July. However as the extent of the mine threat did not become apparent until late September, the two ships were diverted to typical destroyer duties. In August 1950, COMNAVFE, VADM Turner Joy, asked for more minesweepers, which was denied as the activation of other types of ships from mothballs had higher priority. The discovery of North Korean mines in mid-October changed the prevailing lethargy regarding minesweepers. On 16 September, *Magpie* (AMS-25) and *Merganser* (AMS-26) were sent forward from Guam and three more AMSs of MINDIV 51 were sent forward from Pearl Harbor, and the Chief of Naval Operations revised the reactivation schedule to include nine AMSs. On 1 October, *Magpie* struck a mine and sank with 21 of her crew of 22. On 2 October, the only two other destroyer-minesweepers in the Pacific, *Thompson* (DMS-38) and *Carmick* (DMS-33) were ordered forward from the West Coast as were the three remaining AMSs of MINDIV 51.



Mine Division Thirty-One. (Complete Caption) Commanding Officers in conference off Korea, 26 October 1950. Probably taken in the wardroom of USS Incredible (AM-249) during minesweeping operations off Wonsan. Those present are (from left to right): Lieutenant Edward P. Flynn, Commanding Officer of USS Incredible; Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Nicholas Grkovic, CO of USS Kite (AMS-22); Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Robert C. Fuller, CO of USS Partridge (AMS-31); Lieutenant Commander D'Arcy V. Shouldice, Commander, Mine Division 31; Lieutenant (Junior Grade) T.R. Howard, CO of USS Redhead (AMS-34); Lieutenant (Junior Grade) James P. McMahon, CO of USS Chatterer (AMS-40); Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Philip Levin, CO of USS Osprey (AMS-28) and Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Stanley P. Gary, CO of USS Mockingbird (AMS-27). Note medical operating table lamp overhead and extensive consumption of cigarettes and coffee. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives.



Opening of Wonsan, October 1950. USS Merganser (AMS-26) tied up to USS Conserver (ARS-39) in Wonsan Harbor, Korea. Photographed by AFAN W.C. Newbill. The original photo is dated 23 October 1950. Note navigation bouy on Conserver's after deck and ships in background, including another AMS and a high-speed minesweeper (DMS). Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-422161)

The use of Japanese vessels in a combat zone was also extremely politically sensitive in Japan.

Because the North Koreans only belatedly realized that Inchon would be the location of the major UN amphibious landing, their minelaying activity was too little, too late. U.S. minesweepers were not over-taxed at Inchon, although minesweeper *Pledge* (AM-277) did capture 44 enemy prisoners aboard a sampan while operating in the vicinity of Inchon. By late September, the mine threat at Inchon had been dealt with, and the minesweepers began transiting to the east coast of Korea.

After departing Inchon, *Pledge*, *Mockingbird* (AMS-27), *Chatterer* (AMS-40), *Kite* (AMS-22), and *Redhead* (AMS-34) conducted minesweeping at the port of Kunsan on the southwest coast of South Korea. Kunsan had been more extensively mined than Inchon as the North Koreans assumed it was a more likely place for a landing than Inchon. On 2 and 3 October, the minesweepers cleared a 22-mile-long, 1,500-yard channel. Seven moored contact mines were swept and destroyed and another 49 located and marked. The minesweepers then headed for Wonsan, where they would find a far greater challenge.

Soviet Navy officers had been in Wonsan as late as 5 October, running a mine school for the North Koreans, assembling magnetic bottom influence mines (sensitive enough to be triggered by a wooden minesweeper hull), planning the minefields, and supervising the seeding of the minefields. The North Koreans used sampans to tow barges and rolled mines off the stern in a fairly precise manner. Of about 4,000 mines provided by the Soviets, over 3,000 were employed at Wonsan and hundreds at a variety of other locations, including some planted in waters in South Korea. When the North Koreans pulled out of Wonsan, they executed the civilian crews of the sampans who knew where the minefields were laid.

VADM Joy was able to get permission from General MacArthur (who still retained his hat as Supreme Commander Allied Powers Japan (SCAP)) to employ 20 contract Japanese minesweepers (JMS). The Deputy Chief of Staff of CMNAVFE, RADM Arleigh Burke, was the point man for gaining use of the Japanese vessels. Japanese minesweepers were the most experienced in the world at clearing bottom influence mines, having cleared over 900 such mines from Japanese waters after World War II laid by the U.S. during "Operation Starvation"(see H-gram 053). These vessels were initially intended only to operate in non-combat conditions south of the 38th Parallel (and the crews were given double pay). However, the need for minesweepers would prove so acute that the Japanese vessels were quickly pressed into service north of the Parallel. Ultimately, the Japanese would contribute 43 contract minesweepers, ten patrol boats, and one trial ship (*Soei Maru*) to the Korean War, with a total of about 1,200 Japanese personnel. The purpose of the "trial ship" was to steam through swept areas to test that it was safe to do so. Not surprisingly, it proved hard to recruit crewmen for the trial ship.

Wonsan is located at the westernmost point of the Sea of Japan. It is situated on the southwest side of a bay shaped like a lopsided semicircle oriented northwest-southeast. In the center of the approach to the bay is Yo Do Island (actually “island” is redundant) with a smaller island to the north, Ung Do. There are several smaller islands in the bay past Yo Do, before reaching Wonsan. The most direct passage from the sea to Wonsan passes to the south of Yo Do. A bit longer route passes between Yo Do and Ung Do and was known as the “Russian Route” as it had previously been used by Soviet ships entering and leaving Wonsan before the war started. The daily tidal variation at Wonsan is only one foot (compared to 30 feet at Inchon), but it is still 30 miles from the 100-fathom line to the port.

The original COMNAVFE plan recognized the strong probability the Wonsan would be mined, and initially called for minesweeping to commence at D minus 5 (five days before the assault planned for 20 October). However, given the paucity of sweepers and the length of the channel that needed to be swept, COMNAVFE adjusted the plan to allow for ten days of minesweeping before the assault. This would not be enough.



AMS-type minesweepers at work in Wonsan harbor, Korea, October 1950. The original photo is dated 12 October 1950. Minesweeping had begun there on 10 October. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-422245)

10 October 1950, Wonsan Operation Commences

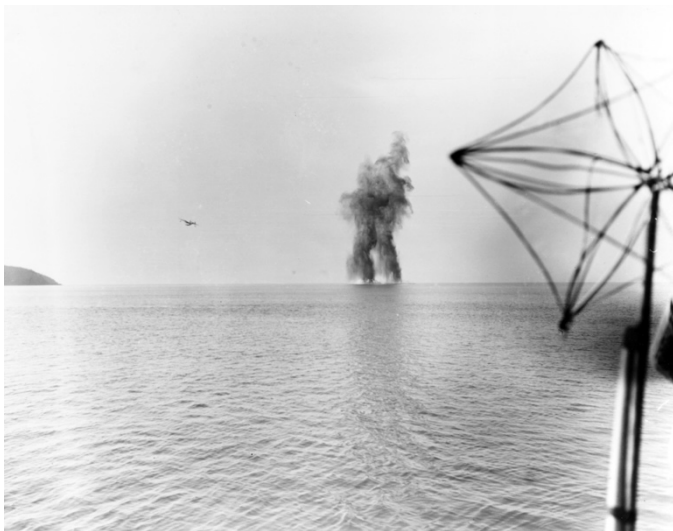
Task Group TG 95.6., the Minesweeping Group that was commanded by Captain Richard T. Spofford, embarked on destroyer *Collett*. CAPT Spofford had replaced LCDR Shouldice as commander of Mine Squadron Three and Shouldice had then assumed command of Mine Division 31. The fast transport *Diachenko* (APD-123) served as mother ship for an underwater demolition team. The group included three “steel” minesweepers, *Pirate*, *Pledge*, and *Incredible*, and seven smaller U.S. “wooden” minesweepers (AMS). There were also three ROKN auxiliary motor minesweepers (YMS). Eight Japanese contract minesweepers (JMS), under the command of Captain Tamura, were also part of the effort. The combustion engine repair ship *Kermit Roosevelt* (ARG-16) and a salvage ship rounded out the group.

Fire support to TG 95.6 was provided by heavy cruiser *Rochester*, with RADM John Higgins (Commander, Cruiser Division Five) and a helicopter embarked, and several destroyers. Fast Carrier Force (TF 77) aircraft provide Combat Air Patrol (CAP) and air support. PBM Mariner flying boats provided search support, and their on-station time was about to be significantly increased by the establishment of a seadrome at Chinhae by small seaplane tender *Gardiners Bay* (AVP-39).

Minesweeping operations for Wonsan commenced at dawn on 10 October 1950. *Pledge* led *Incredible*, *Mockingbird*, and *Osprey* (AMS-28) in sweeping a channel 3,000 yards wide on the direct route to Wonsan to the south of Yo Do, with the helicopter from *Rochester* scouting ahead (one account says the helicopter was from light cruiser *Worcester*). *Chatterer* trailed behind to mark the channel, while *Partridge* (AMS-31) destroyed mines that came to the surface with gunfire. As the sweep operation continued,

aircraft from *Leyte* and *Philippine* Seabombed suspected defenses on islands in the bay.

As sunset approached, ten miles of channel had been swept (to the 30 fathom line) and 18 moored contact mines destroyed (some accounts say 21 mines accounted for). At that point, the helicopter reported first one mine line, then two, and then five mine lines ahead. As a result of the heavy minefields on the direct route, CAPT Spofford opted to abandon the direct route and shift operations to the longer (34 NM) "Russian Route" to the north of Yo Do in hopes of finding less dense minefields. (The use of a helicopter to scout for mines was a new innovation, although it was hampered by having to relay all communications through the destroyer-minesweeper *Endicott*).



Martin PBM Mariner Patrol Bomber Explodes Russian-type mines with machine gun fire, in the channel near Chinnampo, North Korea. The original photo is dated 20 August 1953, after the Korean War armistice. It may have been taken in October-November 1950, when patrol aircraft were employed to search for and destroy mines to open Chinnampo for the use of advancing United Nations' forces. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-423162)

11 October 1950

At dawn on 11 October, minesweeping commenced on the Russian Route. A VP-47 PBM Mariner circled overhead, scouting, plotting, and reporting minefields. UDT personnel from *Diachenko* and just-arrived fast transport *Wantuck* (UDT ONE and UDT THREE) scouted the

shorelines of Yo Do, Ung Do, and other islands for signs of command-detonated minefields (none were found). Messages were sent to friendly forces ashore (already in Wonsan) to look for any charts that the North Koreans might have left behind with the positions of the minefields. This time *Pirate*, *Pledge*, and *Incredible* conducted the sweep with a helicopter leading the way, while *Kite* and *Redhead* trailed behind marking the channel. By sunset, the force had advanced to within four miles of the island and 16 mines had been cut and destroyed; one mine got stuck in *Pirate*'s sweep gear and had to be towed out to sea.

As the minesweeping off Wonsan was going on, carrier aircraft from TF 77 were hammering targets from Wonsan and to the north up the east coast of North Korea, sinking coastal vessels off Wonsan, Hungnam, and Songjin, while also targeting railroads, trucks, warehouses, and supply dumps around Songjin.



U.S. Navy Auxiliary Minesweepers (AMS) clearing a channel through a minefield, off Wonsan, North Korea, 12 October 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 97054)

12 October 1950, A Really Bad Day

On 12 October, VADM Struble on *Missouri* arrived near Wonsan, rendezvoused with RADM Hartman's cruisers, screened by a UN force of

British, Australian, and Canadian destroyers, and steamed northward along the east coast of North Korea to pummel warehouses, marshaling yards, and rolling stock at Chongjin. The rest of the day didn't go so well.

The day began with a new innovation, aerial countermining using bombs. The visual effect was spectacular, the results not so much. Carriers *Philippine Sea* and *Leyte* launched 47 aircraft. Eight F4U Corsairs were held in airborne reserve, while 31 AD Skyraiders, with three 1,000-pound bombs each, and 16 Corsairs, with one 1,000-pound bomb each, bombed at intervals along two parallel five-mile long strips of water. About 109 bombs were actually dropped. The idea was that the bombs would detonate any mines in the area. The problem was that it was very difficult to bomb at the required evenly spaced intervals. As a result, there were large gaps in coverage. The event was deemed a partial success but does not appear to have been repeated, and it was quickly overtaken by the events of the day.

Minesweeping operations commenced late morning on 12 October, entering unswept waters at 1112. Once again a helicopter led the way, with a PBM Mariner flying boat providing support. The three steel minesweepers formed a standard echelon minesweeping formation with *Pirate* in the lead, followed behind and to starboard by *Pledge* and then *Incredible*. The "darning" vessel, wooden minesweeper *Redhead*, trailed *Pirate* at the outer port edge of *Pirate's* sweep gear, dropping buoys to mark the cleared channel. *Kite* did the same on *Incredible's* starboard side. Destroyer-minesweeper *Endicott* followed close behind the minesweeper group to provide quick-reaction fire support in the event shore batteries were encountered (so far there had been none).

Leading the formation was Lieutenant Commander Bruce Hyatt, Commander of Mine Division 32, embarked on *Pirate*, which was commanded by Lieutenant Cornelius McMullen. The ships were at Condition Able with the

degaussing on the steel minesweepers energized, and in accordance with doctrine, all non-essential personnel were topside and spread out to minimize casualties in the event of a mine strike. The 3-inch guns on the steel minesweepers were manned and ready, although the gun crews were drawn back to less exposed locations as the orders were to fire only if fired upon.

Shortly after noon, everything went to hell. The helicopter reported three mine lines ahead, followed by a report of a "cabbage patch" of mines directly ahead. *Pirate's* sonar began picking up probable mine shapes. In quick succession, *Pirate's* cutters brought up five mines to port and one to starboard. *Pledge's* gear brought up three mines to port and *Incredible* four more. Thirteen contact mines were now bobbing on the surface. A *Pirate* lookout sighted a mine directly ahead. *Pirate* tried to maneuver clear but it was too late.

At 1209, a massive explosion blew a hole the "size of a two-car garage" amidships at frame 62. The blast knocked the commanding officer, Lieutenant McMullen, unconscious for about 30 seconds and dazed everyone else on the bridge. When he came to, *Pirate* was listing 20-degrees and righting herself, but that proved only temporary. Within a minute the ship was listing 15-degrees and continuing to go over, while the stern was already underwater. LT McMullen gave the order to abandon ship. Those who survived the blast were able to get off in an orderly fashion and the CO and XO were the last off just as the mast went into the water. *Pirate* went down in four minutes.

The skipper of *Pledge*, Lieutenant Richard O. Young, ordered the sweep gear cut and the ship to a halt to lower a boat to rescue survivors. Previously undetected North Korean shore batteries on Sin Do then opened "withering" fire on the sinking and stopped minesweepers, and on the survivors in the water. Reports also described machine gun fire and shrapnel hitting amongst the survivors.

Endicott promptly opened fire on the North Korean guns, as did *Pledge* and the other minesweepers. *Diachenko* and the other wooden minesweepers of MINDIV 31 (LCDR Shouldice) also rushed forward to engage and look for survivors. The PBM overhead spotted the positions and called for TF 77 airstrikes. As the gun-battle raged, *Pledge* maneuvered to avoid the incoming fire (and the minefield that surrounded her). In doing so, *Pledge* struck a mine at 1220, with the same result as *Pirate*, except it took 45 minutes for her to sink despite heroic efforts to save her. During the gun battle, both engines in *Incredible* conked out and she went dead-in-the-water and would have to be towed from the scene. The cumulative fire from *Endicott* and the minesweepers finally silenced the North Korean guns, and vigorous air strikes by *Leyte* aircraft with guns, 500-pound bombs, and napalm shut them down for good.

The rest of the afternoon was focused on searching for survivors from *Pirate* and *Pledge*. *Pledge*'s boat (launched before *Pledge* hit the mine) rescued many, as did a boat from *Incredible*. UDT Frogmen from *Diachenko* were particularly valorous in rescuing survivors (three would be awarded Bronze Stars). Aided by the searching helicopter, the boats towed men in rafts and nets to *Endicott*. Destroyer-minesweeper *Doyle* also joined in the search.

Of *Pirate*'s 77-man crew, six were missing and never found and 43 were wounded. LCDR Hyatt and his Quartermaster (the Mine Division "staff") embarked on *Pirate* also survived. Of *Pledge*'s 72-man crew (two others were not aboard), six were missing and one died after being rescued. Two Japanese "visitors" on *Pledge* also survived. When combined with the mine strikes on *Magpie*, *Brush*, and *Mansfield*, in the space of three weeks North Korean mines had sunk three U.S. minesweepers and severely damaged two destroyers, with the loss of a total 47 Sailors. (There are differing accounts of the number of Sailors lost on *Pledge*, with one source listing nine names as killed. The

total number of crewmen wounded also differs between sources).

Upon word of the mine strikes, VADM Struble (CJTf 7) and RADM Allen "Hoke" Smith (CTF 95) jumped aboard destroyer *Rowan* (DD-782) and steamed to the scene, not that there was much they could do at that point. RADM Smith subsequently sent his colorful message to Washington, "We have lost control of the seas 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." This was arguably an exaggeration, given four aircraft carriers, two escort carriers, a battleship, and a host of cruisers and destroyers off the coast, but it did get attention and resulted in a flurry of activity back in the states to improve U.S. mine-countermeasure capability. Nevertheless, RADM Smith had a point that the array of ships and 50,000 Marines and Army Soldiers weren't going into Wonsan (even in friendly hands) until the handful of minesweepers completed their task. And as the saying goes, "Where minesweepers go, the fleet follows." (On 16 October, the CNO moved the reactivation of nine AMSs to the highest priority and added four AMs to the list. A rapid research and development program was launched, a Mine Force Type Command was stood up (again), and by 11 November, Minesweeping Force Western Pacific was stood up under the command of RADM Higgins).

Engineman Third Class Harry L. Link and Lieutenant (junior grade) Aubrey McIlvaine were each awarded the Silver Star for their actions aboard *Pledge* in saving crewmen and attempting to save the ship. The Commanding Officer of Mine Division 32 and of each of the minesweepers was awarded the Silver Star; LCDR Hyatt (MINDIV 32), LT Cornelius McMullen (*Pirate*), LT Richard O. Young (*Pledge*), LT Edward Flynn (*Incredible*), LTJG T. R. Howard (*Redhead*), LTJG Nicholas Grkovic (*Kite*), LTJG Robert Fuller (*Partridge*), LTJG James McMahon (*Chatterer*), LT Philip Levin (*Osprey*) and LTJG Stanley Gary

(*Mockingbird*). The dates of action include following minesweeping operations in the next days.



Korean War Minesweeping. Deploying a float from a U.S. Navy minesweeper (AMS), off Wonsan, North Korea. Original photo is dated 14 November 1950. This ship is probably USS *Mockingbird* (AMS-27). Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-425997)

The Commander of Mine Division 31 (the “wooden” minesweepers), Lieutenant Commander D’arcy V. Shouldice, embarked in *Mockingbird* was awarded the Navy Cross for service as set forth in the following citation:

“The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Commander D’arcy V. Shouldice, United States Navy for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving as Commander of Mine Division 31 and in Tactical Command of that Division during mine sweeping operations off Wonsan Harbor, on the coast of Korea, on 12 October 1950. When two heavy minesweepers of another Division were mined within a few minutes of each other and were still under severe enemy gunfire from hostile shore batteries, Lieutenant Commander Shouldice led his Division into supporting positions exposed to enemy fire in order to rescue survivors and to take in tow a third heavy minesweeper. Maneuvering his command

skillfully throughout this operation in un-swept and densely mined waters, he returned effective gunfire against enemy shore batteries until his Division and tow had reached safe waters without further loss or serious damage. In the following days, Lieutenant Commander Shouldice continued to lead his division in the vital task of sweeping heavily mined areas until an anchorage and channel had been cleared to the landing beaches, thereby contributing essentially to the success of Naval Operations in the Wonsan area. His inspiring leadership and gallant devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

All of the minesweepers in action at Wonsan on 12 October, plus *Merganser*, and the staffs of Mine Division 31 and 32 were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for the period 10-24 October 1950. *Pirate*’s citation follows:

“The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to the USS *PIRATE* (AM-275) (including Commander Mine Division THIRTY TWO and staff serving in *PIRATE*) for service as set forth in the following CITATION: “For outstanding performance in action during operations against enemy aggressor forces in Korea on 11 and 12 October 1950. Operating as part of Task Element 95.62, the USS *PIRATE* assisted in the extremely hazardous and difficult task of sweeping and buoying a channel 2,000 yards wide and 14 miles in length, to the outer limits of Wonsan Harbor, during which time heavy concentrations of enemy contact mines were swept in the face of the ever present threat of mine explosions and attack from hidden hostile gun batteries on the beaches and surrounding islands. On 12 October, after leading the assault formation in a dual role as Flagship for Commander Mine Division THIRTY-TWO and minesweeper in the clearance of a channel through two heavy contact-type minefields, the *PIRATE* encountered a third field of extreme density, struck a mine and sank in approximately four minutes with casualties numbered at six killed

and forty-three wounded. During rescue operations, her survivors were repeatedly fired upon by enemy shore batteries and machine guns. The fortitude, superb teamwork and unrelenting determination of each individual serving on board *PIRATE* were contributing factors in the success of vital minesweeping operations and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service." For the President, C. S. Thomas, Secretary of the Navy.

13 October 1950

Despite the losses on 12 October, mine clearance operations resumed the next day, although it became increasingly apparent that sweeping would not be complete by the 20 October D-Day, although the occupation of Wonson by ROK forces made that date less critical. Four small minesweepers of LCDR Shouldice's MINDIV 31 now shouldered the brunt of the sweeping, with additional ROK and JMS minesweepers pressed into the action. In addition to the conventional minesweepers, UDT in small boats (as many as could be rounded up) also conducted search operations.

Also on 13 October, divers went down to the wrecks of *Pirate* and *Pledge* for the retrieval or destruction of any sensitive gear or materials, such as crypto material. The wrecks were then subsequently destroyed. Two years later the skipper of *Pirate*, LT McMullen, received an anonymous package that included a note and the 48-star flag that had flown on *Pirate* and that had been brought up from the wreck, according to the note. In 1985, Captain (Ret). McMullen donated that flag to the Naval History and Heritage Command (then Naval Historical Center) and it remains on display in the Korean War section of the Cold War Gallery of the National Museum of the United States Navy.

cruiser *Toledo* coming from Sasebo, bombarded five separate targets along the east coast of North Korea. At the same time, the U.S. Air Force attacked numerous targets elsewhere in North Korea, the UN surface force commanded by RADM Andrewes, RN, bombarded targets on the west coast of North Korea near Haeju, and the British carrier *Theseus*, operating in the Yellow Sea, bombed targets around the port of Chinnampo. These targets had all been announced in advance as part of a UN psychological campaign to convince the North Koreans to surrender by demonstrating that the UN forces could strike any targets at will. In terms of convincing the North Koreans to surrender, the impact of the operation was zero.

Lastly, U.S. Marine Major General Field Harris flew into Wonsan to survey the airfield, and promptly ordered two USMC squadrons into the airfield to commence flight operations the next day. He also suggested that since the South Koreans were already in control of Wonsan that the amphibious assault be canceled. However, the momentum of the operation, coupled with the snarled logistics situation in South Korea, precluded a major change of plans at this point. Although the operation could be changed from an amphibious assault to an administrative landing, the troops of the 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division were still going to come in by sea.

In other events on Friday the 13th, RADM Hartman's cruiser group, joined by heavy



Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, USN, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Far East (at left), is greeted at Wonsan airfield by Major General Field Harris, USMC, Commanding General of the First Marine Air Wing, 19 October 1950. Elements of the Wing had arrived at Wonsan by air on 13-17 October. Flight operations were sustained by aerial resupply until the landing beaches were opened on 26 October. Note MGen. Harris' shoulder holster and ammunition for a .38 caliber revolver. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives.

14 October 1950

By the end of 14 October, a channel had been cleared of contact mines, and sweeps commenced to locate any magnetic bottom influence mines. To this point, there had been no evidence of any. Also on 14 October, Marine Fighter Squadron VMF-312 began flight operations from the airfield at Wonsan, but would quickly need sustainment from the sea.

15-17 October 1950

Between 14-16 October, Lieutenant Commander Don C. DeForest had gone ashore to gather intelligence on possible mine locations. As he was



Two U.S. Navy minesweepers (AMS) at work off Wonsan, Korea. The original photo is dated 24 October 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-421899)

transiting along the shore in an LCVP, the landing craft struck a moored contact mine that had popped to the surface and miraculously didn't break any of the five horns on the mine. Forest was close enough to read the serial number on the mine—11825. DeForest also braved a transit along a sniper-infested road and risked capture to reach a fishing village. There, using the power of a chocolate candy bar to win over a little girl, he then coaxed first the women and then the men, fearful of North Korean retribution, to come out of hiding. When he showed a schematic of a magnetic influence mine, a fisherman led him to a haystack that hid a coil from a magnetic mine, confirming the presence of such mines, and also provided intelligence necessary for devising effective sweep methods. Fishermen also became increasingly cooperative when offered cigarettes and rations, and soon a number of local fishermen were out in their boats searching and reporting mines. LCDR DeForest would be awarded the Silver Star for his exploits. (Accounts differ as to the order and dates of these events, and his award citation covers a range of dates).

By 15 October, CAPT Spofford was convinced that a channel to Wonsan had been cleared of moored contact mines.

Subsequently, *Diachenko* made a safe passage to the outskirts of the harbor. On 16 October, a North Korean prisoner of war reported that magnetic mines had been laid in Wonsan. The next day, contradictory reporting was received, but LCDR DeForest's recovery of a coil from a magnetic mine strongly suggested such mines had been laid. This was about to be confirmed beyond any doubt.

On 17 October 1950, Japanese contract minesweeper *MS-14* struck a contact mine and sank off the southern shore of Yo Do in the approaches to Wonsan, with one crewman killed and 18 wounded. General MacArthur imposed a news blackout of the sinking to minimize any political blowback in Japan to Japanese ships and personnel being used in a combat zone. Also, on 17 October, ROK LST *BM SF-673* struck a mine in the Wonsan outer harbor after cutting a corner; fortunately the ship suffered only minor damage and no deaths, and continued into port. On the same day, the massive Wonsan attack force got underway from Inchon, having re-embarked the 1st Marine Division and the heavy vehicles of the 7th Infantry Division. The troops of the 7th Infantry Division had gone south by truck to embark ships at Pusan.

Also on 17 October, heavy cruiser *Helena* and light cruiser *Worcester* shelled the port of Songjin north of Wonsan, but enemy activity along the entire east coast of North Korea had effectively ceased so the ships had little to shoot at, and even the aircraft of TF-77 were having a hard time finding useful targets.

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Republic of Korea minesweeper YMS-516 sinking in Wonsan harbor, 18 October 1950, after she detonated a magnetic mine during sweeping operations west of Kalma Pando. USS *Redhead* (AMS-34) is just to the right of the sinking ship, rescuing survivors, as is another minesweeper to the left. Photographed from USS *Merganser* (AMS-26). ROK YMS-516 was originally the U.S. Navy's YMS-148, which had served in the British navy in 1943-46. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-443316)

18 October 1950, Another Bad Day at Wonsan

On 18 October 1950, Shouldice's minesweepers were conducting what were thought to be final operations off Wonsan when the third ship in the formation (*Redhead*) triggered a magnetic bottom influence with the kite and float, which resulted in a sympathetic detonation of another mine about 150 yards away. The skipper of *Redhead*, Lieutenant (junior grade) T. R. Howard, described it as "suddenly the whole ocean started to erupt." Although, fortunately, no ship was seriously damaged (as neither mine detonation was a direct hit), the minesweepers cut their gear and stopped all machinery except for one engine and slowly moved away. However, inadequate communications capability prevented the U.S. minesweepers from sending a timely warning to a

South Korean formation heading for the same spot.

Commanded by Commander Sihak Hyun, ROKN, embarked on *Jirisan* (PC-704), the original Korean formation was supposed to be led by ROKN minesweeper *Gongju* (YMS-516), followed by PC-704, YMS-510, and six small power boats bringing up the rear. However, the commanding officer of YMS-516 never acknowledged repeated orders to take the lead. Instead, PC-704 took the lead, followed by a power boat with YMS-516 in third position. As the ROKN force moved forward at one-third speed on one engine, the two explosions were observed detonating just behind the American minesweepers. Still cautiously moving forward, two minutes later a magnetic bottom mine blasted YMS-516, breaking her in two and quickly sending her to the bottom with four crewmen killed and 13 missing. *Redhead* assisted in rescuing survivors from YMS-516. (PC-704 would hit a mine near Yo Do on 26 December 1951, and was lost with all hands).



Republic of Korea minesweeper YMS-516 sinking in Wonsan harbor, 18 October 1950, after she detonated a magnetic mine during sweeping operations west of Kalma Pando. USS *Redhead* (AMS-34) is just to the right of the sinking ship, rescuing survivors, as is another minesweeper to the left. Photographed from USS *Merganser* (AMS-26). ROK YMS-516 was originally the U.S. Navy's YMS-148, which had served in the British navy in 1943-46. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-443316)

Shipping in the outer harbor at Wonsan, North Korea, during the landing of the First Marine Division, 26 October 1950. Peninsula in the middle distance is the Kalma Pando, with Wonsan city and the inner harbor beyond. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives.

18-25 October 1950, Operation Yo-Yo

With a magnetic mine threat now confirmed, VADM Struble had to recommend a postponement of the 20 October D-Day. Although small craft began bringing critical supplies ashore on the 19th, a channel for larger ships would take another week to clear, requiring that the 250-ship Attack Force (and over 50,000 embarked troops), which arrived on 20 October, to continue steaming about smartly off Wonsan in what became known as "Operation Yo-Yo."

Rear Admiral Doyle, in amphibious command ship *Mount McKinley*, arrived off Wonsan on the afternoon of 19 October and anchored in the swept channel. The rest of the Transport and Tractor groups arrived shortly after, but were obliged to remain at sea as magnetic minesweeping operations continued until 25 October. This caused a number of problems as food aboard the ships began to run out, but extended close-quarters also encourage the spread of various contagious ailments. The worst was an outbreak of dysentery aboard the MSTs transport *Marine Phoenix* which sickened 700 of 2,000 troops aboard (84 had to be hospitalized) and a similar percentage of the crew.

At 1500 on 25 October, ships of the Attack Force began moving through the swept channel. Five LSTs were beached, and offloading began at dawn on 26 October. The 1st Marines landed on Yellow Beach and the 7th Marines on Blue beach, in accordance with the original plan, except no one was shooting at them. Actually, the Marines were welcomed by banners from the ROK troops who'd been in the city since 10 October, as well

as another banner "This beach is all yours courtesy of Mine Squadron THREE." Perhaps worse, the X Corps Commander, Army Major General Almond, was already there to greet them along with comedian Bob Hope and a USO troop. Having endured days of seasickness during Operation Yo-Yo, most of the Marines were apparently not amused.

The 5th Marine Regimental Combat Team landed on 27 October. By the evening of the 26th, over half the 25,000 men in the 1st Marine Division, 2,000 vehicles, and 2,000 tons of cargo were ashore.

Despite the delay of 6 days caused by the mines, a major Marine force was ashore and ready for offensive operations, having suffered no casualties (except to dysentery), although the front was 50 miles to the north and advancing rapidly. ROK troops had taken the significant port of Hungnam (and city of Hamhung) on 17 October.



LCMs unloading on the Kalmo Pando beaches, at Wonsan, North Korea, with LVTs standing by to assist, 26 October 1950. The stranded LCV in the right background is from USS Bexar (APA-237). Several LSTs are beached beyond that. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-421315)

Post-Wonsan Operations on East Coast of North Korea

Before moving out from Wonsan, one Marine battalion was ordered to Kojo, on the coast 30 miles south of Wonsan, to deal with some holdout North Korean forces in the nearby hills. A Marine airstrike had found about 800 North Korean troops in the area. On 24 October, destroyer-minelayers *Endicott* and *Doyle* swept a channel into Kojo, although the Marine battalion wound up going south by train. On the night of 27 October, the North Koreans launched a surprise attack into Kojo that achieved some initial success, prompting calls for air and naval gunfire support and helicopter evacuation of the wounded. The escort carriers *Sicily* and *Badoeng Strait*, with embarked Marine F4U Corsair squadrons, had arrived off Wonsan on 18 October and responded to the threat. Destroyers *Hank* (DD-702) and *English* (DD-696) took the North Koreans under fire while *LST-883* departed Wonsan with a load of tanks. A second Marine battalion arrived by rail, and the North Korean attack was ultimately defeated.

The original mission of X Corps was to attack westward from Inchon to link with the Eighth Army near Pyongyang and cut off retreating North Korean forces. This was actually OBE (overtaken by events) even before the originally scheduled D-Day at Wonsan on 20 October. On 25 October, X Corps received revised orders to attack north toward the 40th Parallel limiting line. VADM Struble, MG Almond, and RADM Doyle met to discuss the change of mission. To speed the northward movement, they agreed to land at least two regiments of the 7th Infantry Division at Iwon, 90 miles north of Wonsan, which also was already in ROK hands. Destroyer-minesweepers *Endicott* and *Doyle*, along with one AMS, were dispatched to Iwon and between 25-26 October cleared a 19-mile channel without discovering any mines.



Armored vehicles moving inland from the beaches, during the landing of the Seventh Infantry Division at Iwon, North Korea, circa late October 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 97058)



Marines boarding USS Bayfield (APA-33) at Hungnam, for transportation out of North Korea. Note details of the Marines' packs. Man at left is carrying a Russian Mosin-Nagant carbine in addition to his M1. This photograph was released by Commander, Naval Forces Far East, under date of 20 December 1950. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 97060)

RADM Thackrey, Commander Amphibious Group Three, embarked in command ship *Eldorado* (AGC-11) took charge of landing the 7th Infantry Division at Iwon. This proved to be a challenge because the ships carrying the 7th ID were configured for an administrative landing (i.e., they lacked landing craft) and it turned out Iwon lacked anywhere near enough lighterage. As a result, everything had to be craned from the ships onto LSTs (with a fair amount of equipment damage due to swell in the unprotected anchorage). Nevertheless, by 30 October, one regiment was ashore and by 8 November, the entire division of 29,000 men was ashore.

On 1 November, Communist guerillas threatened Kosong, on the coast 60 miles south of Wonsan. ROK troops were loaded onto two LSTs, which left Wonsan. *Endicott* and *Doyle* once again swept a channel, finding no mines, and the ROK troops were successfully landed (unopposed) and dealt with the situation.

In the meantime, Major General Almond selected the city of Hamhung to be X Corps headquarters and the minesweepers set to work clearing the port of Hungnam, which served Hamhung. Hungnam was slightly bigger than Wonsan and located about 50 miles farther north. Intelligence reports indicated at least 100 mines had been laid at Hungnam. A cooperative captain of one of the North Korean minelaying vessels (who apparently had avoided being executed by the retreating North Koreans) provided detailed information on the mines; an inner line was laid by two ships carrying 18 mines each, and an outer line was laid by three ships—two with 18 mines and one with 20 mines—for a total of 92. The cooperative captain stated that a Russian navigator had been aboard

during the minelaying operation. The captain was unsure if any magnetic mines had been laid.

On 7 November, destroyer-minesweeper *Doyle*, seven AMSs, and supporting units commenced clearance operations at Hungnam. Aided by the intelligence from the cooperative captain, helicopters and small boat reconnaissance was so successful that a route was found that avoided the mines. The only contact mines swept were well clear of the designated channel. Sweeps for magnetic mines turned up none. Upon completion of the Hungnam operation, the minesweepers moved further north to clear Songjin (35 miles further north than Iwon). Between 16 and 19 November, seven AMSs swept the approaches and harbor of Songjin and found no mines. The next planned minesweeping operation at Chongjin (north of Songjin) would be aborted due to the massive surprise Communist Chinese offensive (which will be covered in the next H-gram).



A LCVP bucks in the well of USS Catamount (LSD-17), during mine clearance operations off Chinnampo, circa November 1950. USS Forrest Royal (DD-872), flagship for this operation, is in the left background. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-422837)

Chinnampo, West Coast Landing

As the operation at Wonsan was getting bogged down by mines, a parallel effort was getting underway on the west coast of North Korea at the

port of Chinnampo. As the U.S. Eighth Army advanced northwestwards, its logistics situation became increasingly acute as supplies coming in to the inadequate port at Inchon then had to go through the bottleneck at Seoul. The commander of the Eighth Army, General Walton Walker, requested that a port be opened up on the west coast of North Korea. VADM Turner Joy, COMNAVFE, was sympathetic to the Eighth Army's situation but there were initially insufficient minesweepers to support any such operation, but one would be mounted as soon as possible.

In mid-October, Japanese contract minesweepers (JMS) cleared a route into the small North Korean port of Haeju, but this wasn't far enough north to be of much help to the Eighth Army.

The major port on the west coast of North Korea was Chinnampo, located ten miles up a tidal river (the North Korean capital of Pyongyang was further up the river). Chinnampo was very similar to Inchon in terms of the great daily tidal variation and strong tidal currents. The approach to Chinnampo was 30 miles long, and was lined with islands and mud banks. In terms of port capacity, it was less than Inchon, but had the advantage of being the only real alternative on the west coast.

As it became apparent that the landing at Wonsan would not be opposed (except by mines), RADM Smith (CTF 95) was released from his duties to return to Sasebo and scrounge another minesweeper force to conduct the Chinnampo operation as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Eighth Army had captured the North Korean capital of Pyongyang in a battle around 17-19 October, with logistical challenges becoming even more acute, bogging down the offensive north of Pyonhyang. Eighth Army personnel occupied the port of Chinnampo about the same time.

Fortuitously, on 22 October, the remaining two destroyer-minesweepers in the Pacific Fleet, *Thompson* (DD-627) and *Carmick* (DD-493)

arrived at Sasebo. The next day, three wooden minesweepers of Mine Division 51 arrived at Sasebo from Pearl Harbor (*Pelican* (AMS-32), *Gull* (AMS-16), and *Swallow* (AMS-36)). With these minesweepers as a nucleus, supported by destroyer *Forrest Royal* (DD-872), Task Element 95.69 was formed under the command of Commander Stephen M. Archer. Archer had previously commanded the Underwater Reconnaissance Element at Wonsan (for which he would be awarded a Silver Star). Archer was aided by the efforts of Commander Donald Clay, who formed an intelligence collection team that scouted the approaches to Chinnampo in advance of the minesweeping effort and provided much useful information. Archer was also aided by the rapid transmission of lessons learned from the Wonsan operation, the biggest of which was search first, then sweep. (Searching and sweeping at the same time led to the loss of *Pirate* and *Pledge*). In addition, the object became to find a way around the minefields, if possible, rather than try to sweep the way through them.

As CTE 95.69 set off for Chinnampo, the PBM Mariners shifted reconnaissance operations from the east coast back to the Yellow Sea, now with much greater on-station time thanks to the seaplane tender *Gardiners Bay* at Chinhae, South Korea. British Sunderland flying boats also participated in these searches. The initial searches were hampered by large numbers of big jellyfish (four feet across) that drifted just below the surface, resulting in numerous false alarms. Nevertheless, in the first three days of searching, 34 mines were located and 16 were destroyed by strafing from the PBMs. An attempt to innovate using depth charges to destroy magnetic mines had mixed results. The helicopter from light cruiser *Worcester* was also temporarily embarked on carrier HMS *Theseus* to support the minesweepers.

As the entire Yellow Sea is a mineable depth (like the Arabian Gulf) sweeping began at an arbitrary point 30 miles from the entrance to the channel to

Chinnampo (almost 70 miles to the docks in the port). On 29 October, destroyer minesweepers *Thompson* and *Carmick* commenced sweep operations in the outer approaches. (This was actually somewhat rare; although destroyer-minesweepers were obviously equipped to clear mines, they were generally used in WWII to provide fire support (and antiaircraft support) for regular minesweepers, and for standard destroyer-type duties). On 31 October, CDR Archer arrived on *Forrest Royal* along with the three AMS minesweepers, two ROKN YMS minesweepers (later joined by two more), and fast-transport *Horace A. Bass* with underwater demolition team ONE embarked (UDT-1), and salvage ship *Bolster* (ARS-38). A Scajap LST (Q-007) relieved *Theseus* as a platform for the minesweeping scout helicopter.



Underwater Demolition Team personnel paddle their rubber boat through Wonsan harbor, en route to explode North Korean mines, 25 October 1950. Photographed by C.K. Rose, of Combat Photo Unit Two. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-421399)

The significant tidal variation (twelve feet) at Chinnampo proved to be an advantage relative to Wonsan, as low tide tended to expose the moored contact mines. So searching was done at low tide and sweeping at high tide. By 2 November, CDR Clay and LTJG Hong, ROKN, had discovered (thanks to a cooperative North Korean

river pilot) and charted a pattern of 217 moored mines and 25 magnetic mines laid in five lines across main channel north of Sok-to Island and one line across an alternate more shallow (15 feet at high tide) and longer route to the south of Sok-to. As a result of this information, CDR Archer decided to clear the alternate passage first. On 3 November, a ROKN YMS made a safe passage through the southern route. On 4-5 November, high winds caused a number of moored mines to break free, which were then destroyed as they floated on the surface.

About that time dock landing ship *Catamount* (LSD-17) arrived loaded with gear to act as a mother ship for 14 LCVP landing craft (four of which were rigged for sweeping moored mines and four for sweeping magnetic mines), which could search for mines in shallow water where other ships couldn't go. *Catamount* was the first LSD to engage in minesweeping operations. Four 40-foot launches from carrier *Boxer* were also brought in and rigged as minesweepers. Although the LCVPs and small boats were useful searching for mines, the effort to use them to sweep was mostly a failure as the fast currents caused the boats to burn out their engines when trailing sweep gear. Nevertheless, on 6 November, an ROKN YMS escorted tugs and barges through the southern channel, and the first small freighter went through the next day.

The minesweeping operation then shifted to the main (and more heavily mined) deep water channel, assisted by the arrival of a 13 Japanese contract minesweepers (operating well north of the 38th parallel, a politically sensitive matter). The JMS minesweepers were also tended by a mother ship and assisted by a "trial" ship. By 17 November, 14 ships reached Chinnampo and 40,000 tons of supplies were offloaded, highlighted by the arrival of hospital ship *Repose* (AH-16).

Benefiting from lessons learned the hard way at Wonsan, the operation at Chinnampo was

conducted without loss or damage to any ships, or loss of any crewmen. Commander Archer was awarded a Legion of Merit with Combat V as commander of TE 95.69. Most mines encountered were marked and bypassed. Of 80 moored mines that were actually destroyed, 36 were credited to PBM strafing, 27 to UDT demolition from small boats, 12 as result of the storms, and only five were actually cut and destroyed by minesweepers. Four magnetic mines were also found and destroyed. Planes from *Theseus* also destroyed a barge that was in the act of laying mines, and the sunken barge was later found with 15 mines still aboard. Although the mines at Chinnampo inflicted no losses, they were successful in the sense of causing several weeks' delay in opening a key port, at significant cost to the logistics effort in support of Eighth Army's offensive.

East Coast Operations - November 1950

On 10 November 1950, a PBM Mariner flying boat located and destroyed nine mines northeast of Wonsan, outside the bay area. The next day, recently-arrived destroyer *Buck* (DD-761) was seriously damaged in a collision with destroyer *John W. Thomason* (DD-760), and had to return to the U.S. west coast for repair.

By 20 November, U.S. sealift had brought another Army division (3rd Infantry Division) into Wonsan from Japan. Also on 20 November, the Secretary of the Navy, Francis P. "Rowboat" Matthews, arrived in Korea and went aboard the command ship *Mount McKinley*. It was the first time in his year-and-a-half tenure that he had gone aboard any ship of the U.S. Navy!!!



Secretary of the Navy Francis P. Matthews (right) talks with Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble, Commander Seventh Fleet, (left) and Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, Commander Naval Forces Far East, (center), upon his arrival at

The mines at Wonsan weren't quite done yet. On 16 November 1950, Army tug *LT-236*, towing a crane barge, triggered a mine and went to the bottom with 30 of 40 aboard (the largest loss of life in a mine strike during the war). Among those killed were 22 of 27 Japanese contract laborers aboard, a fact that was kept under wraps due to political concerns in Japan.

RADM Allen Smith's official post-Wonsan report stated, "The Navy able to sink an enemy fleet, to defeat aircraft and submarines, to do precision bombing, rocket attack and gunnery, to support troops ashore and blockade, met a massive 3,000 mine field laid off Wonsan by the Soviet naval experts....The strongest Navy in the world had to remain in the Sea of Japan while a few minesweepers struggled to clear Wonsan."

The next H-gram will cover Naval Operations during the Chinese Offensive and Evacuation of U.S. forces from Hungnam following the U.S. Marine Corps' epic fighting retreat from Chosin Reservoir in December 1950.

Sources include; *Assault from the Sea: The Amphibious Landing at Inchon*, by NHHC Historian Curtis Utz: Naval Historical Center, 1994.

A Study of the United States Navy's Minesweeping Efforts in the Korean War, by Stephen D. Blanton: Texas Tech Master of Arts Thesis, August 1993. *Damn the Torpedoes: A short History of U.S. Naval Mine Countermeasures, 1777-1991*, by Tamara Moser Melia: Naval Historical Center, 1991. "Silently. Quickly. By Sea, in Darkness: How U.S. Submarines Helped Special Troops Destroy Enemy Supply Lines in the Korean War," by Nathaniel Patch: *Prologue Magazine*, Winter 2016, Vol 48, No.4. *Attack from the Sky: Naval Air Operations in the Korean War*, by Richard C. Knott: Naval Historical Center, 2002. *"United States Naval Aviation, 1910-2010, Vol. I, Chronology* by Mark L. Evans and Roy A. Grossnick: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2015. "Korean War, U.S. Pacific Fleet Interim Evaluation Report No. 1, 25 June to 15 Nov 1950" at history.navy.mil. "Naval Battles of the Korean War," by Edward J. Marolda, at history.navy.mil. *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, by James A. Field: U.S. Navy History Division, 1962. *USS Pirate, Report of Loss: USS Pirate War Diary*, C.E. McMullen, 12 Nov 50.



A port bow view of the amphibious command ship USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19) moored at Manama. *Blue Ridge* served as command ship of U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command, during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. (National Archives photo)

H-055-2: Operation Desert Shield, November 1990

H-Gram 055, Attachment 2

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

October 2020

Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm—Part Four: November 1990

H055.2 Desert Shield/Desert Storm Part 4 (November 1990)

Sam Cox, Director of Naval History, 08 October 2020

Desert Storm Deployment, USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19), September 1990 - January 1991

Early November 1990. Mina Salman, Bahrain.

We were literally stunned as we read the message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff announcing a huge increase in the build-up of U.S. military forces in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO), including many more naval ships. As we did the math, I commented that six aircraft carriers would be the largest carrier force assembled in one spot since World War II.

We already had a sizable force deployed to our region under the Commander, Naval Forces

Central Command, our boss, Vice Admiral Mauz. The carriers *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69) and *Independence* (CVA-62) had arrived in the region within a few days of the Iraqi invasion in early August, but had since been relieved by *John F. Kennedy* (CVA-67) and *Saratoga* (CV-60) in the Red Sea, and *Midway* (CVB-41) and the battleship *Wisconsin* (BB-64) in the north Arabian Sea. The new message stated the carriers *America* (CV-66), *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) and *Ranger* (CVA-61), plus the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) would be deployed to the region and would arrive by mid-January. The force represented half the carriers and battleships in the U.S. Navy and would be a huge disruption to Navy deployment schedules for years, an indication to us of just how serious this buildup was. In a couple more weeks, we learned that the Navy would also deploy over 30 Amphibious ships with two full Marine Expeditionary Brigades embarked, which represented virtually the entire amphibious capability of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. The knowledge of the scale of the build-up provoked some conflicting thoughts. On the one hand, there was a somewhat perverse thrill about it. For over the last decade, the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean had been the scene of the action and had been considered the most "prestigious" seagoing intelligence assignment, but even the peak of the Libyan strike operations in February through April of 1986 had not involved more than three carriers at a time. When the detailer had offered me orders to Seventh Fleet, I'd had a brief moment of hesitation as I pondered whether I should try to hold out for Sixth Fleet instead, but I realized I should not be an arrogant ass and just count myself lucky to be offered an assignment at any "numbered fleet" staff. Now I thought of how I'd be kicking myself if I'd gone to Sixth Fleet only to see all their forces stripped away to go to the action somewhere else.

On the other hand, our new-found sense of "bragging rights" was quickly tempered by the seriousness of the situation. As we discussed the implication of the buildup, we reached a general

consensus within the intelligence staff that we really couldn't imagine deploying that much combat power, and not using it. Up until that point, we had been working with feverish intensity in the belief that we *might* be going to war. Now, the pace and stress ratcheted up even more as we worked in the belief that we *would* be going to war.



F/A-18C Hornet aircraft of Strike Fighter Squadron 113 (VFA-113) sit armed and ready on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Independence (CV-62). Independence is one of the U.S. Navy ships sent to the Persian Gulf in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. (National Archives photo)

November 1990. Mina Salman, Bahrain.

The Iraqi F-1 pilots knew exactly where "the line" was. Day after day, Exocet antiship missile-equipped Mirage F-1s came screaming out of Iraq and down the Arabian Gulf off the Kuwaiti coast, sometimes as many as seven per day. I knew the profile well. Iraqi F-1s had flown the exact same strike profile during the Iran-Iraq War, launching Exocets and hitting over a hundred Iranian and neutral tankers and ships, as well as USS *Stark* (FFG-31). The only difference now was that the Iraqi pilots turned away just before crossing the arbitrary line that CENTCOM had drawn across the northern Arabian Gulf, a line that the U.S. Navy was not allowed to cross.

"The line" was a major point of contention between NAVCENT and CENTCOM. Throughout the fall, the buildup of U.S. forces in the Middle East continued, but the Army and Air Force were

not yet ready for war. The Navy, on the other hand, was heavily engaged in operations from the very beginning, intercepting, boarding, stopping, and sometimes firing warning shots at Iraqi merchant ships, as well as merchant ships from other countries trying to violate the UN Security Council resolutions that imposed economic sanctions on Iraq that were enforced by U.S. and Coalition Navy maritime interception operations. Navy carriers and battle groups routinely deployed ready and trained for combat operations. Nevertheless, General Schwarzkopf didn't want to take the risk that a clash between U.S. Navy and Iraqi forces might precipitate the start of the war before the rest of the U.S. and Coalition force was ready. His solution was to draw a line across the Arabian Gulf and order the Navy not to cross north of it. This conceded international waters and airspace to the Iraqis, who proceeded to use that "sanctuary" to violate international law by laying mines, and to engage in a very dangerous game of Exocet "chicken."

The waters of the Arabian Gulf are very constrained, and reaction time for naval forces was extremely limited to begin with. Conceding battle space to the enemy made it significantly worse. From "the line," Iraqi jets were only a few minutes flight time from U.S. ships in the Arabian Gulf, from key ports and logistics nodes critical to the build-up and supply of U.S. ground and air forces, and only a few minutes from where USS *Blue Ridge* was tied up to the pier at Mina Salman, Bahrain (a position in the harbor that looked remarkably like the center of a bullseye). The Iraqi "chicken" flights were brazen and audacious. Not surprisingly, this made naval forces quite nervous. Navy fighters and missile-armed ships were constantly positioned to shoot the first Iraqi jet to cross south of the line. Many times the Iraqi jets turned away at the last second.

As a result, "the line" did absolutely nothing to diminish the hair-trigger environment and the high risk that Navy and Iraqi aircraft and ships might shoot each other, but did drastically reduce

warning and reaction time, arguably increasing the risk of an inadvertent clash. The aggressiveness of the Iraqi pilots (who apparently knew exactly where they were safe and where they weren't) led us to believe that the Iraqi Mirage F-1 pilots, the cream of the Iraqi Air Force, still retained the boldness and fighting spirit they had demonstrated repeatedly during the Iran-Iraq war. As a result, we were forced to plan to "hold back" aircraft from the bombing campaign in Iraq in order to provide for fleet defense against what still appeared to be a very serious threat to naval forces. As it turned out, the Iraqi Mirage F-1 force was just a pale shadow of its former self, its pilots unmotivated and their antiship strike prowess long since atrophied. Had we been allowed to engage with them earlier, we might very well have called their bluff, which would have allowed us to move the carriers closer earlier and commit many more strike sorties and bomb tonnage to destroying targets in Iraq and Kuwait in support of the air and ground campaigns.

"The line" may have made sense to a four-star Army general, but it sure seemed dumb to us, and it damn near cost the lives of hundreds of Sailors later in the war.

Early November, Mina Salman, Bahrain.

Eureka! The mystery of the long-lost target imagery graphics, desperately needed by the carriers to conduct strike planning, was finally solved. It turned out the target graphics were shipped by mistake to the MIDEASTFOR flagship, rather than the NAVCENT flagship, where they had been sitting in the Communications Materiel Security (CMS) vault on USS *LaSalle* (AFG-3) for over a month. Eventually the Communications Security Officer got fed up tripping over the big boxes of imagery and finally decided perhaps it was time to walk down the passageway to the MIDEASTFOR Intelligence Office to see if this stuff was of any use to anyone, otherwise he was going to burn it.

This discovery resolved the months-long saga of the wayward target graphics. Produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency in the first months of Desert Shield, the target imagery graphics were very important to the aviators for strike planning; without them, all they had to visualize the target was a chart and the “file” imagery the aircraft carriers held onboard, which could be anywhere from a month to a couple years old. Since there was no way to send bulk high-resolution imagery by electronic means at that time, it had to be shipped by aircraft. Once the material hit the loading dock, things went wrong. The next couple months would have made a good “Who’s on First?” routine with the dialog between NAVCENT and DIA going something like, “Did you send it yet? Yes we did. We didn’t get it. We sent it a month ago. We didn’t get it. We sent it. Where did you send it? To you.” This might have been funny, except that if the war had broken out in October this would have constituted a major intelligence failure. A later shipment of target graphics did fail to get to the carriers; the boxes of imagery were found stuffed in a warehouse in Bahrain after the war.

The problem with the target imagery graphics was symptomatic of larger issues that made providing intelligence support to naval forces far more difficult than in other regions of the world. Simply put, the intelligence support infrastructure developed over the years in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Pacific did not exist in the Central Command region.

CENTCOM had only been established as a Theater Command relatively recently (@1983), carved out of area that previously belonged to the European Command and mostly to the Navy-centric Pacific Command, and the Navy still hadn’t gotten over it. The Navy had all the love for CENTCOM that they did for MacArthur in WWII and for similar reasons. The Navy wasn’t interested in expending the resources to set up a naval intelligence support infrastructure in CENTCOM, and the Army-centric CENTCOM was

not sufficiently interested in naval operations to demand it.

Naval Intelligence support revolved around a concept called Operational Intelligence (OPINTEL). The whole point of the OPINTEL process was to get rapidly-fused all-source intelligence into the hands of operational decision-makers throughout the fleet as fast as possible. The system existed to drive intelligence from higher echelons to lower echelons in order to better support the forces doing the fighting.

By contrast, CENTCOM had no conception of operational support. At that time, the CENTCOM Joint Intelligence Center was essentially a glorified briefing shop. It existed to suck in intelligence in order to brief the four-star CENTCOM Commander (Commander-in-Chief (CINC) back then). It was a black hole. Very little of timely operational significance ever came back out. In fact, CENTCOM tasked us to support them. It didn’t take long to figure out that CENTCOM didn’t care a whole lot about what the Navy had to say, so we blew that requirement off. Periodically, some of the lower-ranking CENTCOM staff would beat up on us for not sending in a daily “Intelligence Summary” but we continued to successfully ignore them.

From CENTCOM’s perspective, providing intelligence support to operational naval forces was not their problem to begin with. CENTCOM had an intelligence support architecture that required the service components to provide their own intelligence support. CENTCOM called it a “ederated” architecture. We called it, “every man for himself.” This might have worked, except that the Navy had no intelligence support architecture in the CENTCOM region.

In other theaters, Naval Intelligence provided support to operational forces using two kinds of facilities, the Fleet Ocean Surveillance Information Facilities (FOSIFs) and Fleet Intelligence Centers (FICs). As soon as we were directed to head

toward the Arabian Gulf, we turned to our normal support lifeline for intelligence production, the Fleet Intelligence Center Pacific (FICPAC). We were in a bit of a panic because we had virtually nothing about Iraq onboard, such as target imagery, since Iraq wasn't in the Seventh Fleet area of responsibility. However, the Pacific Fleet decided that Desert Shield was a CENTCOM problem, FICPAC had more important things to do dealing with the Soviets (the Cold War being over hadn't sunk in yet), and therefore we must go to CENTCOM for help. This might have worked if CENTCOM had a FIC, but it didn't, and it was this that forced us to go to DIA instead of the FIC for such things as target imagery graphics, a process that neither DIA nor us had practiced before.

The purpose of the FOSIFs was to provide the time-sensitive indications and warning intelligence of enemy operations. The Central Command area didn't have a FOSIF either. Rather, the decision had been made several years earlier not to establish one. Instead, the FOSIF at Rota, Spain, was given responsibility for reporting on activity in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, while the FOSIF at Kamiseya, Japan, had responsibility for the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

This arrangement with the FOSIFs had severe drawbacks. For operational security reasons, CENTCOM ordered operational traffic not to be sent outside the CENTCOM area. As a result, Rota and Kamiseya were in the dark about the operations they were tasked to support, which made it really tough to support them. In addition, in an attempt to manage the huge communications jam, our own communicators had to stop any messages coming in from outside the CENTCOM or Seventh Fleet region. We could receive messages from Kamiseya, but Rota was effectively filtered out. We therefore received no reporting on Red Sea and Gulf of Aden activity, even though three U.S. carrier battlegroups and several Iraqi merchant ships were in the Red Sea at the start of Desert Storm. The effect of this was

demonstrated shortly after the war ended when a Soviet destroyer transited the Suez Canal and was already into the Gulf of Aden before we even knew it was coming. Unfortunately, there was no way for our communicators to allow only FOSIF Rota traffic through the filter.

FOSIF Kamiseya tried heroically to support us, but cut off from in-theater operational reporting and hampered by the communications delays, about all they managed to do was tell us what the Iranian Navy and Air Force had done yesterday (which is what they'd been reporting on since the Ernest Will/Praying Mantis days of the Iran-Iraq tanker war). We already knew what the Iranians had done, since our ships could see it. The Iraqis were the problem, and the vaunted FOSIF and FIC system that worked so well elsewhere was of practically no use to us during Desert Shield/Storm.

Virtually none of the naval forces that came into the Middle East had operated in the Central Command region before. They expected to get the kind of intelligence support they were used to getting from the FOSIFs and FICs. They were unhappy when they didn't get it. Unfortunately, with the technology of the era, there was not enough time to stand up a new FOSIF before the war started. Some of the carrier battlegroups, particularly *Theodore Roosevelt* and *Ranger*, accepted this sad state of affairs with stoicism and actually found ways to be pretty self-reliant. A couple other battlegroups whined like a bunch of helpless baby seals, blaming NAVCENT for everything that was wrong with the CENTCOM theater architecture. We did the best we could, considering we had to do it all from scratch.

We also did our utmost to respond to dozens of "requests for information" submitted by the carrier battlegroups and amphibious groups, although a number of RFIs submitted (especially from the baby seal battlegroups) proved the adage that, yes, there is such a thing as a stupid question. I remember one testy exchange over an RFI that

was a laundry list of highly detailed and technical questions about lubricants used by the Iraqi Air Force. It would take a lot of time and work to get the answers (and I had little time and a lot of work). I understood the rationale for the question. Although Iraq was an oil exporting country, it had to import the high-end refined products like lubricants for precision parts in jet engines. In theory, cutting off the supply of lubricants would eventually ground the Iraqi Air Force. The fallacy of the theory was that Iraq had such huge stockpiles of all manner of war supplies, and the amount of this kind of lubricant required was relatively small and could easily be smuggled into Iraq over land. It would take years for this strategy to have effect. The battlegroup didn't like my response and persisted in wanting the answers to the full list of questions. I suggested they could make better use of their time (and mine) by focusing their effort on tracking the SA-6 batteries that would be shooting at their aircraft in the next month, and I put the RFI at the bottom of my "hold" pile.

My piles of message traffic were actually quite high. There was no electronic storage back then, and given the unreliability of the communications, many messages that I did get I would save for future reference. I had so many stacks of hard-copy messages on, above, and underneath my desk that I was facetiously accused of single-handedly giving *Blue Ridge* a one degree starboard list. On many other occasions, however, I was able to amaze and delight my fellow staff members by my ability to utilize my unique "sedimentary" filing system, reaching into a two-foot tall stack of messages and pulling out the one that had the answer to the question at hand.

A success story in intelligence support during Desert Shield/Storm was our embarked Joint Inter-Agency Support Element (JILE), a deliberately vague euphemism for the CIA. The JILE team came as part of a National Intelligence Support Team (NIST). The NIST had members from the Defense Intelligence Agency, the

National Security Agency (NSA), and the CIA. The DIA element was useful but not all that much value added. The NSA element provided the best information on real-time Iraqi air and missile activity, absolutely critical to protecting our force.

The JILE team was especially valuable in getting answers to RFIs that were outside the normal experience of naval intelligence, and there were an awful lot of them. Given CENTCOM's lackluster performance in providing accurate answers to RFIs, the JILE team was a huge help. Another big advantage was the JILE's direct link to CIA headquarters in Washington. On a number of occasions, we used this link to bypass CENTCOM to get national level collection we needed because the CIA oftentimes agreed that it was important, even when CENTCOM did not.

A drawback to the JILE support was that their communications system was incompatible with the Navy's. The JILE would give us messages that had useful information for the fleet, but in order to send a CIA message to other Navy ships we had to manually retype the entire message into our communications system; we had several intelligence specialists who did little else but retype CIA messages all day long. Although the amount of intelligence the CIA was willing to share tended to be personality dependent, based on who was in charge of the JILE at the time, the CIA came through for us so many times that I have had a soft spot for them ever since. They really are great Americans.

Although Naval Intelligence support during Desert Shield/Storm fell short of what we all hoped it would be, it was far superior to that I remember receiving during the Lebanon crisis in 1983. By any objective measure, I believe it was superior to any previous conflict. Given that we deployed to an area that wasn't even our responsibility, that had no intelligence support infrastructure, and did it with just a handful of officers and enlisted Sailors on *Blue Ridge*, in the largest naval combat operation since WWII, I think

it was pretty damn good. I give the greatest credit to the Seventh Fleet/NAVCENT Intelligence Officer, Commander Wayne Perras. He provided the direction that made the whole thing work, under the most trying circumstances, and under the most unbelievable pressure. He was truly on a high wire with no net. He is a true hero of Desert Storm. Because of him, when war came, we were ready.



A Fighter Squadron 32 (VF-32) F-14A Tomcat aircraft passes a desert dust storm during a flight off of the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) while Kennedy and its embarked air wing were in the Red Sea to support Operation Desert Shield. (National Archives photo)

Late November 1990. Dubai, United Arab Emirates

I was crammed shoulder-to-shoulder with a crowd of unkempt laborers from Bangladesh, Baluchistan, and who-knows-where-istan, on a

small, lightless ferry boat, yet I felt more at peace than I had for months. In fact, the effect was magical on that balmy night. The packed wooden "abra" glided across the half-mile-wide estuary called Dubai Creek, and the lights from the minarets and the souk bazaar in the old city of Dubai shimmered on the black waters ahead of us, while the glitzy lights of the new city danced on the water behind, as the evening call-to-prayer lofted through the starlit sky around us.

We'd spent over two months tied up to the pier in the harbor of Mina Salman, Bahrain, and apparently Vice Admiral Mauz had gotten some wanderlust. One of the distinct advantages of having a headquarters on a ship was that we could move it. So, *Blue Ridge* transited to the port of Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates and we got our first real liberty since we'd left Japan.

Most of the crew seemed content to stay in a barricaded area on the pier called "the sandbox" where they could guzzle beer and not get into too much trouble. Navy liberty policy was also a bone of contention with the other services, which were governed by General Schwarzkopf's "General Order Number 1" which forbade the consumption of alcohol, but it applied only to Saudi Arabia where the vast majority of U.S. Army and Air Force personnel were. Since we weren't in Saudi Arabia, the Navy took advantage of the loophole and refused to abide by even the spirit of General Order Number 1. There hadn't actually been much imbibing up to that point in Bahrain simply because most places that served alcohol were closed due to the evacuation of most of their foreign expatriate patrons, and because it was too hard to get from the pier to the city, and none of us on the staff had any time anyway. Jebel Ali was the first blowout of the deployment. Amazingly, we only had a handful of liberty incidents. The sandbox worked.

I chose to take the 45-minute bus ride from the Jebel Ali port area to the city of Dubai. Bahrain and Dubai had long been in competition to be

the trading and finance center of the Persian Gulf. Dubai was clearly winning, and was obviously taking advantage of Bahrain's misfortune of being closer to the war zone. Commerce in Dubai was booming. There wasn't the slightest hint that anyone in Dubai cared a hoot that their fraternal neighbor to the north, Kuwait, had just been gobbled up by Iraq. I suspect they saw Kuwait's demise as just one less economic competitor.

Dubai was an incredible mix of traditional and ultra-modern architecture. The city was a cacophony of different peoples from all over the world. It was a swirl of color of numerous different tribal costumes from all over the Middle East and South Asia. Shops were bulging with more glittering gold jewelry than I had ever seen in one spot in my life. The old souk was a beehive of buying and selling of all manner of goods in a manner unchanged for centuries, except almost all the shops and stalls took Visa.

Fascinating contrasts hit me the moment I stepped off the bus in Dubai. The first thing I saw was a rather heavy-set woman, dressed head-to-toe in black, her face entirely veiled, waddling down the street in a scene right out of the Middle Ages, until she stopped, pulled out a set of keys, hopped into a large white Mercedes, fired it up, and drove away. I was floored. As I learned the region better, I came to know that places like Bahrain and Dubai were vastly different and centuries away from the ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia.

Later, I took a taxi over to the east side of Dubai Creek where I rendezvoused with other members of the Seventh Fleet/NAVCENT staff at a bar. Eventually tiring of that, one of the other Intelligence Officers on the staff, Lieutenant Commander Steve Carey, and I decided to strike out back to the old city. I have no idea what possessed us to take an abra instead of the taxi that normal people, including the local Arabs, took. I guess we were just moved by the spirit of adventure. And it was hard to beat the price,

about a nickel, which was why it was the transportation mode of choice for the "Third Country Nationals (TCNs)" laborers.

The ferry master grossly overloaded the boat. There had to be over 50 people on the 20 foot abra, but we had gotten on early, so there was no real way to get back off if we had tried, as the master just kept jamming more forlorn looking people in behind us. As we pulled away from the rickety ferry dock I could see that the boat traffic on Dubai Creek, even at night, was astonishingly heavy, with large traditional dhows transiting at rather high rates of speed, their wakes rocking our open boat, which only had a few inches of freeboard to spare. I also noted the abra had no lights. This may have explained why the crowd of passengers was totally silent. They may have been the Third World "Wretched of the Earth," but they had the good sense to be scared stiff.

For my part, I imagined a newspaper story, "Ferry boat capsizes. Fifty Bangladeshis Die. Two U.S. Naval Officers Drown Too; No One Could Explain What The Hell They Were Doing There." But the exotic beauty of the abra ride was sublime, and I promptly forgot all danger as I tried to soak in all the atmosphere. I thought, "Only because of the U.S. Navy would I ever have been in this spot. This must be the adventure part."

A month later, 20 Sailors from *Saratoga* drowned when their liberty ferry capsized during a port visit to Haifa, Israel, just before Christmas.

In the next H-Gram—(Part 5, December 1990)—Final Preparations for War and JFACC Follies (part one).

Source: (Me. Although I wrote these pieces by memory a number of years after the fact, the best pretty comprehensive source for information on the U.S. Navy during Desert Shield/Desert Storm is still the two-volume set of "Desert Shield at Sea: What the Navy Really Did" and "Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did" both by Marvin

Pokrant (the NAVCENT/C7F CNA Rep during both operations): Greenwood Press, 1999. (It wasn't cheap.) Also useful is the Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, "The United States Navy in Desert Shield, Desert Storm" of 15 May 1991," which has the best chronology and other facts and figures. I would note that these are more "PC" than my account.)



NORFOLK (Dec. 15, 2016) USS Cole (DDG 67), a guided-missile destroyer, passes the USS Cole Memorial as the destroyer departed Naval Station Norfolk for a scheduled deployment to the 5th and 6th fleet areas of responsibility. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Justin Wolpert/Released)

H-055-3: Attack on USS *Cole* (DDG-67) – October 2000

H-Gram 055, [Attachment 3](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

October 2020

H055.3 Attack on USS *Cole*-October 2000

Sam Cox, Director of Naval History, 08 October 2020

I first wrote this for the 15th anniversary of the attack on USS *Cole*, but I have added some additional material regarding the threat

environment in the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) area of responsibility at the time.

Since the dawn of recorded history, city-states and nations that expected to survive would station troops or send patrols to their farthest frontiers to provide early warning of enemy invasion and buy time to mobilize and meet the threat. On 12 October 2000, the guided missile destroyer USS *Cole* (DDG-67), in a port on the far side of the globe did exactly that. Seventeen Sailors died and 37 were wounded, and the ship was grievously damaged as a result of a determined enemy surprise suicide boat attack in Aden, Yemen.

But in their sacrifice, the crew of *Cole* gave our nation eleven months of unambiguous warning

that we were at war with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida, or certainly that they were at war with us. Others may debate whether that warning was properly heeded, but that in no way reflects on the valor and sacrifice of the crew who saved their ship from damage that would have sunk any other warship of that size in any other navy in the world, and who brought *Cole* out of Aden harbor with the massive battle flag of the United States flying high. The crew of *Cole* who made the ultimate sacrifice must never be forgotten.

Hull Maintenance Technician Second Class
Kenneth Eugene Clodfelter, 21, Mechanicsville,
Virginia

Chief Electronics Technician Richard Dean
Costelow, 35, Morrisville, Pennsylvania

Mess Management Specialist Seaman Lakeina
Monique Francis, 19, Woodleaf, North Carolina

Information Systems Technician Seaman Timothy
Lee Gauna, 21, Rice, Texas

Signalman Seaman Cherone Louis Gunn, 22, Rex,
Georgia

Information Systems Technician Seaman James
Rodrick McDaniels, 19, Norfolk, Virginia

Engineman Second Class Marc Ian Nieto, 24,
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Electronic Warfare Technician Second Class
Ronald Scott Owens, 24, Vero Beach, Florida

Seaman Lakiba Nicole Palmer, 22, San Diego,
California

Engineman Fireman Joshua Langdon Parlett, 19,
Churchville, Maryland

Fireman Patrick Howard Roy, 19, Cornwall-on-
Hudson, New York

Electronic Warfare Technician First Class Kevin
Shawn Rux, 30, Portland, North Dakota

Mess Management Specialist Third Class
Ronchester Mananga Santiago, 22, Kingsville,
Texas

Operations Specialist Second Class Timothy
Lamont Sanders, 32, Ringgold, Virginia

Fireman Gary Graham Swenchon Jr., 26,
Rockport, Texas

Lieutenant Junior Grade Andrew Triplett, 31,
Macon, Mississippi

Seaman Craig Bryan Wibberley, 19, Williamsport,
Maryland

On 12 October, it is entirely appropriate to take time to reflect in silence on these lives cut short in the service of our country and the defense of our freedom.



USS Cole (DDG-67) was laid down on 28 February 1994 at Pascagoula, MS, by Ingalls Shipbuilding Division, Litton Industries; launched on 10 January 1995; sponsored by Mrs. Lee Perry, wife of Secretary of Defense William J. Perry; and commissioned on 8 June 1996 at Port Everglades, FL, Commander M. Stewart O'Bryan in command. (L45-54.10.03)

USS *Cole* was not a random target. Al-Qaida chose to attack a warship flying the flag of the United States precisely because of the symbolism

of such an attack. Previously, bin Laden had issued two declarations of war (Fatwas) against the United States (in 1996 and 1998) that, from his perspective, had been ignored. His attacks against the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 resulted in intense criticism of bin Laden, even in extremist circles, due to the extremely high death and injury toll amongst innocent civilians, many of them Muslims. The American response to the embassy bombings came in the form of Tomahawk cruise missile strikes from U.S. Navy ships against al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan (and a suspected chemical weapons precursor plant in Sudan). The physical damage against the primitive camp infrastructure in Afghanistan was easily repaired. The psychological impact was more profound, as al-Qaida's leadership understood just how close they came to being hit and killed. Nevertheless, the strike fell well short of bin Laden's intent for the embassy bombings, which was to provoke such a grossly disproportionate overreaction by the United States that it would galvanize the Muslim world to the final jihad against the U.S. and the infidel world.

Bin Laden chose to attack a warship to demonstrate to the world that he was not afraid of the United States and to provoke the United States by flagrantly attacking a symbol of America's might and pride. He chose a military target to preclude Muslim casualties. He chose a warship because warships had attacked him, and because he found the presence of American warships in a port in his ancestral homeland of Yemen to be particularly offensive. He chose the method of attack, suicide bombing, to ensure the effectiveness of the attack and to demonstrate to the world the resolve of those committed to his cause, who would go willingly to their deaths to accomplish their mission. By attacking a U.S. Navy warship, bin Laden intended for there to be absolutely no ambiguity that when he "declared war" he meant it.

The first al-Qaida attempt to attack a U.S. warship in Aden, the guided missile destroyer *The*

Sullivans (DDG-68) in January 2000, failed because the attack boat, overloaded with explosives, got stuck in the mud and had to be lifted out of the water by a crane; a highly visible event that Yemeni security services either missed, ignored, or were complicit. The fact is that this failed attack was not known by anyone in the United States until after the attack on *Cole*. That Aden was a very dangerous place was very well known, as was the entire U.S. Central Command region.

The environment that *Cole* entered when she transited south through the Suez Canal was fraught with danger. The high-intensity conflict of Desert Storm had been replaced by a lower-intensity combat operation (Southern Watch) in which mobile Iraqi antiaircraft batteries regularly fired on U.S. and Coalition aircraft enforcing the Southern No-fly Zone and were struck by U.S. carrier aircraft in return. U.S. Navy ships had fired Tomahawk cruise missiles into Iraq on short notice in 1993 following the attempted assassination of former President George H. W. Bush in Kuwait, again in 1996 (Operation Desert Strike), and in a major strike campaign along with U.S. carrier aircraft during Operation Desert Fox in December 1998. Tankers smuggling oil out of Iraq in violation of United Nations sanctions frequently played potentially dangerous cat-and-mouse games with U.S. ships enforcing the sanctions, ducking in and out of Iranian territorial waters to thwart pursuit, with the ever-present danger that a smuggling tanker could be used as cover for a terrorist attack, as well as safety hazard to U.S. boarding teams due to the decrepit nature of many of the smuggling ships.

The situation in the Arabian Gulf between Iran and the U.S. was still extremely tense, following the undeclared shooting war of the 1980s during which *Stark* (FFG-31) was accidentally hit by two Iraqi Exocet missiles, the U.S. captured the IRAN AJR in the act of laying mines in international waters, U.S. Navy ships shelled Iranian oil platforms being used in attacks against neutral

shipping, *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG-58) survived being deliberately mined by the Iranians, and U.S. Navy forces sank an Iranian frigate and a missile boat and badly damaged a second frigate during Operation Praying Mantis, all culminating in the accidental shoot down of Iranian airliner by the guided-missile cruiser *Vincennes* (CG-49). By 2000, the Iranians had added a submarine threat capability while Iranian missile boats and Revolutionary Guard speedboats frequently operated within close visual range of U.S. ships, sometimes provocatively, with the ever-present risk of an inadvertent clash.

The CENTCOM region had long been a venue for terrorist attacks against U.S. and Allied interests including the bombing of a U.S. training facility in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 1995, the bombing of the U.S. Air Force housing facility at Khobar Towers, Saudi Arabia, in 1996 and the Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam embassy bombings in 1998, which led to the U.S. Navy Tomahawk strikes into Afghanistan and Sudan. Al-Qaida was hardly the only terrorist group active in the region; Egyptian Islamic Jihad (which later merged with al-Qaida) was active throughout the region, among many smaller groups, while al-Itihaad al-Islamiya and other Somali terrorist groups were active in the vicinity of Djibouti.

Yemen itself had only emerged from a long and costly civil war, with warring parties still itching to go back at it. It was, at that moment in time, technically the only “democracy” in the region, and as part of U.S. Central Command’s regional engagement strategy, U.S. NAVCENT elements were assisting in clearing left over land-mines in Yemen and responding to CENTCOM and U.S. Ambassador in Yemen’s pressure to make refueling stops in Aden, long a hotbed of lawless activity going back centuries. This, despite the fact that Yemen was a known safe haven for al-Qaida recruitment and logistics operations, with the tacit understanding that the Yemeni government would tolerate such activity so long as al-Qaida conducted no attacks inside Yemen. When al-

Qaida “cashed in” their most important logistics hub by attacking *Cole*, this was a clear indication of major operations to follow in the near term.

In sum, any ship entering the CENTCOM AOR in 2000 was entering a high-threat area with potential danger from many quarters. By 2000, U.S. national intelligence agencies had published a series of warnings, all with a similar theme; al-Qaida operational planning is complete, attacks could occur anywhere in the region (not just Yemen,) at any time, with no additional warning. Although such general warning was useful, and heeded in the form of extensive force protection measures, U.S. forces did not have the option to cower behind sandbags, but had to accomplish their missions. *Cole* had a mission to ensure that the U.S. had a sufficient number of Tomahawk missiles in range of designated targets at all times. In order to meet the timelines, and because of lack of tankers, *Cole* had to transit at a speed that required a refueling stop, either in Djibouti, where it was possible to get a truck bomb alongside, or Aden, where the only way to attack a ship was by boat or stand-off weapon. Prior to *Cole*, twenty-seven U.S. Navy ships conducted brief stops for fuel at Aden without being attacked. In the case of *Cole* and Aden, al-Qaida demonstrated that they were a determined and resourceful foe, able to take advantage of weakness in U.S. national intelligence as well as operational routine. As a result, al-Qaida achieved tactical surprise.

It is appropriate to remember that just under a year later, 7 October 2001, U.S. Navy ships launched Tomahawk land-attack missiles and strike fighters from the carriers *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70) and *Enterprise* (CVN-65) to destroy al-Qaida and Taliban targets in Afghanistan. Shortly joined by carriers *Theodore Roosevelt* (CV-71) and *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63), configured to host a joint special operations aviation force, U.S. Navy aircraft flew the great preponderance of tactical strike missions in the initial weeks of the campaign in Afghanistan, hitting targets identified by U.S.

special operations teams on the ground embedded with friendly Afghan tribes. U.S. Navy jets proved decisive in blunting determined counter-attacks against friendly Northern Alliance forces in Northern Afghanistan. The Navy's efforts led to a rapid cascading collapse of Taliban positions. Marines from U.S. Navy amphibious forces, put ashore in southern Afghanistan, ensured that the Taliban could not regroup in their ancestral southern strongholds after being routed from the North.

Carl Vinson was arriving in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility on 9/11. *Enterprise* was departing, but reversed course even before being ordered to do so. U.S. Navy surface ships and submarines were already in range of Afghanistan and could have launched Tomahawks immediately, and the carriers could have launched strikes within a couple days. Whether that would have been the right thing to do is debatable given the extensive diplomacy and logistics efforts required to ensure the U.S. Air Force and Special Operations Forces would have the things they needed (over-flight permissions, landing rights, enough tanker assets, combat search and rescue capability, etc.). The point is that U.S. naval forces in the region were ready to attack immediately after 9/11 had they been called upon to do so. And throughout the course of the campaign, every one of those naval forces did their utmost to ensure that the Sailors of *USS Cole* did not sacrifice in vain.

There are many pejorative words that would accurately describe those who attacked *Cole*, but "coward" would not be one I would choose to use. The men on the boat that came alongside *Cole* knowingly and willingly went to their deaths for a cause they believed in. Nor would I describe the Sailors on *Cole* as "victims." They were U.S. Navy Sailors doing their duty in one battle in a long war against an enemy of the United States. Those who have read my H-Grams on the Kamikazes at Okinawa will know that even against an overwhelming technologically and numerically

superior adversary, an enemy that is determined to die for their cause will get in blows. *Cole* took such a blow. But I do not ascribe to the view that the attack was "successful." When the smoke cleared, *Cole* was still there, afloat, with the American flag still flying. The U.S. Navy continued to operate in the region. *Cole* would be repaired and returned to the fight, and ultimately Osama bin Laden would be dead under the guns of U.S. Navy Seals. But let us never forget the sacrifice of the crew of *USS Cole*.

(Of note, I do not discuss in detail intelligence warning (or lack thereof) what force protection measures were implemented (or not) by *Cole*, nor do I discuss the investigations and attempts to bring perpetrators to justice afterwards, as some material is still classified and the attempt at justice is indeed a sorry saga.)



Former crew members of the guided-missile destroyer *USS Cole* embrace before the beginning of the tenth anniversary remembrance ceremony of the terrorist attack on *Cole*. (Photo by Lt.j.g. Michael Eric Quisao)