

## H-Gram 056: The 70th Anniversary of the Korean War (Communist Chinese Offensive: November — December 1950), the 30th Anniversary of Desert Shield/Desert Storm (Part 5: December 1990), and the 75th Anniversary of the Loss of Flight 19

7 December 2020

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*This H-Gram focuses on the Communist Chinese intervention and offensive in Korea in November–December 1950 that resulted in a debacle for UN forces, although the U.S. Marines made an epic fighting withdrawal at Chosin Reservoir. Also during this period, naval aviator Lieutenant (junior grade) Thomas Hudner was awarded the Medal of Honor for his attempt to rescue Ensign Jesse Brown, the first African American carrier aviator. Also covered is the last month of Desert Shield before the transition to Desert Storm combat, and the 75th anniversary of the loss of all five Avengers of Flight 19 and the PBM Mariner sent to search for them.*



*Yalu River bridges at Sinuiju, North Korea, under attack by planes from USS Leyte (CV-32). Three spans have been dropped on the highway bridge, but the railway bridge (lower bridge) appears to be intact. The Manchurian city of Antung is across the river, in upper right. Photograph is dated 18 November 1950, but may have been taken on 14 November. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-423495)*

### **70th Anniversary of the Korean War**

*Following the success of the United Nations amphibious landings at Inchon and Wonsan, by mid-October 1950 United Nations forces were driving northward in North Korea toward the Yalu River (the border between North Korea and China/Manchuria). Meeting little opposition, “home before Christmas” fever began to grip U.S.*

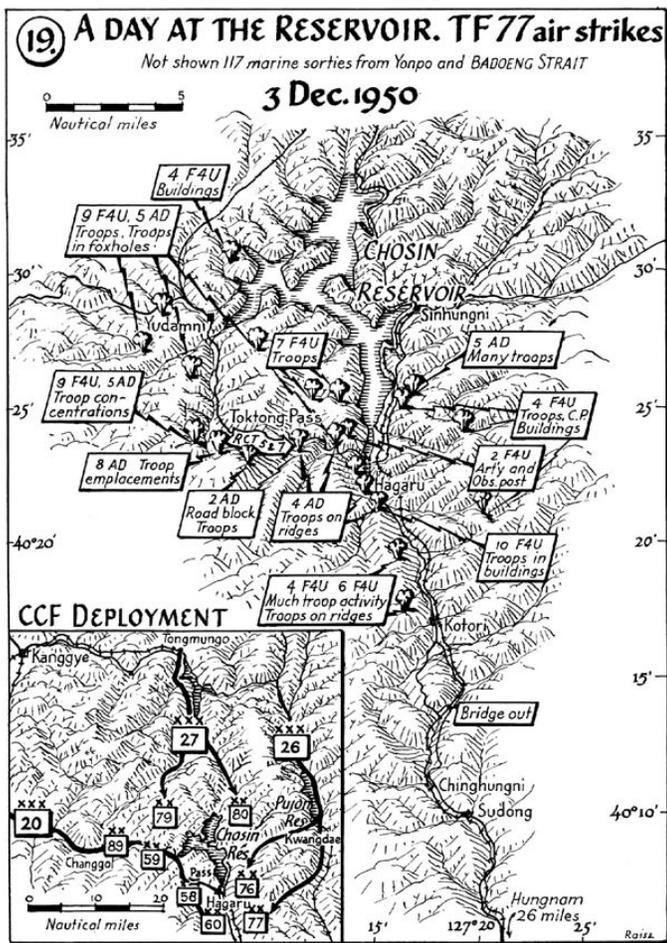
forces despite Communist China's warning that if UN forces crossed the 38th Parallel (the pre-war dividing line between Communist North Korea and Free South Korea), China would intervene in the war to prevent hostile foreign forces on China's border. On 19 October 1950, Chinese troops began crossing into North Korea at night undetected, resulting in a surprise defeat (one of the worst of the war) for the U.S. Army at the Battle of Unsan on 1 November.

In response to the Chinese incursion, the carriers of Task Force 77 were directed to attack the Korean side of bridges over the Yalu River with the intent to forestall Chinese reinforcement and resupply. These carrier air strikes resulted in the first clashes between U.S. Navy jet fighters and Soviet-piloted MiG-15 jet fighters (with North Korean markings flying from Chinese bases in Manchuria). On 9 November, Lieutenant Commander William Amen became the first Navy pilot (and possibly the first of any pilot) to shoot down a MiG-15, and within a week U.S. Navy pilots downed two more MiG-15s without suffering any losses. The Soviets tried to keep their involvement secret and it wasn't until the end of the Cold War that the full extent of massive Soviet involvement became known.

Meanwhile, following the Battle of Unsan, Chinese forces disappeared into the mountains and forests of North Korea, resulting in a lull that created a false sense of security by UN Commanders that Chinese intervention would be minimal and easily defeated. However, in one of the greatest intelligence failures (or operational failure to use intelligence) in modern history, the Chinese infiltrated a force of over 300,000 men into North Korea at night through the mountains almost completely undetected. In late November, the Chinese took steps to try to lure UN forces further northward into a giant trap. It worked. On 27 November 1950, on the heels of the worst Siberian blizzard in a century, the Chinese launched a massive surprise offensive against UN forces in western North Korea (U.S. Eighth Army,

South Korean and some British and Turkish units) and against UN forces in eastern North Korea (First Marine Division, Seventh Infantry Division, and South Korean I Corps). The Chinese attack in the west was a debacle, as the Chinese (who fought at night) repeatedly threatened to encircle UN units resulting in the UN units withdrawing to prevent being encircled. This resulted in the destruction of most of the South Korean units and led to a pell-mell retreat by the U.S. Eighth Army all the way back to the 38th, parallel in which unit cohesion broke down and much equipment and weapons was abandoned.

On the eastern side of the North Korean mountains, the brunt of the Chinese offensive hit the First Marine Division, which had been carefully advancing northwards around Chosin Reservoir. Grossly outnumbered, four different groupings of Marines were surrounded and cut off from each other, with only one barely passable road through the mountains (with the Chinese on the heights) connecting them to each other and to the sea, 75 miles distant. Nevertheless, despite the odds, bitterly cold weather, and high casualties, the Marines retained their unit cohesion and fighting spirit, fighting their way back down the road and inflicting far more casualties on the Chinese than were inflicted on them. In what would become known as the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, the Marines would earn 14 Medals of Honor (seven posthumously) and would emerge at the end as an intact fighting force.



A Day at the Reservoir. Task Force 77 Air Strikes of 3 December 1950.

to his injuries and hypothermia. Ward was awarded a Silver Star and Hudner would be the first Navy recipient of a Medal of Honor in the Korean War. Jesse Brown was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his previous 20 combat missions.

With the front in the west collapsing, the Supreme UN Commander in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur, ordered the UN forces in eastern North Korea to be evacuated by sea from the port of Hungnam, so they could be transported to the other side of Korea in an attempt to prevent Seoul from falling to the Communists for the second time in the war. The evacuation of X Corps (First Marine Division, Seventh and Third Infantry Divisions) and South Korean I Corps was a massive logistical undertaking by the U.S. Navy, completed on 24 December and dubbed the "Christmas Miracle."

In the evacuation from Hungnam, 105,000 U.S. and military personnel, 91,000 Korean civilian refugees (including the parents of the current president of South Korea—one ship alone brought out 14,000 refugees) and 17,500 vehicles were extracted, with nothing of military value left behind, all with no loss to the enemy. Regrettably, there was insufficient room for many thousands more refugees desperate to escape the advancing Chinese Army (or what was left of it after the Marines, naval aviation, and subzero temperatures were through with it). As the last ships pulled out, the port facilities in Hungnam were deliberately destroyed in a massive explosion set by U.S. Navy Underwater Demolition Teams.

The Marines at Chosin were aided greatly by close air support from Marine and Navy aircraft flying from U.S. aircraft carriers in the Sea of Japan despite abysmal weather and sea conditions. In one such mission on 4 December 1950 in support of the Marines, Ensign Jesse Brown, the first African-American qualified as a naval aviator, was probably hit by ground fire and forced to crash land his Corsair high in the mountains where he wound up alive but pinned in the wreckage of his burning plane. Brown's wingman, Lieutenant (junior grade) Thomas Hudner deliberately made a wheels-up landing near Brown's plane in a desperate attempt to extract Brown from the cockpit. Marine helicopter pilot First Lieutenant Charles Ward made a dangerous attempt to rescue Brown, but neither Hudner nor Ward could get Brown out of the plane before he succumbed



*Hungnam's port facilities and remaining UN supplies are blown up, at the conclusion of evacuation operations, 24 December 1950. USS Begor (APD-127) and a motor launch are standing by in the foreground. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-K-11770)*

*For more on the Communist Chinese offensive, please see attachment H-056.1. For background on the Korean War and operations from 25 June to 10 November 1950 please see H-grams 050, 054, and 055.*



*Marines line up on the pier before boarding a U.S. Navy ship for transportation to the Persian Gulf region for Operation Desert Shield. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008)*

### **30th Anniversary of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm: December 1990–January 1991**

*On 1 December 1990, Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur relieved VADM Henry H. Mauz, Jr. as Commander U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/Commander U.S. SEVENTH Fleet.*

*The month of December 1990 was characterized by a massive deployment of U.S. naval forces while maritime interception operations continued at an intense pace. The first drifting mines were encountered in late December floating south from Iraqi minelaying activity off Kuwait, which U.S. Navy forces could not observe due to restrictions imposed by U.S. Central Command (see H-Gram 055). Provocative Iraq MIRAGE F-1/Exocet flights continued over the northern Arabian Gulf. Iraq also began demonstration launches of long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, with impact in western Iraq. (I will cover Iraqi mine warfare in a comprehensive piece in the February 1991 installment and the "Great Scud Hunt" in the January 1991 installment).*

*On 1 December, 18 ships of Amphibious Group THREE (PHIBGRU 3) with Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) embarked departed the U.S. West Coast. USS Ranger (CV-61) deployed from the U.S. West Coast on 8 December. USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) and USS America (CV-66) deployed from Norfolk on 28 December. On 6 January 1991, USS Saratoga (CV-60) returned to the Red Sea via a record-breaking fifth transit of the Suez Canal following a tragedy off Haifa, Israel, when a chartered liberty ferry capsized on 21 December, resulting in the loss of 21 Saratoga Sailors. On 1 January 1991, USS Missouri (BB-63) arrived in the Gulf of Oman, joining USS Wisconsin (BB-64) in theater. On 12 January, PHIBGRU 3 arrived in the North Arabian Sea, joining Amphibious Task Group TWO, with Fourth MEB embarked, forming the largest amphibious task force since the Korean War. On 14 January, Theodore Roosevelt arrived in the Red Sea and America arrived the next day, joining Saratoga and USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) already there. America remained in the Red Sea while Theodore Roosevelt continued to the Arabian Gulf. Also on 15 January, USS Ranger arrived in the Arabian Gulf, joining Midway (CV-41) already there, making six carriers deployed for Operation Desert Storm. A total of 108 U.S. Navy ships were involved: 34 in the Arabian Gulf, 35 in*

*the North Arabian Sea/Gulf of Oman, 26 in the Red Sea and 13 in the Mediterranean.*

*As of 6 December 1990, U.S. and coalition Navy ships had conducted 4,605 intercepts, 569 boardings, and 22 diversions due to prohibited cargo. By 15 January 1991 the numbers were 6,913 intercepts, 823 boardings, and 36 diversions. The most contentious boarding was the Iraqi-flagged freighter IBN Khaldoon, the so-called "Peace Ship," which was carrying international peace activists as well as prohibited cargo, on 26 December. The boarding team fired warning shots in the air and used a smoke and noise grenade to control the unruly crowd. After being diverted and prohibited cargo offloaded, IBN Khaldoon proceeded to Iraq arriving just in time for the peace activists to be used a "human shields" by Saddam Hussein.*

*On 4-5 January 1991, USS Guam (LPH-9) and USS Trenton (LPD-14) conducted Operation Eastern Exit, a daring long-range helicopter minimal-notice non-combatant evacuation (NEO) from Mogadishu, Somalia, involving the first inflight night refueling of helicopters by USMC KC-130s. The U.S. ambassador; Soviet ambassador; 65 U.S. citizens, including 36 embassy personnel; and ultimately a total of 281 people, including eight heads of mission and foreign nationals from 30 countries, were successfully evacuated as Mogadishu descended into chaos. For more on Desert Shield, December 1990, please see attachment H-056.2.*



*Flight 19, which was lost in the Bermuda Triangle, December 1945, was flying a similar type aircraft. (NH 91350)*

### **75th Anniversary of the Loss of Flight 19**

*On 5 December 1945, five U.S. Navy TBM Avenger torpedo bombers from Fort Lauderdale Naval Station were lost on a routine overwater navigation flight over The Bahamas islands. No trace of the planes or the 14 pilots and aircrewmen aboard has ever been found. Fragmentary radio communications indicated compass failure and disorientation of the flight leader as the likely cause leading to the planes running out of fuel and ditching at sea as a bad weather front moved in, hampering the search and any possible survival. A PBM Mariner flying boat launched from Banana River Naval Air Station (now Patrick Air Force Base) to search for the missing Avengers probably exploded in flight with the loss of all 13 men aboard. Radar and visual sighting of a flaming aircraft falling from the sky indicated a sudden catastrophic end for the Mariner; although the exact cause of the Mariner's loss was not*

*determined, the planes were prone to gasoline vapor accumulating in the bilges. The exact cause of the loss of the five Avengers has also never been determined, however the "mystery" is one of the most enduring in aviation history and quickly became part of "Bermuda Triangle" and "Alien/UFO" lore (see the movie Close Encounters of the Third Kind, which depicts the "return" of Flight 19 by the aliens). I will cover Flight 19 in greater detail in the next H-Gram.*

*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 [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>]... plus lots of other cool stuff on Naval History and Heritage Command's website.*



Vought F4U-4B Corsair Fighter (Bureau # 62924) landing on USS Philippine Sea (CV-47) after attacking targets in Korea, circa 7 December 1950. This plane belongs to Fighter Squadron 113 (VF-113). Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-423961)

## H-056-1: Communist Chinese Offensive – November-December 1950

H-056.1

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### **Korean War Review**

To quickly recap the Korean War, on 25 June 1950 (H-Gram 050) Communist North Korea launched a massive surprise offensive into the Republic of Korea (South Korea), rapidly driving U.S. and South Korean troops in a series of

stinging defeats to a perimeter around the port of Pusan in the southeast corner of South Korea. Strikes by U.S. and British carriers were a significant factor in slowing the North Korean advance to buy time for the United Nations forces to bring in reinforcements and supplies by sea to Pusan. U.S. Marines, brought in by sea, played a pivotal role in holding the Pusan Perimeter. In September 1950 (H-Gram 054), United Nations forces under the command of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur launched a bold amphibious landing, led by the First Marine Division, on the west coast of South Korea at Inchon that outflanked the North Korean forces in South Korea, already severely weakened by continuing air strikes on their supply lines by carrier aircraft. North Korean forces in South

Korea were quickly routed, while UN forces recaptured Seoul and continued driving into North Korea. In October 1950 (H-Gram 055), the U.S. Army advanced into North Korea, capturing the capital of Pyongyang on 19 October while the South Korean I Corps advanced up the east coast of North Korea. In the meantime, the First Marine Division and the Seventh Infantry Division (together forming X Corps) were withdrawn from the Seoul/Inchon area by sea to conduct an amphibious assault on the east coast of North Korea at Wonsan, which was delayed due to the presence of over 4,000 Soviet-supplied sea mines that had to be swept before X Corps could be put ashore, even though the South Korean I Corps was already in possession of Wonsan. Carrier strikes by Task Force 77 (by late October including four Essex-class carriers) continued to play a key role in the United Nations' advances. To this point in the war, the sea mines had proved to be the most serious threat to U.S. and allied naval forces.

By mid-October 1950, the North Korean People's Army had been decisively defeated and the small North Korean air force and navy swept from the skies and the seas. United Nations forces were advancing rapidly in North Korea toward the Yalu River (separating North Korea from the Communist Chinese area of Manchuria) with little opposition. It looked like the war would be over by Christmas. It was all about to go horribly wrong.

### ***Indications of Communist Chinese Intentions to Intervene with Soviet Assistance***

In one of the first signs of impending danger, on 30 September 1950, an F-4U-4B Corsair pilot of Fighter Squadron VF-113 off *Philippine Sea* (CV-47) sighted a MiG-15 swept wing jet fighter northwest of Seoul. At the time, little was known about the performance characteristics of the Soviet-built jet fighter. The plane had actually made its combat debut earlier in the summer when MiG-15s of a Soviet aviation division, flying

in support of Communist Chinese offensive operations in the Chinese Civil War, shot down several Nationalist Chinese bombers that were flying from the island of Formosa (Taiwan), the last refuge of the Nationalist Chinese government under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. This intervention by Soviet jet fighters in the Chinese Civil War went undetected by U.S. intelligence, as did the movement of a detachment of these Soviet jet fighters from the Formosa Strait area to Manchuria in August 1950, where they were joined initially by about 120 other Soviet MiG-15s, also undetected.

On 15 October, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander of U.S. and United Nations (UN) forces in Korea, met with President Harry S. Truman at Wake Island, famously (or infamously) keeping the President waiting for his arrival. MacArthur assured Truman that organized North Korean resistance would be over by Thanksgiving with most troops returning home by Christmas. Although the Chinese had publically warned in late September that if United Nations forces crossed the 38th Parallel into North Korea (which occurred on 3 October) that the Chinese would intervene, MacArthur dismissed this threat, believing that if the Chinese entered the war it would be in small numbers that would be "slaughtered."

On 19 October 1950, the same day that the U.S. Eighth Army took the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, twelve Chinese divisions (about 10,000 men per division) began crossing the Yalu River bridges at night into North Korea, initially undetected. On 26 October, South Korean troops reached the Yalu River and were surprised to be shoved back by Chinese forces that they didn't expect to be there. It should also be noted the many of the initial Chinese forces that entered North Korea were actually ethnic Koreans, drafted from the large Korean population in Chinese Manchuria.

In late October, Commander Naval Forces Far East staff, under Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, was busy working on redeployment plans as the advance of the ground forces toward the Yalu River left very few targets to be hit outside of the restricted zone along the Manchurian border, where U.S. aircraft were not supposed to fly in order to avoid inadvertent conflict with Chinese forces along the border (or Soviet forces at the eastern end). The first carrier to withdraw was the HMS *Theseus* from the Yellow Sea side of Korea. On 22 October, carriers *Philippine Sea* and *Boxer* (CV-21) departed the operating area off the east coast of North Korea near Wonsan and transited to Sasebo. *Boxer* continued on to the United States for her overdue overhaul. On 30 October, carrier *Valley Forge* (CV-45) departed station and *Leyte* (CV-32) followed two days later, leaving no fleet carriers in the Sea of Japan. *Valley Forge*, which had been in the fight from the very beginning, was scheduled to return to the U.S. west coast by late November.

Although the fleet carriers departed, Marine F4U Corsairs flying from escort carriers *Sicily* (CVE-118 - VMF-214) and *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116 - VMF-323) continued to provide close air support to the First Marine Division which was advancing up the road through the mountains toward Chosin Reservoir (a name that would become famous in the annals of the U.S. Marine Corps). Marine Corsairs of VMF-212 and VMF-312 were also flying from airfields in North Korea, along with VMF(N)-513 F4U-5N Corsair night-fighters and VMF(AW)-452 F7F-3B Tigercat twin-engine, all-weather night fighters. By 29 October, all of Task Force 77 was returning to Sasebo and on 31 October, Joint Task Force 7 (which had commanded both the Inchon and Wonsan landings) was dissolved and VADM Arthur Struble returned with his SEVENTH Fleet flagship to Sasebo.

As the Navy drawdown was underway (as well as U.S. Air Force units), there were more indications of unusual Chinese activity. On 24 October, U.S.

Marine pilots observed anti-aircraft fire coming from the Manchurian (Chinese) side of the border. Shortly afterwards, a USAF reconnaissance aircraft detected a large number of unidentified type aircraft at Antung airfield on the Manchurian side of the lower Yalu River. USAF and Navy (before the carriers departed) aircraft reported coming under fire from the Manchurian side of the border.

On 31 October 1950, a USAF F-80 straight-wing jet fighter reported sighting "silver, arrow-shaped jets" over Antung airfield. Unknown at the time, the Soviets had agreed to provide 16 operational fighter regiments to support the Chinese, and the first division had actually arrived at Antung in August. The aircraft were drawn from the Soviet Air Defense Force (PVO), which was transitioning to an independent service (separate from "frontal aviation" that supported ground forces). Each PVO division included three regiments of about 35-40 aircraft each, all the new swept-wing MiG-15 (later given the NATO code name [after NATO was formed] "Fagot.") The pilots were all drawn from elite units and many were World War II aces. The commander of the first large Soviet PVO Division to arrive was Colonel Ivan Kozhedub, who had 62 kills during WWII, making him the leading Soviet and Allied ace of the war. The 64th Fighter Aviation Corps was the overarching command for all Soviet PVO Divisions that fought in the Korean War.

The Soviets went to great lengths to hide their involvement—their aircraft carried Chinese or North Korean markings, the pilots wore Chinese uniforms or civilian flight suits, and they used code words to avoid speaking in Russian on the radios. The Soviet aircraft were forbidden to operate over UN-controlled territory so as to avoid being captured (which initially meant they stayed very close to their Manchurian bases), nor were they permitted to fly over water (and Colonel Kozhedub, Hero of the Soviet Union, was grounded). That Russian pilots flying "North Korean" MiGs quickly became an open secret due

to Russian operational security (OPSEC) busts on the radio, but the full extent of the major Soviet involvement was not fully known until the end of the Cold War. In fact in the initial year of the war, all the MiG-15s encountered were flown by Russian pilots; Chinese and North Korean pilots weren't trained and ready until late 1951.

On 1 November 1950, Soviet MiG-15s finally crossed the border to engage USAF aircraft. In the first jet-versus-jet engagement in history, three MiG 15s of the Soviet 72nd Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment (flown by WWII aces) attacked F-80s of 51st Fighter Wing and the Soviets claimed to shoot down one F-80C, while another MiG-15 claimed to shoot down an F-51D Mustang piston fighter. Both U.S. aircraft were in fact lost and their pilots killed, but records at the time attributed the losses to antiaircraft fire.



*Attacks on Yalu River bridges, November 1950. A Navy AD-3 Skyraider attack plane pulls out of its dive (top center) after dropping a 2000-pound bomb on the Korean side of a bridge over the Yalu River, at Sinuiju, North Korea. Note bomb craters in the vicinity of the bridges. Photograph is dated 15 November 1950, but may have been taken a few days earlier. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-422112)*

### **Chinese “First Phase” Offensive-Early November 1950**

The Chinese infantry divisions of the “People’s Volunteer Army” that entered North Korea were under orders to engage only South Korean units and avoid contact with U.S. units. On 25 October, the South Korean 1st Infantry Division was advancing toward the Yalu River when it encountered an overwhelming number of

Chinese infantry. The South Koreans assumed defensive positions, but the Chinese maneuvered between gaps in South Korean and U.S. forces. The Chinese had Intelligence collection problems of their own and on 1 November accidentally engaged elements of the U.S. Eighth Cavalry Regiment at Unsan. Caught by surprise by the size of the Chinese force, which attacked from multiple directions simultaneously, the battle went very badly for the U.S. force with over 1,149 casualties including 449 killed, one of the worst U.S. defeats of the war. Those U.S. troops that made it out after several days of bitter fighting, did so only in small groups after abandoning vehicles and heavy weapons. In the debacle, the only thing that kept the Chinese from driving the U.S. force back to Pyongyang was that they ran short of food and ammunition (and the Chinese had suffered 10,000 casualties themselves).

On 4 November, a Chinese force briefly engaged the U.S. Marine Seventh Regiment (part of the First Marine Division) on the eastern side of the mountains in North Korea as the Marines were advancing toward Chosin Reservoir. The Chinese disengaged in both the eastern and western areas on 5 November, and essentially disappeared into the heavily mountainous and forested terrain, which caused much confusion within the UN high command regarding Chinese intentions.

The massive scale of the Chinese intervention was unknown. During the subsequent “lull” the Chinese infiltrated 250,000 troops to oppose the U.S. Eighth Army on the western side of the mountains while 150,000 entered on the eastern side to oppose the X Corps (with the First Marine Division). With the Chinese in hiding, the Eighth Army was ordered to plan a “Home by Christmas” offensive (enabled by the opening of the west coast port of Chinnampo after the mines were cleared (H-gram 055)), while the First Marine Division continued its careful advance in the east toward Chosin Reservoir. However, the commanding general of the First Marine Division, Major General Oliver Smith, sensed that the

Chinese were setting a trap and made much more extensive preparations for a potential Chinese surprise attack than did the Eighth Army, including establishing supply points along his route as well as a crude airstrip.

Although the outward tune from MacArthur's headquarters was still "Home by Christmas," the surprise U.S. defeat at Unsan provoked a flurry of activity and movement by U.S. Navy forces. On 5 November, a Patrol Squadron VP-42 PBM Mariner flying boat with a crew of 12 disappeared over the Formosa Strait. Although the cause remains unknown, it added to the rapidly growing tension in the region.

### ***U.S. Carrier Strikes on the Yalu River Bridges and First U.S. Navy Jet Kill***

By 6 November, the fast carrier task force (Task Force 77) was back on station in the Sea of Japan, and on 8 November received orders to destroy international bridges over the Yalu River in order to prevent any further Chinese reinforcement or resupply of the unknown number of forces already in North Korea. However, the aircraft were ordered to drop only the first overwater span of the target bridges on the Korean side and were not to violate Chinese Manchurian airspace. These restrictions made for ineffective attacks with dangerously predictable run-ins to avoid having bombs land on the Chinese side of the bridges. Pursuit of enemy aircraft into Manchuria was also forbidden. The aircraft were also forbidden to hit the hydro-electric power plants on the Yalu (across which Chinese troops could cross). What made the whole operation even more absurd was that the Yalu River was frozen so hard in spots that heavy vehicles could cross without a bridge (although the Chinese travelled almost exclusively on foot, at night, in the mountains). But the carrier aviators carried out their orders.

On 9 November 1950, Task Force 77 commenced strike operations against the Yalu River bridges. The typical strike package consisted of 8 or more

AD Skyraiders with either one 2,000-lb bomb or two 1,000-lb bombs, supported by F4U Corsairs with rockets and VT (proximity) fuzed bombs to suppress enemy anti-aircraft guns, while F9F Panther straight-wing jet fighters provided high cover against any enemy aircraft threat. Lieutenant Commander William T. Amen, the commanding officer of Fighter Squadron VF-111 off the *Philippine Sea*, was leading a group of F9F-2B Panthers when at least five MiG-15s from Antung Airfield (which could be seen across the Yalu River) engaged. As a dogfight amongst the jet fighters ensued, the AD Skyraiders scored three direct hits and five near misses on the Sinuiju road bridge and four hits with 2,000-pound bombs on the Manpojin railroad bridge. (It was no surprise that destroying a bridge was extremely difficult; the planking was easily replaced and hitting key structural points required pin-point accuracy). Despite heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire, all Skyraiders and Corsairs came back to the carrier safely.

As the attacks on the bridges commenced, LCDR Amen engaged and shot down a MiG-15 flown by Captain Mikhail Grachev of the 139th Guards Fighter Regiment, who was killed. This was the first U.S. Navy jet-versus-jet kill, and the first Navy kill of a MiG-15. Some accounts state that it was the first kill by anyone of a MiG-15. The previous day a USAF F-80 claimed to shoot down a MiG-15, but Soviet records do not confirm that (although the USAF pilot's account seemed pretty convincing to me). U.S. and Soviet records definitely agree on Amen's kill. In many ways the MiG-15 was superior to the Panther, particularly in speed, rate of climb, and maneuverability. The Panther's main advantage was a much more accurate gunfire aiming system.

On 10 November, LCDR Amen's flight of F9F Panthers again engaged four MiG-15s in a ten-minute inconclusive dogfight. Beginning on 11 November MiG-15s engaged every USN strike along the Yalu, but without effect. LCDR Amen would be awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross

for 30 combat missions during *Philippine Sea's* first Korean War deployment.

On 13 November, *Leyte* had to refuel and then flew 130 strike sorties during the next two days (which was about average for the TF-77 carriers). The Navy carrier strikes expended so much ordnance on the Yalu River bridges that the carriers had to come off station on 16 November to re-arm. It turned out the AD Skyraiders could empty an *Essex*-class carrier's magazines in a little over three days. The weather also turned exceptionally foul with heavy snow blanketing the carrier decks. The weather was better on the west side of the mountains and aerial reconnaissance showed the Chinese had already repaired the bridges and were moving all the anti-aircraft guns to the Manchurian side of the border, where they would be immune to U.S. flak suppression but still quite lethal.

Shocked by the appearance of the superior MiG-15s, the USAF scrambled to send F-84 Thunderjet and the even newer F-86 Sabre to the Korean theater (like the U.S. Navy with the newer *Midway*-class carriers, the most capable USAF jets were being held back in case of a Soviet attack in Western Europe. This had to change, as the F-86 was the only aircraft with performance characteristics in league with the MiG-15, which was the best the Soviets had). The escort carrier *Bairoko* (CVE-115), recommissioned on 12 September, was pressed into service as an aircraft ferry for USAF jets, as was the recently recommissioned light carrier *Bataan* (CVL-29), both of which departed San Diego on 16 November en route Japan, which would get the F-86s into battle by 6 December. Recognizing the threat from enemy jet aircraft, the Marines promptly (on 7 November) ordered their only jet fighter squadron (VMF-311) to deploy to Korea and the squadron's F9F Panthers were loaded in *Bairoko* along with the USAF jets.

Carrier strike operations resumed on 17 November 1950, despite continuing abysmal

weather conditions at sea, with gale force winds and heaving seas making recovery probably the most dangerous part of the mission. On 18 November, a strike from *Valley Forge* was approaching the Yalu River when the F4U Corsairs of VF-54 were engaged by between eight and twelve MiG-15s, just as the Panther jet fighters were making the rendezvous with the Skyraiders and Corsairs (the slower propeller aircraft would head toward the target first and the faster jet fighters would depart later and catch up). In the ensuing dogfight, the skipper of fighter squadron VF-52, LCDR William E. Lamb, shared a kill of a MiG-15 with Lieutenant Robert E. Parker. Ensign Frederick C. Weber of VF-31 from *Leyte* also downed a MiG-15. Thus, in the space of a week, Navy pilots downed three Soviet-piloted MiG-15s and damaged a number of others, for no losses. The strikes on the bridges at Sinuiju were less successful, causing only some damage while two Skyraiders were severely mauled by heavy anti-aircraft fire but made it back to the carrier.

Over the next days, Navy aircraft dropped the road bridge at Sinuiju and spans at Hyesanjin, while USAF B-29 Superfortress strategic bombers knocked down a couple more. However, by this time the Yalu was pretty much frozen solid.

The lack of observed Chinese activity in North Korea gave a false impression that the strikes on the supply lines across the Yalu River had been effective, and once again naval forces began to return to port. On 18 November, the two escort carriers returned to Sasebo. On 19 November, carrier *Valley Forge* departed to proceed all the way to the U.S. west coast for a much needed overhaul. (She would be home for all of five days before being ordered to return to Korean waters, commencing her second deployment on 6 December, but with a different air group: CVG 2 replaced CVG 5).



Philippine Sea (CV-47) receives bombs from USS Mount Katmai (AE-16) during underway replenishment off Korea, 29 November 1950. Note crewmen standing in the carrier's forward hangar bay, and Grumman F9F-2 Panther fighters and LeTourneau crane parked on her flight deck. Crewmen on Mount Katmai are wearing cold weather clothing. A few days after this photo was taken, Philippine Sea commenced a period of close-support operations in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-439879)

### **Chinese "Second Phase" Offensive - Late November/December 1950**

Beginning on 24 November 1950, the massive Chinese force (over 300,000 men) in North Korea, that had largely remained well camouflaged during the previous weeks, began movement with the intent to lure the Eighth Army in the west and X Corps in the east into a trap, where the steep mountains in between would prevent any kind of UN mutual support. As if on cue, the Eighth Army commenced its "Home by Christmas" offensive. The result would be a catastrophic meeting engagement on the western side of North Korea.

On the east side of the mountains, the First Marine Division had reached the Chosin Reservoir by 15 November and on 25 November reached Yudam-ni at the northwestern side of the reservoir, which would prove to be the Marine's farthest advance. All operations came to a halt on 25 November as the worst Siberian blizzard in a century raged through the Korean peninsula and at sea. The weather was extremely hard on U.S. forces, while the Chinese soldiers suffered

grievously, many dying of exposure. During the day on 27 November, with the blizzard still blowing, the Fifth Marine regiment commenced an advance from Yudam-ni to the northwest, which didn't get very far because of the presence of many Chinese troops. At 2200 on 27 November, with the bugles and gongs that the Chinese used for battlefield communications, 120,000 hardened soldiers of the 9th Volunteer Army, commanded by Long March veteran General Song Shi-lun, commenced mass attacks and closed their trap on the Marines near Yudam-ni and along the only route on the west side of Chosin Reservoir, while simultaneously attacking U.S. Army positions ("Task Force Faith") on the east side. Both roads funneled into a single road at the south end of the reservoir, which was the only route back to the coast.

In the west, the Chinese "Second Phase Offensive" hit the Eighth Army hard, concentrating on the two South Korean divisions at the eastern end of the line (on the west side of the mountains) which had been badly mauled during the First Phase Offensive in early November, with many losses replaced by raw recruits. The Chinese traveled on foot and fought at night to negate U.S. reconnaissance and air power, while remaining extremely well camouflaged during the day. They frequently got in the rear of U.S. units, prompting them to withdraw, rather than risk being cut off which quickly turned into a backwards race toward Pyongyang and then the 38th Parallel. The Battle of the Ch'ongch'on River would also become known as "The Big Bugout" as the Chinese chased the Eighth Army all the way back across the 38th Parallel by Christmas. Casualties were extremely heavy on both sides. The retreat was not the U.S. Army's finest hour, as discipline in some units broke down, and much equipment was abandoned and many troops captured. The U.S. Second Infantry Division lost about 40 percent of its personnel and most of its equipment and artillery. It would have been even worse without air support from both the Fifth Air Force and the TF-77 carrier aircraft (however, due

to the chaotic situation in the Eighth Army area, about two thirds of the Navy sorties in support of Eighth Army were “wasted,” reminiscent of the situation around Pusan early in the war).

The Marines at Chosin were a completely different story. Despite being surrounded and heavily outnumbered and suffering heavy casualties from the enemy and the weather, the Marines retained discipline and unit cohesion as they had to fight their way back to the coast along the only road through mountains and gorges. As the commander of the First Marine Division, Major General Oliver P. Smith stated during the battle, “Retreat, hell!! We’re not retreating, we’re just advancing in a different direction.” And unlike in the Eighth Army area, virtually every sortie by TF-77 aircraft in support of the Marines was put to good use despite the extreme difficulties faced by air controllers on the ground.

One critical advantage that the Marines had was effective close air support from their own aircraft based ashore and on the two escort carriers, and from Navy aircraft from the two fleet carriers *Leyte*, and *Philippine Sea*, augmented by the arrival of carrier *Princeton* (CV-37), which had been hastily brought out of mothballs and had a largely reservist crew. The British carrier HMS *Theseus* was recalled from Hong Kong. The escort carrier *Sicily* had just arrived back in Japan after embarking her anti-submarine warfare air group (which she had put ashore at Guam very early in the war) and she was ordered once again to re-embark Marine aircraft. For the next week, the carriers conducted strike operations in some of the worst weather conditions ever encountered in combat operations, and accidents outnumbered losses to the enemy, but still the pilots did their duty to the utmost to protect the Marines on the ground. Making matters worse, the weather forecasts were often unreliable (since the weather originated in Soviet Siberia, where the U.S. obviously had no weather stations) so planes often had difficulty in finding the carriers in white-out conditions or dense fog. Pilots who ditched at

sea, even with immersion suits, had only a few minutes to live in the frigid waters.

On 29 November, as the scope of the Chinese offensive was becoming apparent, the Fifth Air Force sent a message shifting attack priority for USAF and USN aircraft from the Yalu River bridges to direct support of Eighth Army and X Corps (a classic, “no kidding, Sherlock” message). This message was actually at the instigation of TF-77 Commander, RADM Edward Ewen, who had quickly recognized the changed tactical situation. Stopping the supplies over the Yalu River was pointless when the whole ground force was in imminent danger of being cut off, surrounded, and overrun. On 30 November, General MacArthur’s headquarters deemed the situation on the ground to be “critical” and ordered the immediate reconstitution and deployment of all Task Force 90 (the amphibious force for the Wonsan landings in October) to prepare for evacuation of X Corps from Hungnam and Wonsan on the east coast of North Korea, and evacuation of elements of the Eighth Army from Chinnampo on the west coast of North Korea.

In reaction to the rapidly deteriorating situation on the ground, the Commander of Task Force 90, RADM James H. Doyle, began to deploy his ships to Korea, originally divided 50/50 between east coast and west coast, with four attack transports and two attack cargo ships sent to Inchon on the west coast and Wonsan on the east coast. During the “lull” between the Chinese First Phase and Second Phase Offensive, Navy planners at Commander Naval Forces Far East headquarters had the foresight to develop an emergency evacuation plan (Operation Plan 116-50, issued on 13 November) which was put to good use.

The Task Group (90.1) ordered to Inchon, after a series of confusing orders, actually went in to the port of Chinnampo in North Korea despite the imminent danger of it falling to the rapid Chinese advance. It turned out there were relatively few friendly personnel left in Chinnampo and much of

the transport capacity was not needed. The bulk of the Eighth Army had already pulled out to the south. The transport group took out 1,700 port logistics personnel and 6,000 Korean military, police, and government personnel in addition to 3,000 Korean refugees. Protected by several British and Australian destroyers, the transports made the difficult transit down the channel just in time. The destroyers then bombarded the harbor cranes, oil storage, and railway gear to keep them from falling into Chinese hands.

### ***The Battle of Chosin Reservoir - December 1950***

Chosin Reservoir is about 50 miles inland from the port city of Hungnam at an elevation of 3,400 feet. The reservoir is oriented north-south about 16 miles long with a western spur about eight miles long. The reservoir is narrow with steep banks up to the hills. Near the end of the western spur is Yudam-ni, connected by a narrow, winding often single lane gravel road to Haguru-ri, where the Marines had established an advanced base, division command post and crude airstrip at the southern end of the reservoir, making Yudam-ni about 75 miles from the coast, almost all of the route surrounded by commanding heights, which the Chinese controlled. The extreme cold (night temperatures often reached 25 degrees below zero) was as much an enemy as the Chinese.

The Fifth and Seventh Marine regiments were surrounded by two Chinese divisions at Yadam-ni. Additional Marine elements were surrounded at Haguru-ri and at Koto-ri (further south on the road to the coast), while the U.S. Army 31st Regimental Combat Team (Task Force Faith) was trapped on the east side of the reservoir north of Haguru-ri. All units north of Haguru-ri were directed to disengage and consolidate at Haguru-ri, and the entire force would then fight its way south along the road to Hungnam on the coast.

On 1 December, the Fifth and Seventh Marines commenced to fight their way out of Yudam-ni

toward Haguru-ri. The Chinese would attack at night in force, with a combination of mass attack, infiltration, and hand-to-hand combat. At night, the Marines would draw into a compact hard-point formation and inflict heavy casualties on the attacking Chinese. Marine casualties were heavy (about 100 per mile) but Chinese casualties were even worse. During daylight, the Marines would advance southward down the road, relying on close-air support and artillery to neutralize Chinese on the heights along the road.

Task Force Faith, which had been brought under First Marine Division command, almost made it to Haguru-ri before it was cut to ribbons four miles short by massive Chinese attacks; almost all the officers and NCOs were killed, including the commanding officer, and 75 percent of the unit was lost as it disintegrated into individual stragglers, almost all of the survivors wounded.

A Navy patrol squadron plan to use flying boats to bring in supplies and evacuate wounded by landing on the reservoir was abandoned because the lake was frozen solid. However, air drops by USAF and Marine transports were more successful and made a significant difference. The half-completed airstrip at Haguru-ri was declared "operational" on 1 December and four USAF C-47 transports flew in with supplies. Three Marine fighter squadrons moved from Wonsan to Yonpo, near Hungnam, reducing flight time to the battle zone, while the Marine air group on escort carrier *Badoeng Strait* continued close support.

Beginning on 2 December, all of CTF-77's combat sorties were committed to supporting the Marines at the reservoir and protecting the transport flights, aided by the arrival of carrier *Princeton* with Rear Admiral Ralph Ostie embarked (which commenced strikes on 5 December, which also coincided with the return of escort carrier *Sicily* with Marine Corsairs embarked).

On 4 December, the Fifth and Seventh Marines reached the Haguru-ri perimeter, still as a coherent force. Nevertheless, the Marines still

faced a long, difficult route to the coast. General Almond, the commander of X Corps, authorized General Smith to abandon equipment, and get as many troops as possible out by air. The Marines refused to do so, and in fact were flying in reinforcements; only the wounded went out by air.

On 4 December, a flight from carrier *Leyte* attacked a Chinese force estimated at a thousand troops at the northern end of the reservoir, with indications that many more were closing in. *Leyte* had been in the Mediterranean when the war broke out, but was recalled to the U.S. in August and then sent through the Panama and thence to the Korean combat zone, commencing strikes on 9 October by Carrier Air Group THREE (CVG 3).



*Ensign Jesse L. Brown, USN, in the cockpit of an F4U-4 Corsair fighter, circa 1950. Jesse L. Brown was the first African American to complete U.S. Navy flight training and the first African American naval aviator in combat and to be killed in combat. He flew with Fighter Squadron 32 (VF-32) from USS *Leyte* (CV-32). Official U.S. Navy Photograph. (USN 1146845)*

### ***Ensign Jesse Brown and Lieutenant (junior grade) Thomas Hudner***

At 1338 on 4 December 1950, carrier *Leyte* launched a strike in support of Marines near Chosin Reservoir. The executive officer of Fighter Squadron VF-32, Richard "Dick" Cevoli, led a flight of six F4U-4 Corsairs. Cevoli had been awarded a Navy Cross during World War II as an F6F Hellcat

pilot in VF-18 on *Intrepid* (CV-11) during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, for strafing the Japanese super-battleship *Yamato* in the Sibuyan Sea one day, hitting a carrier with a 500-pound bomb off Cape Engano the next day, and near-missing the battleship *Kongo* with a bomb and strafing a destroyer the day after that. (Cevoli would earn a Distinguished Flying Cross in Korea but would be killed in a training flight accident in 1955 while in command of VF-73).

Leading the third section of Cevoli's flight was Ensign Jesse Brown with his wingman, Lieutenant (junior grade) Thomas Hudner. Although Hudner was senior in rank, Brown had been a pilot longer and was more experienced. Brown was the first African American to complete Navy basic flight training and be officially designated as a naval aviator. (Another African American, Oscar Holmes, had entered Navy flight training in 1942. As a rare Black college graduate at this time, his paperwork didn't specify race and it wasn't until he was in the flight training program that Navy bureaucracy figured out he was Black and sidelined him).

Jesse Brown (who also had Native American Chickasaw and Choctaw ancestry) had grown up in poverty in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and had overcome extreme prejudice to gain entry to Ohio State University. Despite resistance from recruiters he entered the Navy's V-5 aviation cadet program, which was not offered at any historically Black colleges, thereby effectively eliminating African Americans from naval aviation. Of 5,600 NROTC students in 1947, only 14 were Black. Brown enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in July 1946 and earned his wings on 21 October 1948. Although he encountered some racism in the late stages of his flight training, it was less than he expected (President Truman's desegregation order signed in July 1948 helped).

In January 1949, Brown was assigned to VF-32 on board *Leyte*, and commissioned an ensign in April 1949. He was popular with his squadron mates

due to his intelligence, personality, and especially his demonstrated superior flying skill. He was hero to the African American community in the United States with a degree of celebrity status, and was the subject of a *Life* magazine photoshoot aboard *Leyte* only days before the 4 December mission. In fact, when he launched for the mission, "Vulture's Row" and other spots were lined with shipmates flashing the "V" for Victory hand signal.

Brown's wingman, LTJG Hudner had little in common with Brown, but the two had become friends during the Mediterranean deployment. Hudner was from a politically connected patrician Boston family, entered the U.S. Naval Academy in 1943, and graduated in 1946 with the wartime-accelerated class of 1947. He served as a surface line officer until he somewhat belatedly becoming interested in flying. He qualified as a naval aviator in August 1949 and was assigned to VF-32. The mission on 4 December would be the 20th combat mission for both Brown and Hudner.

When Cevoli's flight approached Chosin Reservoir and checked in with the Marine air controller, there were no Chinese that could be seen and the air was stacked with blue airplanes awaiting targets. The controller suggested Cevoli conduct a road reconnaissance north of Chosin Reservoir. The flight then proceeded along the road past Yudam-ni at relatively low altitude trying to spot Chinese troops known to be well-concealed there.

At 1440, one of the pilots in the second section noted that Brown appeared to be trailing fuel or oil and radioed a warning. No Chinese troops or ground fire had been observed but Brown's Corsair had apparently been hit in an oil line by a lucky shot by Chinese small arms fire. Brown began to rapidly lose oil pressure and was having increasing difficulty controlling the aircraft. It also quickly became apparent that he wouldn't be able to make it back to the ship. With the aid of squadron mates, Brown sighted a potential flat

area for an emergency wheels up landing amidst the otherwise forbidding mountainous terrain, over 15 miles behind Chinese lines.

Brown jettisoned his external fuel tank and napalm tanks and fired off his rockets. As he approached, the seemingly smooth snow field was actually full of boulders. Brown almost made a good landing, but with the engine seizing up dropped the last 25 feet into a crash landing that bent the nose sidewise, and probably broke Brown's back. At first there was no sign of life, and the plane started to smoke from a fire in the engine area. Finally, Brown slid his canopy back open and waved, and in his haste to exit the aircraft from the fire he discarded his helmet and lost his gloves, only then realizing that his leg was pinned by the crunched instrument panel and he could not get out.

As Cevoli climbed to altitude to call for a helicopter rescue and the other planes circled to mark the position and ward off any Chinese, Hudner could see that the fire was getting worse. Hudner made a quick decision, without asking permission (Cevoli was on a different frequency by that point anyway), to deliberately crash-land near Brown's plane. Hudner's wheels-up landing was only slightly better than Brown's, wrenching Hudner's back. In great pain, it took Hudner almost 30 minutes to wade through the 50 yards of waist-deep snow. When Hudner reached Brown's plane, Brown was still alive, but already suffering from exposure to the intense cold and drifting in an out of consciousness, and in obvious great pain, although Brown refused to complain. Hudner tried multiple times without success to pull Brown from the cockpit. He then used his gloved hands to pack snow in the engine in an attempt to smother the flames, with only partial success. He then waded back to his plane to radio that he needed an ax and a fire extinguisher. The Marine rescue helo was already on the way, but had to turn back to get an ax.

By this time other Navy and Marine flights had arrived and began flying an outer ring of circles. Although neither Hudner nor his squadron mates saw any Chinese, the outer rings did engage approaching Chinese troops.

As the winter darkness was fast approaching, the H03S-1 rescue helicopter arrived, flown by Marine First Lieutenant Charles Ward, who had volunteered for the dangerous mission. The previous day, the pilot of another Marine helo had been shot between the eyes by a sniper while attempting a similar rescue mission. Ward brought the fire extinguisher and ax. By sheer chance, Ward (a veteran WWII Corsair pilot from Alabama) had met Brown earlier on *Leyte's* transit and "Alabama" struck up a good-natured friendship with "Mississippi." When Ward asked if that was Brown in the plane, and Hudner responded yes, Ward's response was "aww, shit." Ward tried to put out the fire with the extinguisher, but the fire persisted. Hudner took the ax to the plane, but the ax just bounced off, and Brown didn't flinch. Brown uttered his last words, "Tell Daisy [his wife] how much I love her." Both men took turns trying to break through with the ax, which did nothing but cause dents.

With the sun setting, temperature rapidly falling, and Brown almost certainly already dead, Ward gave Hudner the choice to stay or go, but that if he stayed he would freeze to death overnight, as the helos could not fly at night and there would be no rescue. Reluctantly, Hudner went with the helo to Haguru-ri and eventually back to his ship, where he begged to be allowed to return to the wreck by helo to retrieve Brown's body. His request was denied due to the extreme danger to the helicopter. Instead, Brown's squadron flew a "warrior funeral" strike to destroy the two aircraft. Before dropping the napalm, Brown was observed to still be in the cockpit, but his flight gear and clothes had been taken. One of the pilots recited the Lord's Prayer as the bombs were dropped. Brown was the first African-American naval officer to die in combat.

Due to his back injury, Hudner was grounded for about a month before flying seven more combat missions. He expected to be court-martialed for what he had done, as his skipper had previously warned pilots not to attempt anything like that, and in fact force-wide orders were subsequently issued explicitly forbidding anyone from doing that again. Instead, Hudner became the first Medal of Honor recipient since World War II, receiving the Medal of Honor from President Truman at a White House ceremony in April 1951. (Several others were awarded a Medal of Honor for action prior to Hudner's but were received afterwards). Hudner's was the first of seven Medals of Honor awarded to Navy personnel during the Korean War, and the only carrier aviator during the Korean War (and only one of five carrier aviators, Butch O'Hare, John Powers, David McCampbell, during World War II and Michael Estocin during Vietnam. James Stockdale's award was for action as a Prisoner of War in Vietnam). Hudner was one of 17 Medals of Honor awarded for action during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir-14 Marines and 2 Army). At the White House ceremony, Hudner met Daisy Brown and the two remained in contact throughout their lives until she died in 2014.



*Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Thomas J. Hudner, USN, is congratulated by Mrs. Daisy P. Brown, widow of Ensign Jesse L. Brown, after he received the Medal of Honor from President Truman at the White House, 13 April 1951.*

***Thomas Hudner's Medal of Honor citation reads as follows:***

"The President of the United States, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Lieutenant (junior grade) Thomas Jerome, Hudner, Jr. United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a pilot in Fighter Squadron THIRTY TWO (VF-32), attached to the USS LEYTE (CV-32), while attempting to rescue a squadron mate whose plane struck by anti-aircraft fire and trailing smoke, was forced down behind enemy lines near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, on 4 December 1950. Quickly maneuvering to circle the downed pilot and protect him from enemy troops infesting the area, Lieutenant (junior grade) Hudner risked his life to save the injured flier who was trapped alive in the burning wreckage. Fully aware of the extreme danger in landing on the rough mountainous terrain and the scant hope of escape or survival in subzero temperatures, he put his plane down skillfully in a deliberate wheels-up landing in the presence of enemy troops. With his bare hands, he packed the fuselage with snow to keep the flames away from the pilot and struggled to pull him free. Unsuccessful in this, he returned to his crashed aircraft and radioed other airborne planes, requesting that a helicopter be dispatched with an ax and fire extinguisher. He then remained on the spot despite the continuing danger from enemy action and, with the assistance of the rescue pilot, renewed a desperate but unavailing battle against time, cold and flames. Lieutenant (junior grade) Hudner's exceptionally valiant action and selfless devotion to a shipmate sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service."

Ensign Jesse Brown was awarded a Posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross for his 20 combat missions:

"The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Flying

Cross (Posthumously) to Ensign Jesse Leroy Brown, United States Navy, for heroism in aerial flight as Pilot of a fighter plane in Fighter Squadron THIRTY-TWO (VF-32), attached to the USS LEYTE (CV-32), in hostile attacks on hostile North Korean forces. Participating in 20 strikes on enemy troop concentrations in the face of grave hazard, at the Chosin Reservoir, Takshon, Manp Jin, Linchong, Sinuiju, Kasan, Wonsan, Chonjin, Kilchu and Sinanju during the period 12 October to 4 December 1950. With courageous efficiency and utter disregard for his own personal safety, Ensign Brown, while in support of friendly troops in the Chosin Reservoir area, pressed home numerous attacks destroying an enemy troop concentration moving to attack our troops. So aggressive were these attacks, in the face of enemy anti-aircraft fire, that they finally resulted in the destruction of Ensign Brown's plane by anti-aircraft fire. His gallant devotion to duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

The Knox-class frigate USS *Jesse L. Brown* (DE/FF/FFT-1089) was named in his honor and commissioned 17 February 1973, serving until 27 July 1994 before subsequently being sold to the Egyptian Navy, where she remains in service. Contrary to many accounts, this was not the first U.S. Navy warship named for an African American. USS *Harmon* (DE-678), named for the second African-American awarded a Navy Cross (posthumously) in WWII was the first, and USS *George Washington Carver* (SSBN-656) was the second.

First Lieutenant Charles C. Ward, U.S. Marine Corps, of Marine Observation Squadron SIX (VMO-6) was awarded a Silver Star for volunteering to fly the dangerous mission to attempt the rescue of Jesse Brown in the unarmed Sikorski HO3S-1 helicopter. He was subsequently also awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. After he retired, he was killed in a jeep accident.

Thomas Hudner continued to serve in the U.S. Navy until his retirement as a captain in 1973. Among his assignments, he served as XO/CO of Fighter Squadron VF-53, an F-8E Crusader squadron on *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14). He also served as executive officer of *Kitty Hawk* (CVA-63), during her 1966 Vietnam deployment, although he flew no combat missions. After a long life of distinguished public service, Hudner died on 13 November 2017 at age 93. His funeral at Arlington National Cemetery in April 2018, which I had the privilege to witness, was attended by (on my count) eleven Medal of Honor recipients. The *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyer USS *Thomas Hudner* (DDG-116) was named in his honor and commissioned 1 December 2018.



*Chosin Reservoir Campaign, November–December 1950. Weapons Company, in line with Headquarters and Service Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, trying to contact the temporarily cut off Fox Company in a glancing engagement to permit the 5th and 7th Marines to withdraw from the Yudam-ni area. 27 November 1950. Quoted from original picture caption, released by Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, on 22 December 1950. Official U.S. Marine Corps Photograph, from the All Hands collection at the Naval History and Heritage Command. (NH 97023)*

### ***X Corps Consolidation at Hamhung/ Hungnam–December 1950***

Elsewhere in the eastern sector, on 30 November, the commander of X Corps, Major General Almond, directed that all forces withdraw and consolidate at Hamhung (a large city just inland of

the port of Hungnam). The South Korean I Corps had been advancing up the east coast road as far as Chongjin, approaching the Soviet border. The advance was supported by heavy cruiser *Saint Paul* (CA-73) and destroyer *Zellars* (DD-777) and the two ships continued to provide fire support as the South Koreans carried out their orders to withdraw. Although the South Koreans were not significantly engaged by Chinese forces, they were at grave risk of being cut off.

The bulk of U.S. Army Seventh Infantry Division was strung out north of the Marine First Division fighting at Chosin. Although also not attacked in force by the Chinese, the Seventh Division was also at risk of being cut off and withdrew as ordered. The newly arrived U.S. Army Third Division was attacking westward from Wonsan for a planned link-up with the Eighth Army on the west side of the mountains. However, in the west, the Chinese advanced so far so fast against the Eighth Army that the plan became moot, and the Third Division pulled back to the coast as ordered. Fearing a Chinese attack in Wonsan, after the coast road to Hungnam was temporarily cut, *Saint Paul* was ordered to disengage from the north and proceed south to Wonsan to provide gunfire support on call.

Evacuations commenced from the east coast of North Korea about 6 December, with some degree of confusion. Four attack transports, two attack cargo ships, and a fast transport of Task Force 90 arrived at Wonsan to begin out-loading the Third Infantry Division, only to find that most of the division had already moved north along the coast road toward Hungnam. *Saint Paul* and three destroyers executed a short fire-support mission to protect U.S. Army and Korean troops defending the perimeter of Wonsan, but that did not develop into a significant Chinese attack. Only 4,000 men and 12,000 tons of gear were loaded aboard. As there was unused capacity, the attack transport *Noble* (APA-218) was ordered to proceed to Songjin, north of Hungnam, with a couple merchant ships, a Japanese-manned LST

and a South Korean LST to take aboard most of the South Korean I Corps, sparing them a long march south. The evacuation ships left Songjin on 9 December, with the South Koreans on board, and were escorted safely by destroyers *Samuel N. Moore* (DD-747) and *Maddox* (DD-731).

Under covering fire from heavy cruiser *Saint Paul*, the evacuation of Wonsan was completed after nightfall on 9 December. Nothing had to be left behind or destroyed. The Wonsan evacuation ships took out 3,800 troops, 7,000 Korean refugees, 1,146 vehicles, and 10,000 tons of cargo, all in good order. The only thing left was a small salvage group attempting to recover classified material from the sunken minesweepers *Pirate* (AM-275) and *Pledge* (AM-277) but the work had been delayed by heavy seas. Instead, demolition charges were used to destroy the wrecks, which was complete by 13 December.

Initially, General MacArthur believed that with X Corps consolidated at Hamhung/Hungnam the force could hold out through the winter. Major General Almond (X Corps), Major General Smith (First Marine Division), and other senior commanders in the region agreed. However, the debacle in the west made it doubtful that the rest of Korea could be held at all, and it was likely that Seoul would fall to the Communists again. However, on 1 December, the U.S. Joint Chiefs had directed MacArthur to withdraw X Corps. On 7 December, there was a major meeting in Tokyo between senior commanders from Washington and in the Korean theater to discuss a revised plan by General MacArthur to attempt to hold Seoul by re-embarking X Corps and bringing it back around to the west coast of South Korea by sea to bolster Eighth Army's defense of Seoul. As discussions among senior Navy and Marine commanders ensued over the possibility of holding and resupplying a defensive perimeter at Hamhung/Hungnam, the JCS approved MacArthur's revised plan. This decision would be debated for years. Unlike in the west where the Chinese were still driving toward Seoul, the

Chinese Army in the east was essentially a spent force having suffered debilitating mass casualties courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps, naval aviation, and Siberian temperatures. Hamhung/Hungnam probably could have been held, and Seoul fell to the Chinese in January anyway.



*Hundreds of fuel drums await evacuation on the Hungnam docks, 14 December 1950. This view looks across the inner harbor from Blue Beach. USS LST-898 is in the center, with a LSU at right and the harbor entrance control frigate (PF) in the right distance. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-423913)*

## ***The Evacuation of Hungnam - December 1950***

The evacuation of X Corps from Hungnam was actually a massive logistics operation executed on short notice by the U.S. Navy, essentially an amphibious operation in reverse, something the Navy and Marine Corps had little experience in doing, at least in that direction. Troops that had arrived in Korea in three different ports and others that arrived overland from other parts of Korea all had to be funneled back out through a single harbor. The operation required embarking 110-120,000 men, 15,000 vehicles, and over 400,000 tons of supplies, including large stocks of ammunition and aviation fuel that had been built up to support the winter offensive. The operation would require multiple round trips by cargo ships from Hungnam to Pusan, as there was nowhere near enough shipping (or port capacity) to do it all at once.

There was considerable concern among Navy leaders that the evacuation would be vulnerable to enemy attack, with particular worry that Soviet submarines might intervene. Commander Naval Forces Far East, VADM Turner Joy reinstated a submarine patrol of La Perouse Strait to guard against Soviet submarines getting into open water east of Japan. On 12 December an ASW hunter-killer group (TG 96.7) commenced exercises off the east coast of Honshu, formed around escort carrier *Bairoko*, using U.S. submarines as a target. There wasn't much that could be done about Soviet submarines at Vladivostok getting into the Sea of Japan. Admiral Joy also directed that the SEVENTH Fleet be free to move about on short notice and not be tied down near the evacuation area. As a result, the commander of Task Force 90, RADM Doyle, was given responsibility and assets to provide air cover and surface gunfire support in the evacuation area. Fortunately, a Soviet submarine threat never materialized although there were multiple false alarms. (In the next H-Gram I'll discuss the USS *Mckean* (DD-784) 18 December 1950 incident, which some accounts claim sank a Soviet submarine).

Also of concern was the large number of high-performance jets operating from bases in Manchuria, which might rightly view the evacuation as a lucrative target. There was uncertainty as to whether the Soviets might have provided advanced attack aircraft. (The MiG-15 was designed as an interceptor to bring down B-29 strategic bombers and was ill suited for a ground attack role). Marine fighters based at Yonpo, near Hungnam, would provide the best defense. On 10 December, the Marine's first jet squadron, VMF-311 (a F9F Panther squadron that departed the U.S. with the Air Force fighters on escort carrier *Bairoko*) arrived at Yonpo, only to be withdrawn to Pusan three days later, along with the other Marine squadrons, as the perimeter was drawn down, leaving the airfield unprotected. As a result, the jet fighters embarked on the TF-77 carriers remained the best defense against an air attack, which like the submarine threat never

materialized. On 16 December, the light carrier *Bataan* arrived with Marine fighter squadron VMF-212 embarked, after offloading her cargo of USAF fighters at Yokosuka, Japan.

The Task Organization and force structure of the Hungnam evacuation rivaled those of the Inchon and Wonsan landings. Still designated Task Force 90, under the overall command of RADM Doyle, the core of the force was Task Group 90.2, which included three attack transports, three attack cargo ships, two fast transports, one patrol craft (control), three landing ship docks (LSD) with nine landing ship utility (LSU) embarked, 11 landing ship tanks (LST), 27 Scajap (Japanese-manned) LSTs, and dozens of civilian-manned Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) ships.

The Gunfire Support Group (TG 90.8), commanded by RADM Roscoe Hillenkoetter (who had just concluded a tour as the first director of the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency), embarked in heavy cruiser *Saint Paul* and four destroyers (which could be augmented by heavy cruiser *Rochester* (CA-124) and another destroyer) and three LSMR "Rocket Ships." The Blockade, Escort and Minesweeping Group (TG 95.2), commanded by RADM J. M. Higgins, embarked in *Rochester*, also included four destroyers, six patrol frigates, plus various minesweepers. TF-90 also included a repair and salvage element, a control element, and a tactical air control element. The destroyer *Duncan* (DD-874) was stationed as a radar picket ship 50 miles north of Hungnam as mountains blocked radar coverage to the north of ships in port; fortunately, *Duncan* faced no kamikazes. The fire support plan called for leaving as much artillery ashore as long as possible, with extensive preparations for surface ships to respond with naval gunfire as well.

In support of the evacuation was the SEVENTH Fleet, commanded by VADM Arthur Struble, which included the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 77). Task Group 77.1. The support group included the battleship *Missouri* (BB-63), and two light

cruisers. TG 77.2. The screening group included between 17 and 22 destroyers. TG 77.3, commanded by RADM E. C. Ewen, included the three fleet carriers *Philippine Sea*, *Leyte*, and *Princeton*, later joined by light carrier *Bataan*. TG 96.8, the escort carrier group, commanded by RADM R. W. Ruble, included escort carriers *Badoeng Strait* and *Sicily*, a light cruiser, and several destroyers.

The survivors of the First Marine Division, which had fought its way out of Chosin Reservoir, were the first to embark. By 14 December, the Marines were loaded on one APA, one AKA, three transports (AP), 13 LSTs, 3 LSDs, and seven time-chartered merchant ships, which sailed for Pusan on 15 December. The Marines then almost immediately engaged in combat with North Korean guerilla forces operating behind the UN lines in South Korea, and drove them back into North Korea. As soon as the Marine evacuation was complete, the Seventh Infantry Division began loading over the next week. As that was going on, 25,000 South Korean troops with 700 vehicles were loaded and on 17 December were transported to the port of Mukho on the east coast of South Korea south of the 38th Parallel, to set up blocking positions along the east coast road.

Loading at Hungnam continued day and night, even as the weather deteriorated. On 16 December, strong winds blew four landing craft medium (LCM) adrift and into unswept minefields. The unloading was so thorough that three liberty ships were filled with broken down vehicles to prevent the Chinese from salvaging them. In addition, 29,500 drums of fuel were loaded (only 200 left behind) and 9,000 tons of ammunition loaded, with only 1,000 tons of frozen dynamite left behind which was too dangerous to move. The fuel and dynamite would be put to use in the final demolition of the port. The most significant incidents during the evacuation were a chartered MSTs vessel that ran aground on the way out (tugs managed to get her off) and an in-bound

Japanese time-charter *Senzan Maru* missed the entrance channel and hit a mine, fortunately without casualties and the ship was repaired enough to make it back to Japan. A Korean LST with 7,400 refugees on board fouled a shaft and couldn't get off the beach and then developed additional complications, including a shortage of water and food for the refugees. Assisted by repair parties and divers from USS *Askari* (ARL-30) and USS *Conserver* (ARS-39), the LST was finally able to get underway on 19 December, accompanied by two escorts rigged for towing.

Despite repeated air attacks during the day, Chinese forces moving at night had reached the outskirts of Hungnam, but held back without making any significant attacks on the perimeter. On 15 December, *Saint Paul* commenced nighttime harassing fire of Chinese troop movements, a duty that *Rochester* also took up 17 December. The cruisers alternated harassing fire each night thereafter. In order to get rounds on the reverse slopes that the Chinese used to shield themselves from cruiser gunfire, the three LSMR "Rocket Ships" got in on the action on 21 December, launching a heavy barrage against a reported Chinese troop concentration. The volume of fire from the cruisers as well as destroyers was impressive; during the evacuation of Hungnam, 2,932 rounds of 8-inch and 18,637 rounds of 5-inch were fired at the Chinese, which kept them at bay.

By 18 December 1950, the Hungnam perimeter had been reduced to about a 5,000 yard radius. That day, Major General Almond and staff moved aboard RADM Doyle's flagship *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7) and responsibility for the defense of Hungnam passed to RADM Doyle. By 19 December, the embarkation of the Seventh Infantry Division was complete, which sailed for Pusan on 21 December. About three Army regiments and several artillery and anti-aircraft battalions remained ashore. The frequency of naval gunfire increased over the next days as the

shore artillery drew down. D-Day (in reverse) was set for 24 December.

However, a significant complication arose due to the sheer number of Korean civilian refugees flooding into Hungnam. During the earlier evacuation from Wonsan, the U.S. Navy had screened refugees for those deemed most at risk by a return of the Communists and still packed the ships with 7,000 refugees, as much as they could carry, which still left over 20,000 desperate civilians trying to break through barbed wire barriers to get aboard. About twice the population of Wonsan had gathered there in an attempt to get out. Hungnam was even worse.



Some of the 14,000 Korean refugees crowded on board the SS Meredith Victory in December 1950, as she transported them from Hungnam to South Korea. Courtesy of the U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph. (NH 95597)

With their villages occupied by the Chinese and then subsequently bombed, thousands of Korean refugees had followed the Marines down from the Chosin Reservoir area. An initial planning estimate of 25,000 refugees proved to be far short. 50,000 refugees had tried to catch the last train out of Hamhung to Hungnam. The LSTs provided by the Korean Navy were insufficient to meet the demand. LSTs were packed with at least 5,000 people (in one case over 10,000) and the chartered *Meredith Victory* got underway with 14,000 refugees crammed aboard. On the last

day of the evacuation, three *Victory* ships and two LSTs that were excess to U.S. evacuation needs were filled to capacity with 50,000 refugees. All told, 91,000 Korean refugees were evacuated by ship from Hungnam, which still left at last 90,000 more behind.

On 23 December, carrier *Valley Forge* arrived on her second deployment to Korea, after having made a five-day "portcall" on the west coast of the U.S. before being ordered to turn around and return to Korea. TF-77 thus reached peak strength of four fleet carriers, a battleship, and 22 destroyers. The same day destroyer *Charles S. Sperry* (DD-697) was conducting interdiction harassing fire at Songjin, to slow any Chinese advance down the coast road north of Hungnam. *Sperry* was hit three times by shore battery fire, which fortunately caused only minor damage and no casualties. The last of the 3rd Infantry Division was loading on 23 December. Battleship *Missouri* arrived to provide gunfire support in the event the Chinese attempted to overrun the last 10,000 infantry ashore.

Early morning on 24 December, seven LSTs were drawn up on the beach at Hungnam with numerous LVT amphibious vehicles on the flanking beaches. From 0800 to 1100, the surface ships laid down a barrage of gunfire outside the perimeter. At 1100, embarkation of the last troops ashore began, with all beaches secure by 1405. There was no observed Chinese activity, although one ammunition stockpile accidentally blew up, destroying some landing craft and causing a number of casualties. At 1410, RADM Doyle gave the order to destroy the port facility. Underwater Demolition Teams had rigged the port infrastructure with explosives. The result was a massive series of explosions that destroyed cranes, piers, and the walls of the inner harbor, as well as a towering pillar of smoke. It made for some spectacular photos. By 1436, all forces had cleared the harbor area. Chinese troops were first observed at a range of three miles inland, which was answered with some parting naval gunfire.



*Smoke rises over Hungnam's port area, as facilities and remaining UN supplies are demolished by explosives on the final day of evacuation operations, 24 December 1950. USS Begor (APD-127) and a motor launch are in the foreground. Official U.S. Navy Photograph, now in the collections of the National Archives. (80-G-K-11771)*

During the evacuation of Hungnam, 105,000 U.S. and Korean personnel, 91,000 Korean refugees, 17,500 vehicles and 350,000 tons of cargo were lifted out of the port and off the beach. Among the refugees brought out by sea were the future parents of the current president of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in. Most of the ships involved made two round trips and a number made more. Wars are not won by evacuation but many have been lost by the inability to do so—Athens at Syracuse, the British at Yorktown, the Germans in North Africa. At Dunkirk, 338,000 military personnel were saved from the Germans, although almost all equipment was left behind, and the ships suffered greatly from German air attack. The key, however, is that without control of the sea and the air over the sea, such a massive and nearly bloodless operation is not possible.

The contribution of Navy and Marine Corps aviation, in some of the worst flying weather imaginable, was pivotal in keeping the Chinese offensive from being an even bigger disaster than it was. In November, Navy and Marine aircraft flew a total of 6,725 sorties including 2,728 from the

carriers, 583 from the escort carriers, 473 non-carrier sorties, and 2,941 USMC sorties from shore. The cost was six aircraft lost to enemy action and 27 due to accident. In December, Navy and Marine aircraft flew a total of 6,781 combat sorties, including 3,630 from the carriers, 1,470 from the escort carriers, 535 non-carrier sorties, and 1,146 USMC sorties from shore. The cost was 16 aircraft lost to enemy action, almost all to ground fire and 32 by accident.

The Battle of Chosin Reservoir is rightly regarded as one of the U.S. Marine Corps' finest hours. In the face of overwhelming odds and a nearly impossible tactical situation, the Marines retained their discipline and fighting spirit, effectively defeating the Chinese army even as they withdrew to the sea as ordered. Marines were awarded 14 Medals of Honor (seven posthumously) during the advance to, and withdrawal from, Chosin Reservoir (of 42 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines during the entire war). Two members of U.S. Army's Task Force Faith, including Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith himself, were awarded posthumous Medals of Honor while serving under First Marine Division operational control. The commander of the First Marine Division, Major General Oliver Smith, should be regarded as one of the great combat leaders of all time. The First Marine Division was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for Chosin Reservoir and the *Ticonderoga*-class guided missile cruiser USS *Chosin* (CG-65), commissioned in 1991, was named in honor of those who fought there. Task Force Faith (Regimental Combat Team 31), which suffered over 90 percent killed, wounded, or captured, was not originally included in the Presidential Unit Citation. However additional Chinese documentation became available in which Chinese commanders attributed TF Faith with breaking the back of their attacks at Chosin, and in 2001 the U.S. Navy approved TF Faith for the Presidential Unit Citation.

The next H-Gram will cover Naval Operations during the "Third Phase" Chinese Offensive, which resulted in the loss of Seoul again.

Sources include; *Devotion: An Epic Story of Heroism, Friendship, and Sacrifice*, by Adam Makos: Ballantine Books, 2015, a great book on Jesse Brown and Thomas Hudner that is being made into a movie. *Such Men as These: The Story of the Navy Pilots Who Flew the Deadly Skies Over Korea*, by David Sears: Da Capo Press, 2010. "Rescuing the Frozen Chosen," by Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, *Aviation History Magazine*, March 2017. *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](http://history.navy.mil). "Naval Battles of the Korean War," by Edward J. Marolda, at [history.navy.mil](http://history.navy.mil). *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, by James A. Field: U.S. Navy History Division, 1962."

# H-056-2: Desert Shield/ Desert Storm Part 5 (December 1990)

H-056.2

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

September 2020

**Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm—Part  
Five: December 1990-January 1991**

H-056.2 Desert Shield/Desert Storm Part 5 (December  
1990)

Samuel J. Cox, Director, Naval History and Heritage  
Command

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

Operation Desert Shield. September 1990—January  
1991.

## **Early December 1990. Mina Salman, Bahrain.**

My nose was seriously out of joint as I listened to the briefing given by the Navy captain from Washington, D.C. He wasn't even an intelligence officer, yet he was briefing much the same material that I had given in previous briefings to the staff. By the end of the brief, I saw the brilliance of it. Because he was an aviator, wearing wings on his chest, he could use the intelligence to do something I really couldn't, recommend to Vice Admiral Arthur, the new Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the most combat experienced aviator in the Navy, that we discard years of training and doctrine and use completely new and untried tactics for air strikes into Iraq. Only another aviator had the credibility to get away with that one.



*Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, commander, Seventh Fleet, and commander, U.S. Navy Central Command, poses for a photograph during Operation Desert Storm, 3/1/1991. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)*

Providing intelligence support for planning a bombing campaign in Iraq occupied much of my time throughout the fall. Although we had significant gaps in our knowledge of Iraqi Air Defense capability, such as how many mobile SA-6 surface-to-air missile batteries the Iraqis really had, we had very detailed intelligence on key parts of it. During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq bought a completely new Air Defense Command and Control System from France (called "KARI" - "Iraq", in French, backwards) to replace their older Soviet designed system, although they still relied primarily on their Soviet-provided SAM systems, particularly SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 missiles. Fortunately, the French were on our side during

Desert Shield and Desert Storm; their aircraft would be flying along with ours against the very Air Defense Command and Control System that they had sold to the Iraqis. Not being stupid, the French shared what they knew about the KARI system, which was just about everything. As a result, we had very detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the KARI system, and most importantly, how to exploit the weaknesses. The KARI was a very sophisticated system, better than what the Soviets exported around the world, but it could be saturated and overwhelmed with the right electronic warfare and jamming tactics.

The Navy also had new weapons systems that we didn't have in Lebanon, such as the High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM), that could home in on Iraqi SAM acquisition and guidance radars, effectively turning the tables on the SAM operators, since the HARM could get to the SAM radar systems before the SAM missiles could get to the target aircraft. If the Iraqis turned on their SAM radars to try to shoot U.S. aircraft, they took a great risk that they would be hit by a HARM. With the understanding of the weaknesses of the KARI system, new jamming and defensive electronic countermeasure systems, and the new suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) systems, like the HARM, we assessed it would be possible to degrade the Iraqi air defense missile network, a network that with the KARI system was even better than the Egyptian air defense system that shot down over 100 Israeli jet aircraft during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The strike planners I was supporting began to believe that we could fly jets within much of the dense Iraqi SAM coverage, with a reasonable chance of surviving.

Unfortunately, the Iraqis also had well over 5,000 anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) pieces, by far the most dense AAA coverage in the world. Although "smart" Iraqi weapons such as radar-guided SAMs could be "tricked" by our jamming and electronic countermeasures, "dumb" weapons like AAA

were immune. Once an AAA round was fired, nothing could keep it from going wherever it was aimed. Whether or not a plane got hit by AAA was purely a matter of altitude and probability, the more lead that was fired into the air, the more likely that a jet would fly into it and get hit. Based on my description of the Iraqi AAA threat, our strike planners soon realized that aircraft flying at low altitudes near urban areas or military targets had a very high probability of getting hit by AAA. Unfortunately, our primary tactics called for our aircraft to fly very low. The tactics had been devised during the Cold War, when the low altitude AAA threat was considered the lesser of two evils, compared to the highly lethal medium and high altitude Soviet SAM threat.

Meanwhile an organization in Washington D.C., called SPEAR, was analyzing the same intelligence we were, and wrestling with the implications. SPEAR had been established a couple years before the start of Desert Storm at the Navy Operational Intelligence Center in Suitland, Maryland, and was an outgrowth of lessons learned from the botched Lebanon strikes in 1983, and the somewhat lackluster Libyan strikes in 1986. The idea behind SPEAR was to bring in aviators (pilots and naval flight officers) to the intelligence center, give them access to all the most sensitive and highly classified intelligence, so that they could study it and devise operational countermeasures, and produce reports at lower classifications that could be widely shared by the rest of the aviation community. It was a great idea, and worked very well.

At the time of Desert Shield, SPEAR was led by Captain "Carlos" Johnson, an A-7 attack pilot with

*F/A-18C Hornet aircraft fly in formation over the desert during Operation Desert Storm. The aircraft in front is armed with cluster bombs, AIM-7 Sparrow missiles, and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles, while the Hornet to its immediate left is armed with AIM-7 Sparrow, AIM-9 Sidewinder, and AGM-88 HARM missiles. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)*

combat experience from Vietnam, and he came out to personally brief Vice Admiral Arthur and other senior Navy and Air Force leaders on his

findings. I didn't find anything especially new in the intelligence in his brief, but his conclusion was stunning, and the sound of wind whistling through teeth could be heard in the briefing room.

Captain Johnson stated that we could defeat the KARI and SAM systems with our new capabilities, but there was nothing we could do about the AAA. He recommended to Admiral Arthur that we should throw out our standard tactics and fly our strike aircraft above 15-20,000 feet, above the effective AAA altitude, but right in the heart of the SA-2/SA-3/SA-6 envelope, which he argued could be defeated by HARMs and jamming. This would have been considered suicide tactics only a year or so earlier, and now Captain Johnson was arguing that, based on the intelligence and new electronic warfare tactics, our aircraft would have a relatively "safe" sanctuary above 20,000 feet.

There were clearly a lot of aviators in the briefing room who still thought it was suicide. If I had made such a radical tactical recommendation, I would have quickly been shown the door. The discussion was heated, but Captain Johnson eventually carried the day with Admiral Arthur, and the fact he was an experienced aviator made all the difference. Then he had to convince the carrier group and airwing commanders, and hardest of all, he had to convince the U.S. Air Force and General Horner, the Joint Force Air Component Commander, who was in charge of the air and strike campaign planning. It was an uphill fight, but Captain Johnson eventually prevailed, for the most part.

On the first night of the war, one Navy airwing, *Saratoga's*, opted to stick with the traditional low-altitude strike tactics; they flew into a buzz saw AAA barrage at H3 airfield in western Iraq, losing one A-6 over the target, another heavily damaged A-6 crashed in Saudi Arabia while trying vainly to get back to the carrier, and several others were shot up. Based on the post-mission pilot debriefings describing the astonishing density and intensity of the Iraqi AAA, it was a near

miracle *Saratoga* airwing's losses weren't worse. After that strike, Admiral Arthur issued orders taking away the option from airwing commanders.

It turned out that Captain Johnson was right and the new tactics worked. In my view, Captain Johnson and SPEAR, and the intelligence they used, were responsible for saving dozens if not hundreds of U.S. and Coalition pilots and aircraft that would otherwise have been shot down by Iraqi AAA. He was a real hero of Desert Storm.

Several years later, when Captain Johnson made admiral, he gave his captain's shoulder boards and insignia to me, which I have worn with pride. (2020 update; I passed them on to then-Commander Trey Whitworth, then the U.S. Navy SEAL Development Group (DEVGRU) N2 and now the Joint Staff J2, and he subsequently passed them on.)



*Three Attack Squadron 72 (VA-72) A-7E Corsair aircraft pass over the desert while returning to the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67) in the Red Sea after a strike on Iraqi targets during Operation Desert Storm. Each aircraft is armed with an AIM-9 Sidewinder missile; the aircraft in the foreground is also carrying an AGM-88 HARM high-speed anti-radiation missile on its outboard wing pylon. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)*

### **December 1990. Mina Salman, Bahrain.**

Within the first 30 seconds of the brief, it was clear that we had made a serious tactical error on how to brief the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC), Lieutenant General Horner, on the capabilities of the Navy's Tomahawk land

attack cruise missile. Within three minutes, the briefing was over, as Vice Admiral Arthur called a halt to General Horner's unexpected attack on our briefer, asking the Air Force general to, in effect, "take it inside" the Admiral's office where they could settle it man-to-man.

As the two three-stars left the briefing room, the rest of us on the NAVCENT staff seethed with anger. We had assumed that the Air Force had left the Tomahawk missile off the Strike Plan (the Master Air Attack Plan) because they did not understand the capabilities of the relatively new system that had not yet been tested in battle. General Horner's comments, which dripped with arrogance and condescension, made it obvious that he had complete technical mastery of the Tomahawk's capability, and despite his understanding, he had absolutely no intention of including it in the plan. He wasn't sidelining a key Navy capability out of ignorance, but because he could.

The Navy was having a very hard time adapting to the new official joint doctrine, stemming from the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation mandating more "jointness" in U.S. military operations, which was radically changing the way the Navy was used to conducting air and strike operations. In the past, the Navy and the Air Force would divide up the target country by space and/or time. The Navy would have an area and block of time to do its thing, and the Air Force would have an area and block of time to do its thing. Within their assigned areas and time, each service operated pretty autonomously. An example was the Libya strikes in 1986. Although the strikes were simultaneous, Navy aircraft off the carriers struck targets in eastern Libya, while Air Force FB-111s flying from the United Kingdom struck targets in western Libya, although the Navy provide all the fighter cover and suppression of enemy defense (SEAD) capability for both parts of the operation. Under the new doctrine, the Joint Force Air Component Commander was responsible for running the entire air campaign and integrating

all the Service Components into a coherent and efficient operation, at least in theory. From the Navy perspective, it would have been okay if the Joint Force Air Component Commander was actually "Joint," and the new doctrine did state that the Service Component that provided the "preponderance" of the air power and the best means to command and control the air war would be designated as the JFACC. The reality was that under any conceivable scenario, the Air Force Air Component Commander would be "dual-hatted" as the JFACC. A typical JFACC staff would consist of 95% Air Force personnel and a handful of liaison officers (LNO's) from other Services, who were usually scrounged from other commands, and typically treated by the Air Force like the outsiders they were. Although it certainly seemed logical that the Air Force should be in charge of the Air War, the reality is that the Air Force had a very good understanding of Air Force goals and objectives in the Air War, but very little experience or understanding of the roles, missions, and requirements for naval aviation.

The JFACC's primary tool for managing the air campaign was the "Air Tasking Order" (ATO). Under the ATO process the Navy (and other Services) had to determine how many aircraft sorties were required for defensive purposes. This allowed the Navy to fly fighters to conduct fleet air defense and to conduct other air missions over water. All other air sorties were designated as "excess" and were available for use by the JFACC as the JFACC saw fit. Any mission flown by the Navy over land was under the control and direction of the JFACC. The Navy was allowed to nominate land targets to be struck, but the JFACC made the decisions as to which targets would be struck, in what priority, and by what asset. For example, the Navy could nominate a missile boat in port as a target, and the JFACC could choose to strike it with Navy jets, or B-52s, or British Tornados, or any other aircraft—or chose not to strike it at all, in which case all the Navy could do was resubmit the missile boat as a target for the next ATO cycle. For any target that was not on or

over the sea, the JFACC could and did dictate to the Navy what targets to hit, when to hit them, and with what weapons. The JFACC also controlled all the “big-wing” tanker assets, which in Desert Storm was the single most crucial factor in limiting the amount of Navy strike sorties that could be flown. Even though the Navy had actually paid for 10 KC-10 tankers in the early 1980s, the Air Force had total control of how all tanker assets were used, and the Navy frequently was left high and dry. All the directions for air missions and tanking were published by the JFACC in the ATO.

The ATO “cycle” took 72 hours from target nomination to mission execution. This worked fine for fixed strategic targets that didn’t move. There were provisions in the ATO process for more rapid and flexible targeting of mobile tactical targets, but the JFACC had complete control over when to implement those processes, and would only do so when it suited the JFACC. With an air campaign as large as Desert Storm, the ATO was a huge, unwieldy document that choked Navy communications systems. It is widely known that the Navy had to resort to flying S-3 aircraft into Riyadh to pick up hard copies of the ATO and fly them out to the carriers, but for some reason it is much less well known that the Air Force did the same to ensure reliable delivery to its dispersed air wings and squadrons.

In the run up to Desert Storm, General Schwarzkopf effectively abdicated all responsibility for the air campaign to the air component commander, Lieutenant General Horner, and left it to Horner to resolve any disputes that arose between the Services over the use of air power. Horner used (some in the Navy would say abused) his authority to the fullest. Although Navy LNO’s attended the appropriate JFACC joint targeting boards and other joint boards, in reality all the key targeting decisions were made in a USAF-only organization embedded in the JFACC called the “Black Hole” led by Brigadier General Buster Glosson, which could and frequently did overturn or ignore

targeting decisions made by the joint boards. The Air Force ran the Desert Storm campaign their way, with little more than lip service to other Service needs. Although Tomahawk missiles were incorporated into the air campaign, it took intervention from the highest levels in Washington to force the JFACC to do it. Desert Storm was the first real test of the new JFACC doctrine, and from the Navy perspective, it proved to be everything the Navy feared. (2020 comment: It got better in later campaigns.)



*A boxer is tended to in his corner between rounds during a boxing match aboard the battleship USS Wisconsin (BB-64). The match is part of the ship's holiday sports festival, which drew participants from Wisconsin and several other ships on station in the area for Operation Desert Shield, 12/24/1990. (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921-2008)*

### **Late December 1990. Manama, Bahrain.**

As we finished dessert at the staff Christmas party in a hotel in Bahrain, the operations officer suggested we should sing some carols. There wasn't exactly an overwhelming enthusiastic response, but we dutifully launched into a truly lame rendition of Silent Night. There was an awkward silence as we finished the first carol. I suspect we all had much the same thought, “Who are we kidding? We all know we’re going to war. And besides, I still have a ton of work to do tonight.” The Christmas party was over. Wordlessly we shuffled out, heading back to the ship.

Four-and-a-half months of incredibly intense work had pretty much numbed us all. I remember

watching and reading about all the frenetic diplomatic activity in the last weeks of December and early January to avert war. I don't remember feeling much emotion about it. It was simply something beyond my control. I think the prevailing attitude on the staff was mild hope that the diplomats would pull some sort of "rabbit out of the hat" miracle, but we all doubted it. What none of us wanted was interminable delay as the diplomatic process ground on forever, leaving us in limbo as to whether we would ever go back to our families in Japan. No one wanted war, but most of us were resigned to the prospect. The expression, "The way home is through Baghdad," was heard with increasing frequency, along with, "Let's get on with it." It was clear from the pace of the buildup that we would reach peak strength by mid-January, and most of us assumed the war would start around then. For my part, I believed the diplomatic activity was just delaying the inevitable. The quote from Mr. Spock in Star Trek seemed appropriate, "Diplomacy; the art of prolonging a crisis."

A few days after the Christmas party, on Christmas Day, several of us went out into town for a quick dinner. We were all feeling tired and glum. So as not to compound our misery by reminding ourselves of Christmas and home, I suggested we go to an Arab restaurant instead of one of the western establishments in Manama. We all agreed. As we walked in the restaurant for a meal of shawarma and kabobs, the place was packed with local Arabs, but was decked out in green and red bunting and tinsel, complete with Santa Claus, tree, and "Christmas Special" mezze dinner. I guess the proprietor was a Lebanese Christian or something. The surprise incongruity actually lifted our spirits, at least for a short while. I did learn a valuable lesson during the dinner; in dim light, cauliflower and sheep's brain look nearly identical, but the taste is quite different. Yuk.

### **Early January, 1991. Mina Salman, Bahrain.**

"Gee, as if we don't have enough to do," muttered someone as we reviewed the message. The bad situation in Somalia resulting from the collapse of the Siad Barre government had taken a dramatic turn for the worse as inter-clan fighting raged in the capital of Mogadishu. The U.S. ambassador was asking for urgent emergency evacuation for the U.S. embassy staff as well as numerous foreign personnel from other embassies.

We all believed that war in Kuwait was only a few days away. A non-combatant evacuation (NEO) of Mogadishu would have to be planned and executed in very little time. The plan turned out to be daring, the execution even more so. Two U.S. amphibious ships, *Guam* (LPH-9) and *Trenton* (LPD-14) were tasked to steam from their station in the Gulf of Oman toward Somalia as fast as they could. We struggled to try to get intelligence about Mogadishu to *Guam* and *Trenton*, which didn't have the same communication and intelligence capability as the aircraft carriers. I'm not convinced they actually received everything we sent, but we gave it our best shot.

Two CH-53 heavy lift helicopters, with embarked Navy SEALs and Marine Security Force, were launched at extreme range from Mogadishu. The flight was an epic. The only way the helos would be able to make it all the way to Mogadishu and have enough fuel to fly back to the *Guam* would be with two risky nighttime air-to-air refuelings from a Marine KC-130 tanker, something that hadn't been done before. The plan also required *Guam* and *Trenton* to keep closing Mogadishu at maximum speed, or else the helos wouldn't be able to make it back with a maximum passenger load. The dangerous refuelings were successful and the helos pressed on. One of them suffered a broken hydraulic line, spraying the whole interior of the helo with hydraulic fluid; the crew pressed on anyway, struggling to fix the leak in flight. Dodging ground fire, the helos had some difficulty finding the designated helo landing

zone. In the end, the mission was a complete success, evacuating the U.S. ambassador, the Soviet ambassador, and over 250 other western staff, and even delivering a baby on ship, as Mogadishu descended into the chaos and starvation that led directly to the ill-starred U.S. and UN intervention in 1992-94.

There was little time for elation. *Guam* and *Trenton* were ordered to return to station at maximum speed. All of us turned immediately to full focus on impending combat operations in the Gulf, which is why my recollection of some of the details of the Somalia NEO, deemed Operation Eastern Exit, is a bit fuzzy. I do recall having a bit of a juvenile gloating reaction. Throughout 1990, the U.S. Atlantic Fleet had been preparing for a potential NEO from Monrovia, Liberia, designated Operation Sharp Edge, which they executed just after Saddam invaded Kuwait, the first in a series of Liberia evacuations. For a year, the airwaves seemed flooded with messages about preparations for Sharp Edge, one would have thought it was the biggest thing to happen in the Atlantic Fleet in a decade. I couldn't help comparing Sharp Edge with the far more dangerous Eastern Exit and being reminded of the Army recruiting commercial, "We do more before breakfast than most people do all day."

My version was, "We do more in NAVCENT in two days than the Atlantic Fleet does all year." (A statement that while exaggerated still holds mostly true today.) (2020 update: yes, this is definitely a cheap shot.)

In another couple days, *Blue Ridge* was underway for battle. Desert Shield was over.

### ***In the next episode - (Part 6 January 1991) Onset of Operation Desert Storm.***

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. Also, *Shield and Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf*, by Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller: Naval Historical Center, 1998.)