

DESRONNINE and the ODYSSEY of the "SITTING DUCKS"

The following story, includes the U.S. Navy Destroyers in DesDiv 91 as follows, USS DEHAVEN DD727, USS MANSFIELD DD728, USS SWENSON DD729 and USS COLLETT DD730 including USS GURKE DD783 and USS HENDERSON DD785, jointly in Task Force Group Element (90.62).

In 1949, I was transferred from "Cruiser" duty to "Destroyer" duty and boarded USS COLLETT DD730 as Gunners Mate First Class and assigned to the first division, with duties directed to the care and maintenance of the Main Battery and 40MM Bofors. The post war years had not been helpful and much work was needed to bring ordnance up to better standards. This was done in short order, with the help of strikers and subordinates.

Finally Collett received orders to proceed into the "Formosa Straits" and join the 7th fleet for patrol duty. This duty was very boring and some times a rough sea was welcome, when "ROPE YARN SUNDAY" was declared. The best of good times was had, when we entered the ports of Hong Kong, Manila and Olongapo. After months of patrol duty, Collett was ordered to the port of Sasebo Japan, for more patrol duty and Japanese ship boarding inspections. I was part of the inspection team, armed with a 45 caliber pistol and Thompson (SMG), we searched from keel to top mast for contraband. This was also very boring duty, but liberty in Sasebo was considered compensation.

All things changed dramatically on 25, June 1950, DesDiv 91 received emergency orders to proceed to the port of Pusan South Korea, in company with a U.S. Navy Cruiser and Destroyers. That night, the Task Force was challenged by four North Korean Torpedo Boats, they were dispatched post haste into "Davey Jones Locker" by radar controlled gun fire. This was the first battle (Navy) action in Korea.

After arriving in Pusan, Collett was ordered to proceed on to Pohang-Dong, for gun fire support missions. The U.S. Army First Cavalry (24th) Horsehead Division was pinned down and under heavy enemy counter attack and requested immediate help. Our Gunnery officer and Executive officer, LCDR Rue O'neil was an excellent fire control plotter and soon became the scourge of enemy troop concentrations and tanks.

U.S. Army spotters frequently requested our gun fire support, in particular, when the U.S. Navy Heavy Cruiser, USS ST PAUL CA73 inadvertently, fired 8-inch projectiles among U.S. Army troops. It was not unusual for DesDiv 91 Destroyers to attack enemy troops at point blank range. From my birds eye view, on Mt 45 I could see our 40MM and 5"/38 projectile exploding among enemy troops, which was not a pretty sight to see. Which brings to mind, targets of opportunity, especially a troop train which DesDiv 91 had tracked and waited for before dawn, as the train approached the tunnel entrance, we blew it up, then blew up the rear tunnel, trapping the troop train in between tunnels. I could see rail cars and soldiers disappear in huge massive explosions, with other soldiers trying to escape the deadly hail of 40MM shells raking them mercilessly. It was pure and simple, a slaughter.

Seeking targets of opportunity, performing Gun Fire support missions and

rescuing downed pilots became routine and very exciting. Downed pilots greatest fear was ditching in the ice cold water, knowing his life expectancy was three minutes in the water. Of all six pilots rescued by Collett, only one did not survive, he was already (DOA). All rescued pilots showed their gratitude by searching every corner in Collett for new hands to shake, for saving their lives. Captain Robert H. Close, (C.O.) in Collett was a very daring officer, it seemed like he was never in "close" enough to the enemy. Our nick name and unknown to him was "Too Damn Close For Comfort". I presume he acquired this trait during WWII as Captain of the Submarine "Pilot Fish". I believe that he was surprised, when we first came under Soviet Radar controlled artillery fire, which was extremely accurate, except in elevation, enemy projectiles were screeching directly above Collett. On one particular Gun Fire Support Mission, all hands were at G.Q. for almost 72 hours, eating baloney sandwiches and endless cups of black coffee. Upon securing from G.Q. Captain Close ordered cooks to make a steak and egg breakfast for all hands. Most men were too tired to go to breakfast. I fell asleep on gun station. Guess what? We had steak and eggs for "supper".

Prior to the battle of Wonsan, Collett had a very dangerous job to perform, in patrolling the outer harbor. The enemy had planted over 3 thousand soviet mines in the inner and outer harbor periphery, consisting of Contact, Pressure, Radio, Magnetic, Electrical and Acoustic type mines. Navy Carrier pilots attempted to explode the mines by dropping fifty tons of bombs in the harbor. Navy minesweepers were sweeping all day long. Those sailors were the real heros. They used mattresses as cushions against explosions, throughout the Bridge. One day, I was watching Mine Sweepers USS PIRATE and USS PLEDGE on sweeping operations when suddenly, within minutes, both sweepers struck or set off mines which disintegrated both sweepers. Those sailors were among the very brave and deserved high valor awards for their efforts.

In September 1950 USS COLLETT in DesDiv 91 received top secret orders to proceed to the West coast of Korea. Scuttlebutt was rampant. On our journey, we missed Typhoon "Jane" in the sea of Japan and barely missed Typhoon "Keiza" in the Yellow Sea, with winds of 125 miles per hour. What we didn't know, was that we were now assigned into Task Force Group Element (90.62) and had orders for a top secret mission. We entered Flying Fish Channel from the Yellow Sea on 13, September 1950, with Captain Sears in flagship USS MANSFIELD DD728 leading in column, with USS COLLETT DD730, USS SWENSON DD729, USS DEHAVEN DD727, USS GURKE DD783 and USS HENDERSON DD785. I was on Gun Watch on Mt 45 during "Condition II" When suddenly I heard gun fire ahead, G.Q. sounded and saw that Mansfield was now firing to her starboard side, aiming at floating contact mines. I was ordered to commence fire on the exposed contact mines with 40MM Mt 45. I counted eight mines and saw two explode, My ship mate was using a Browning Auto. Rifle on the mines at the same time. Flying Fish Channel is very narrow and shallow. If any ship had sunk, it would have blocked ingress into Inchon Harbor and caused cancellation of the (13,000) First Marine Division Landing Force, Which was set for D-Day, 15, September 1950. After safely negotiating through Flying Fish Channel, A navy helicopter dropped a combat photographer with tripod, camera on our bow. His duty was to photograph all enemy gun fire and record their positions. On approach to South Wolmi, Captain Close revealed our top secret orders to the crew, as follows, six Destroyers would surround Wolmi-Do Island and draw enemy artillery fire, in order to locate all enemy gun positions, which would be a point blank range

threat, to the "First Marine Division" on D-Day. All United Nations Intelligence was blind with regard to the fortifications on Wolmi-Do. General Douglas MacArthur and Naval strategists planned this operation with one thing in mind, that was to take a high risk with the six Destroyers, to locate the fortifications on Wolmi-Do. They knew one thing for sure, Wolmi-Do was the key to capturing the city of Inchon. Prior to entering Inchon Harbor, the six Destroyers received an historic message from Rear Admiral John M Higgins in the Cruiser USS TOLEDO, with the following direct orders, Quote: "Prepare To Repel All Boarders" an order not given since the days of wooden ships and sail. Rear Admiral Higgins realized that Inchon Harbor had a high tide of 32 feet and an ebb tide that extended for three miles of exposed mud flats. The Destroyers would be exposed from the keel up, if they were sunk in the harbor and would invite enemy raiders to attack and capture the Destroyers and their crews. For this reason, all Destroyer Captains gave immediate orders to issue small arms, rifles, machine guns and grenades, to Officers and men. Captain Close now steered course for Wolmi-Do and closed to 800 yards.

I was watching some enemy soldiers running up the causeway, towards the lighthouse and thought that they might be "Spotters". I reported them to Director Control. Through my head phones, I heard that Collett had dropped the anchor. We were in 5 fathoms of water and facing Wolmi-Do portside to. The other five Destroyers had also dropped their anchors. We were now at "Bore Sight" range, or for better words, "Sitting Ducks". We soon started to receive rifle fire, but had strict orders not to fire under any circumstance, until Captain Close gave the order. We were to sit and wait until the enemy fired in total, so that our photographer and Officers could take photos and compass bearings on all exposed artillery. This was the main purpose of our mission. At 1255 hours, a trigger happy artillery man fired the first shot, USS DEHAVEN was the first Destroyer to return fire, wiping out an artillery position, the battle was on. It was almost impossible to locate the hidden artillery with your naked eye. As I watched, I could see a solid row of red and yellow flashes along the face of Wolmi-Do. It appeared as if the whole island was on fire. At long last, Captain Close gave the order to commence rapid continuous fire. The artillery had found our range and a lucky shot had struck our oil storage compartments, another one had entered CIC wounding several men and knocking out our main battery computer, which forced the main battery into Local Control. My gun crew was made up of untested men in combat, they were now facing death as a reality and it showed. Only a fool would deny his fear of death. It seemed like the battle would never end, the air was thick with enemy shells screeching over our heads. One of my second loaders attempted to run out of the gun mount, he was so scared, that he froze, when I ordered him to return. As I leaped down to grab him, a shell whistled over my head where I had been standing between the gun barrels of my Quad 40MM gun Mt. I often wondered if that incident had saved my life. The second loader was "very" lucky to receive only a severe verbal reprimand from the Director Control Officer. When I looked astern, I could see that Mt 53 had both rifles on fire due to the intense heat generated by rapid continuous fire. I was also concerned about the countless cans of 40MM ready ammo. on the poop deck and outside of the splinter shield that could explode, if hit by an enemy shell. All of a sudden, I heard a familiar sound, I looked up and saw navy dive bombers, (Sky Raiders) screaming in on Wolmi-Do with Napalm and Bombs that was a sight to behold and appreciate. The battle was now ferocious with rifle and machine gun fire hitting and passing overhead. The Dive Bombers couldn't

have come at a better time. As we were firing, I noticed that my gun Mt. was firing above zero elevation and soon realized that Collett was listing to portside, due to enemy shells striking our fuel compartments. My first thought, was that I was going in the drink again, but I wouldn't have to worry about sharks. Unknown to us, we were dueling with the 918th North Korean Peoples Army Artillery Battery. On board the USS SWENSON DD729 LT Swenson was on the bridge taking compass bearings of enemy artillery, when he was struck by an enemy shell and killed instantly. I knew him to be a handsome and happy officer, who liked to be with the crew, especially involved with them in athletics. Ironically, his ship, USS SWENSON was named after his uncle, Captain Lyman K. Swenson, who was killed on board his ship, the USS ATLANTA (CL51) with a crew of 700 of which 690 were also killed. At the same time, her sister ship, USS JUNEAU (CL52) lost 172 men KIA including the five "Sullivan Brothers". This all occurred on an unlucky night, Friday 13 November 1942 in the Battle Of Guadalcanal.

After almost one hour of continuous fire, Collett signaled for help from sister ships, Commodore Allen, now ordered all Destroyers to withdraw from the battle, Collett was denied help, when all of the Destroyers were ordered to withdraw independently. Captain Robert H. Close was concerned about damage control and the possibility of sinking in the harbor. He ordered full speed astern and commenced hoisting the anchor at the same time. Soon I saw our sister ships speed by on our stern, waving and cheering loudly, they could see that we were in trouble. Still under fire, Collett maneuvered to the outer harbor and seaward. The task of caring for the wounded and repairing battle damage continued. Preparations were made for another assault on Wolmi-Do and Inchon. The First Marine Division (13,000) landed on Wolmi-Do and Inchon on D-Day 15, September 1950. Wolmi-Do had been reduced to flat Real Estate, due in large part to the very accurate gun fire directed by the (anchored) "Sitting Duck Destroyers", while dueling at point blank range, within (1,000) yards from enemy artillery. Our 5"/38 main gun battery had a range in excess of nine miles. Dueling at under (1,000) yards with this kind of fire power and enemy artillery must be considered to be suicidal if anchored and denied use of speed (34 knots). TFGE 90.62 had expended multi thousands of rounds of high explosives at enemy artillery, in a toe to toe battle of continuous fire that lasted for almost one hour.

When the 5th and 7th Marines of the First Marine Division captured Wolmi-Do, they said that the remaining NKPA troops on the Island were unfit for combat, due to the extreme shock effects caused by the relentless and furious gunfire of the six Destroyers, aided by U.S. Navy "Skyraider" dive bombers.

The very important and crucial role played by the "Sitting Duck Destroyers", was without question, one of the most daring, extreme and extraordinary Destroyer actions in U.S. Naval History.

The battle ended at 1347 hours on D Day Minus 2. 13, September 1950.

The officers and crews of the "Sitting Duck Destroyers" in TFGE 90.62 faced a one way mission with courage and determination, and over came tremendous odds, due to "Good Training", "Good Work", "Good Shooting" and last but not least, Good Luck.

The above story is in large part, my eye witness account of the battle from

my exposed battle station on 40MM Gun Mount 45.

I served on USS COLLETT DD730 from 1949 to 1952 during the Korean War as
Gunners Mate First Class, Serial # 382-47-67 and received an Honorable U.S.
Navy Discharge on 26, July 1952.

Sincerely Yours

Joe Carrillo