

# North Korean Invasion and

Early on the morning of 25 June 1950, the hills around the 38th parallel reverberated with artillery fire. This caused little alarm among the American advisers, however, because of the numerous border incidents that had occurred there during the past year. This complacency soon changed to shock as they discovered North Korean combat forces in their midst. When U.S. Army Captain Joseph R. Darrigo neared the railroad station at Kaesong, five miles south of the parallel, he discovered several NKPA battalions detraining! Overnight, the Communists had connected their rail lines to those in the south and rushed troops forward. He now knew that this was no border incident—this was an invasion!

By early afternoon, NKPA infantry and armored formations, heavily supported by aircraft and artillery, were attacking all along the border. As T-34 tanks spearheaded the main assault on Seoul, landing forces stormed ashore at several places on the east coast and outflanked ROK positions.

Some of the South Korean units fought well, but many did not. None was equipped or trained to hold off a mechanized assault. Surprised as they were, most of the ROK units disintegrated or retreated in the face of the powerful offensive. At least one South Korean unit, however, scored a victory over the attackers. After putting to sea with the few other

combatants of the ROK navy, the newly arrived submarine chaser *Bak Du San* discovered a 1,000-ton armed North Korean steamer off the east coast. In a vicious surface battle, the South Koreans sank the steamer, whose 600 embarked soldiers were meant to land and seize Pusan. This proved to be one of the most important fights of the campaign for it prevented the short-term loss of this key port, soon to be vital to the survival of UN forces in Korea.

Meanwhile, chaos reigned in Seoul. With South Korean defenses around the capital crumbling, U.S. Ambassador John J. Muccio ordered the evacuation of American dependents. Protected by the destroyers *Mansfield* (DD 728) and *De Haven* (DD 727), the Norwegian freighter SS *Rheinholdt* took on the evacuees at Seoul's port, *Inchon*, and headed for Japan. In the next several days, Air Force transports flew other Americans and UN personnel

out of nearby Kimpo and Suwon airfields. During these evacuation operations, escorting U.S. fighters shot down seven North Korean fighter and attack planes.

Even though surprised by the North Korean invasion, President Truman and his advisers in Washington took immediate action to oppose it. Truman called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to consider the North Korean aggression. The council met only 23 hours after the start of the invasion and it discussed a resolution advocated by the United States that condemned the North Korean aggression, demanded an end to hostilities and called for the restoration of the 38th parallel dividing line. With the USSR's delegate absent because of an earlier dispute over the UN's failure to seat the People's

The ROK navy subchaser *Chiri San* (PC 704) sortied from San Francisco on her way to South Korea in June 1950. Her sister ship, *Bak Do San* (PC 701), engaged and sank a Communist steamer loaded with troops and headed for the critical port of Pusan on the first night of the war.

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# UN Reaction

Republic of China on the Security Council, there was no Soviet veto and the council passed the resolution. Then, on the 27th, the Security Council approved a second resolution encouraging UN members to come to the armed assistance of the Republic of Korea.

Meanwhile, despite earlier uncertainty over the importance of South Korea to America's interests, Truman decided that U.S. forces should defend the country. Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were concerned that the attack on Korea was only a diversion for a major Communist offensive in Europe. Still, they ordered the combat deployment of air and naval forces in the Far East, including the Seventh Fleet, to the Korean theater.

The Seventh Fleet was important not only for the help it could provide to UN forces fighting in Korea but for its impact on North Korea's potential military allies, the People's Republic of China and the USSR. Fearing that the Communists might mount a regional offensive, Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet to "neutralize" the Taiwan Strait and then made that directive public. Truman wanted to prevent a Chinese Communist invasion of Taiwan as well as an attack on the mainland by Chiang's Nationalist forces. After steaming from Subid Bay on 27 June, the Seventh Fleet sent carrier planes flying up the Taiwan Strait as it passed close to the island on



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Left to right: Royal Navy Captain A. D. Torlesse, Commanding Officer of HMS Triumph; Rear Admiral John M. Hoskins, Commander Task Force 77; Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble, Commander Seventh Fleet; and Rear Admiral William G. Andrewes, Commander of British Commonwealth Forces, confer on board the heavy cruiser Rochester (CA 133), flagship of the Seventh Fleet, on 1 July 1950. As in many other 20th century conflicts, the U.S. and British navies fought side by side in Korea.

the 29th. Throughout the Korean War, Seventh Fleet forces operated along the coast of China, from the Yellow Sea in the north to Hainan in the south, discouraging the Chinese use of the sea and the air over it. Beijing later revealed that it respected the power of the fleet's air, surface and subsurface forces.

The fleet also maintained naval forces in the waters around the Soviet Far East. Shore-based patrol planes kept a close watch over Soviet air and naval bases. U.S. submarines also prowled the waters off Vladivostok and the straits from the Sea of Japan.

Meanwhile, as units of the Seventh Fleet headed for the Yellow Sea at the end of June, Admiral Joy's Naval Forces, Japan, dispatched units to Korea. Early on the 29th, cruiser *Juneau* and destroyer *De Haven* deployed

off Korea's east coast to stop Communist seaborne movement and to bombard enemy ground forces advancing down the coastal road. In the confusion during the withdrawal of South Korean forces to the south, *Juneau* tragically sank the ROKN minelayer *JML 305*, which the cruiser took for an enemy ship.

Early in July, Joy sent part of Struble's Seventh Fleet dashing into North Korean waters to hit the enemy's central nerve center, the capital at Pyongyang. Struble's Striking Force (Task Force 77) reinforced by several of Rear Admiral William G. Andrewes's Royal Navy warships, mustered 24 ships. On 3 and 4 July, only eight days after the North Korean invasion, planes from *Valley Forge* and HMS *Triumph* pounded the air base, rail yards and bridges near Pyongyang.

In addition to launching



Smoke billows skyward as *Valley Forge* (CV 45) attack planes hit the North Korean oil refinery at Wonsan on 18 July 1950. In a demonstration of naval mobility, UN carrier forces hit enemy targets on both Korean coasts that summer.

USN 707876 courtesy NAH

During July and August, Pacific Fleet units streamed into the Korean theater. These included heavy cruisers *Helena* (CA 75) and *Toledo* (CA 133) and Essex-class carriers *Philippine Sea* (CV 47) and *Boxer* (CV 21). The latter ship brought with her from the U.S. West Coast 171 aircraft, including 146 F-51 Mustang fighters desperately needed by the Air Force. *Boxer* set a transpacific speed record, reaching Yokosuka, Japan, in only eight days. Also dispatched to Korea were the Pacific Fleet's two escort carriers, *Sicily* (CVE 118) and *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116). *Sicily* embarked antisubmarine aircraft and 30 other fighter, attack and transport planes. *Badoeng Strait* embarked not only Marine Fighter Squadron (VMF) 214, assigned to the ship, but also the aircraft of three squadrons of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 33. The UN naval contingent expanded with the arrival in Korean waters of the Royal Navy's light cruiser HMS *Kenya* and British, Canadian, New Zealand, Dutch and French destroyers and frigates.

Those reinforcements soon entered the fray. On 27 July, *Toledo* shelled positions on the east coast of Korea, and on 5 August, planes from *Philippine Sea* attacked targets at Iri, Mokpo and Kunsan. Early in August, VMF-214, the "Black Sheep" squadron of World War II fame, and VMF-323, based respectively on *Sicily* and

Navy carrier and Air Force bombing attacks against the advancing North Korean forces, General MacArthur ordered Air Force transports to deploy a hastily assembled Army infantry-artillery team, Task Force Smith, to Korea. NKPA armor and infantry units overran and destroyed this brave force of 24th Infantry Division soldiers in a bloody action near Osan on 5 July.

MacArthur pleaded with the JCS for reinforcements to stop and then counterattack

the invading NKPA. Since General Omar N. Bradley and the service representatives of the JCS suspected that Korea was only a Communist diversionary move, they were reluctant to dispatch a sizeable portion of the understrength U.S. armed forces to the Far East. The gravity of the UN situation in Korea and MacArthur's insistent pleas, however, soon persuaded them to grant most of the general's requests.

Naval forces answered the call for help with alacrity.

*Badoeng Strait*, began to strike enemy forces ashore.

UN air forces responded in similar fashion. In early July, General Stratemeyer ordered several of his Philippine-based squadrons to Japan. He also ordered that some fighter-bomber squadrons be reequipped with F-51 Mustangs stockpiled in Japan, because his F-80s experienced difficulty in the close air support role and they could not operate from the rough Korean airfields. In addition, the Air Force deployed several B-29 bomber groups to the western Pacific. The Australian F-51 squadron in Japan also joined the FEAF.

As important as naval and



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British destroyer *HMS Cockade* (D 34), here moored at Sasebo, Japan, in July 1950, was one of many naval units deployed to the combat theater by America's British ally.

air forces were to the Allied defensive effort in Korea, ground forces were absolutely essential. On General MacArthur's orders, Admiral Doyle's Amphibious Group 1, Military Sea Transportation Service cargo ships and Japanese time-chartered ships



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Lance Corporal Bob Bell, a crew chief of No. 77 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, "sweats out" the safe return of his unit's F-51 Mustangs from a strike in Korea. Australian air, naval and ground forces fought well alongside their UN allies.

transported three infantry divisions (24th, 25th and 1st Cavalry) from Japan to Korea, where General Walker quickly plugged them into the front line. Only the understrength 7th Infantry Division remained in Japan. MacArthur also requested and received the infantry and artillery battalions needed to bring his Eighth



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Aircraft carrier *Boxer* (CV 21) takes on board US Air Force F-51 fighters at Naval Air Station, Alameda, California, in July 1950 for transportation to the Far East.