



Navy Art Collection

“Scratch One,” by Navy combat artist Herbert Hahn, depicts carrier planes dropping bridge spans in the campaign to deny enemy front-line units supplies and reinforcements.

the British frigate HMS *Whitesand Bay* (F 633) landed U.S. Army special operations troops and Royal Marine Commandos on the docks, who made sure the enemy knew of their short presence ashore.

FECOM worked even harder to keep the true destination of Admiral Struble’s task force secret. With men, supplies and ships concentrating in the ports of Japan and at Pusan, there was no way to hide the fact that an amphibious operation was about to take place. So widespread was the speculation that the press in Japan referred to the impending landing as “Operation Common Knowledge.” Confirming MacArthur’s worst fears, in early September, counterintelligence agents uncovered a North Korean-Japanese spy ring. When the leader of the ring was arrested, he

had a copy of the Chromite operation plan. No one knew if he had been able to transmit the plan to Pyongyang.

Not only were UN commanders uncertain about how the North Koreans would react to an amphibious assault, but also how the Chinese and Soviets would respond. Communist ships and aircraft operated from bases that were only 100 miles from UN fleet units in the Yellow Sea. The 80 submarines of the Soviet Pacific Ocean Fleet at Vladivostok also posed a potential threat. U.S. submarines, surface ships and patrol aircraft, based on shore and afloat, maintained a constant watch in the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan to detect any hostile activities.

Anxiety rose on 4 September when the radar picket destroyer *Herbert J. Thomas* (DDR 833) picked up an unidentified aircraft contact

heading from Port Arthur in Manchuria toward the UN task force in the Yellow Sea. Air controllers vectored a flight of four Fighter Squadron 53 Vought F4U Corsairs from the combat air patrol toward the intruder. Thirty miles north of Task Force 77, the Corsair pilots saw one twin-engined plane dive and head for Korea. The flight leader, Lieutenant (jg) Richard E. Downs, closed on the suspicious aircraft. It was an American-made Douglas A-20 Havoc light bomber, many of which were provided to the USSR in the World War II lend-lease program. The A-20, emblazoned with the red star of the Soviet air force, suddenly fired at Downs. After receiving permission from *Valley Forge*, Downs opened up on the “hostile.” Downs overshot the target, but his wingman riddled the bomber and sent it slamming into the ocean. When crewmen from *Herbert J. Thomas* recovered the pilot’s body, they confirmed that he was a Russian. Leaders in Washington and Tokyo wondered if this event presaged Soviet and possibly Chinese intervention in the war.