

# The Navy's Unorthodox War

*A. J. Plosz*

**T**HE Navy is fighting a different kind of war in Korea.

"It's the cockeyed-est damn war ever", is the way one veteran of the North Atlantic ungrammatically summed it up.

He exaggerated his point, but his meaning was clear enough. The Korean war has produced none of the spectacular anti-submarine actions of the North Atlantic, none of the blazing gunfights of the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay, nor the unrelenting tension of escort duty as RCN ships skirted the flanks of large plodding convoys on the dangerous mid-ocean run.

Wartime members of the Royal Canadian Navy remember the bitter days of the Battle of the Atlantic when merchant ships they were shepherding suddenly flashed into flames as a prowling U-boat's torpedo found its mark. They remember, too, sleeping fully clothed, prepared for the demanding ring of the action bell which they could count on to interrupt their sleep more often than not.

During their six months of operations off the coast of Korea, following the outbreak of the war, the crews of destroyers Cayuga, Athabaskan and Sioux did not go to action stations as often as during some single crossings of the North Atlantic!

But if it was not like the North Atlantic in these respects, at least the Korean war has come up with plenty of new wrinkles.

By far the most outstanding was the complete domination of the seas by the United Nations naval forces. There has

never been the slightest question about it, even during the dark days of the Pusan Perimeter when the UN forces were struggling for a precious little toe-hold on the south-east corner of the thumb-like peninsula.

It is not just superior sea forces—there is nothing to be superior to—it is complete domination. If not 100% it is 99 44/100%.

Since the outbreak of the Korean war only a handful of United Nations ships have suffered casualties. Two have been attacked by enemy aircraft in the early days of the war when the North Koreans sent their few available Yaks into the skies. Three ships have been hit by mines.

One minesweeper was sunk with 27 men aboard. This was the biggest single loss of life of the naval war.

## II

**T**HE Canadian destroyers — Cayuga (Captain Jeffrey V. Brock, DSC), Sioux (Cdr. Paul Taylor) and Athabaskan (Cdr. Robert Welland, DSC)—who fought the first six months of the war, did not lose a single man due to enemy action, nor did they suffer any damage. The Cayuga lost one man by accidental drowning.

The lack of casualties did not mean that the RCN ships were not active. On several occasions they openly dared the enemy to engage in battle but he would

have none of it. They figured in a complete cycle of operations in the Korean theatre. There were numerous bombardments. Mines were exploded by gunfire and by counter-mining techniques. Landing parties hit enemy-held islands. Large-scale evacuations of military personnel and civilians were carried out under cover of Canadian guns. Hazardous narrows bordered by minefields, shoals and shifting mudbanks were navigated under the black of night.

Only one boat's crew got close enough to see their North Korean opponents face to face. It happened in mid-August near Ryanku To in the approaches to Inchon. The principals were Lieut. Paul McCulloch, of Victoria, and his landing party from HMCS Athabaskan.

The Athabee—as she was known to all the Canadian tars in the Korean theatre—was supporting the landing of South Korean marines on the island of Ryanku. There were five villages on the island—all of them believed to contain communist garrisons. As the ROK'S made their way to the beaches in rickety junks, the Athabee opened fire, blasting at each village in turn. Just as the bombardment was ending, lookouts on the Athabaskan's bridge reported two junks, presumably North Korean, rounding the island and heading toward Inchon, their square, patched sails heeling them over as they caught the fresh breeze.

By the time the landing party under Lieut. McCulloch got away from the ship in their two motor cutter, the North Koreans had a three-mile start. The guns of the Athabaskan swung from the island towards the fleeing commies. A single shot was fired ahead of them, but they took no heed. The gunnery officer, Commissioned Officer Robert Paul of Happy Valley, Alberta, "quit fooling around" then. Lieut. McCulloch was in a good spot to observe the fall of shot and directed the fire from his boat with a portable radio set.

He called the first 200 yards over. The next salvo seemed to hit directly between the two junks. "Short, 25 yards", called McCulloch. The gun crews were preparing to let fly another load of "bricks"

when from Athabaskan's bridge the binoculars showed the junks had had enough. Their sails were hauled down and they were giving up. Lieut. McCulloch later reported that the North Koreans indicated their surrender by vigorously waving the only white cloth they had—their underwear.

The captured North Koreans were turned over to the the ROK's who promptly put them to work as laborers.

**O**PPPOSITION from surface craft was virtually non-existent. The Canadian destroyers intercepted junks and motor fishing vessels during blockade patrols. They were mostly loaded with refugees fleeing southward, or they were South Korean fishermen. Other allied warships caught small enemy craft in their nets. There was no skirmish of any consequence. A 50-foot motor vessel, or a leaky junk with tattered sails is in no position to argue with the bristling armament of the UN warships. When enemy craft carrying troops or supplies, were taken the prisoners were turned over to the ROK's and the frail vessels sunk with gunfire.

There was little problem with the shore batteries. The Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan, like other UN units, moved in as close as navigation would permit, dropped anchor and trained their sights on the targets located on islands and promontories commanding the entrances to harbors. The smoking guns of the RCN ships did not draw any return fire of any note. The shore batteries were reluctant to engage the more powerful destroyers in a gun duel. But the enemy wasn't so timid with the small patrol craft of the Republic of Korea Navy which moved in and out of the rugged coastline. The ROK's often reported that gun emplacements ashore had leveled their fire on the small Korean ships.

When this happened the ROK's would contact the Canadians, with whom they patrolled the west side, and the RCN would play the big brother role. A South Korean naval officer, with a broad, gold-toothed smile, would come aboard and point out, on a chart, the location of the

gun installations which had been harassing his little craft. The Canadians would then move in, and in a favorite phrase of Captain Jeffry Brock, commander of the Canadian destroyers, "punish the enemy for shooting up the ROK's".

But if the enemy didn't have much to offer in the way of active resistance on the sea, under the sea, and in the air, he did a thorough job of his mine-laying. During August the ships moved with safety into harbors along the west coast of Korea. By the end of September the approaches to Inchon, Kunsan and Chinnampo on the west coast were infested with sensitive Russian-made contact mines. Other floating mines were released and drifted along with the current and imperiled UN warships working along the coast near the main harbors.

To combat this menace, all ships suddenly had to take on the added job of mine destruction. Most mines were exploded by gunfire from the 40 mm. armament. At least the "floaters" were, but the moored mines presented a more ticklish problem. The Athabaskan came up with a solution that was effective—but it was strictly not for weak hearts.

**S**HE was on patrol outside Kunsan harbor shortly after the Inchon landing in September, when the underwater detection gear picked up objects in the channel leading into the city. They were sharp, clear echoes located at regular intervals along the detection sweep. The voice of the operator was firm and grim as he unhesitatingly identified the objects as mines.

How to destroy a minefield? There is no minesweeping gear on board a destroyer. The mines were visible only at low tide, and would dip below the surface again as soon as it flooded. It was too great a hazard to move the ship in close at low tide and let fly with the 40 mm. guns. The answer to the thorny problem was contained in Cdr. Bob Welland's whimsically named "Operation Woomph".

A demolition party under Commissioned Officer David Hurl of Winnipeg, a mine specialist, went away in a motor cutter towing a dinghy. When they spotted

the black ominous mines bobbing in the slight swell, they climbed into the little dinghy and rowed to the mine. Calmly and methodically the party attached 11¼ pound demolition charges to the rings on either side of the pear-shaped mine. They touched off a five-minute fuse and then bent on the oars to get clear. A geyser of water, dotted with black bits of mine casing, spouted high into the air. A split second later the sound of the explosion crashed against their ears. With broad grins of satisfaction, the party made for another mine to apply the same technique. Five more mines, all identified as Russian-made, were destroyed in Kunsan harbor by the demolition crew of the Athabaskan.

### III

**E**VEN the weather and the sea were different from the North Atlantic. They were, in fact, different from anything the Canadian sailor has sailed in, to any extent. In the summer the weather was hot and sticky. The temperature rarely went over 85 degrees but the humidity remained at a high percentage day in and day out. A fresh pair of dungarees would be sodden rags in a few hours. Conversely, the winter weather at sea was cold and bitter. It wasn't the type of weather which coated the little escort ships with thick layers of ice on their Atlantic crossings. Korea's winter was certainly cold enough to coat the decks with ice, but the seas are comparatively calm and salt-water and spray doesn't flood over the upper deck and the superstructure. Chilly penetrating winds make upper deck work a real chore even with plenty of warm clothing. In six months of campaigning in the Yellow Sea, the Canadian destroyers did not run into more than seven days of rough weather. "It's nice, well-behaved hunk of water", a Chief Petty Officer in Cayuga said, which is certainly not an apt description of the stormy Atlantic.

The Canadian tar also found himself in a strange, new land when he went on shore leave. At the UN naval base in South Japan from which the Cayuga, Sioux and

Athabaskan operated, they went ashore to a shanty town and a people different from anything the North Atlantic ports had to offer. The language and customs were unfamiliar, and many of the Canadians had just a hazy geography-book knowledge of the Japanese and the orientals. But the sailors characteristically adapted themselves easily.

They went sight-seeing, bought silk scarves, chopsticks, carved figurines, and other Japanese goods. But shopping was not as easy as it sounds. It demanded a banker's acumen in foreign currency. To be equipped for purchases the Canadian tar needed no less than four different kinds of currency—Canadian dollars for the canteen on board the ships, American occupation dollars for the Post Exchange, yen for purchases in Japanese shops, and Hong Kong dollars for British clubs and canteens.

**I**T wasn't an uncommon sight to see white-uniformed Canadians riding with mock majesty in rickshaws, or awkwardly manipulating chop-sticks over a bowl of rice in a Japanese restaurant, or sitting on the floor of a Japanese home enjoying a cup of tea at a low table. The first try at this latter relaxation produced a rash of careful darning of sox as Japanese custom was observed and issue boots removed before entering the house.

On trips ashore the Canadians met up with seamen from the seven other navies represented in the United Nations fleet, and the talk was on a more common ground. They compared notes with their English speaking cousins from the USN, the RN, the Australian and New Zealand navies, and "got by" with pidgin talk to Dutch and French fighting mates.

The Canadians fitted just as easily into the operational side of the international navy. All units of the UN fleet operate under immediate command of the United States Navy or the Royal Navy. The Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan have worked under both commands and have proved capable of adapting themselves to the vastly different administration, communication and fleet organization of both navies. "It's all those combined

exercises we did with the USN and RN", said CPO Roy Adams, in charge of Cayuga's radio room. The combined manoeuvres have indeed proved their worth not only in operations, but as a hinge between the Americans and British.

The Cayuga was lying at anchor amidst a group of American and British ships. The radio telephone was blaring messages passing between ships in the harbor. Then a British and an American began talking to each other. A difficulty in differences of radio techniques arose and there were several hitches as the message was being passed. A Cayuga officer cut in when the muddle seemed at its height: "I am a Canuck", he said, "I talk both your languages". With that he helped straighten out the confusion and the message was passed.

For the most part it was routine patrols—24 hours a day, seven days a week, with nothing happening sometimes for weeks. It meant steaming back and forth through the patrol area. "We've cut a groove in the Yellow Sea, the ship just steers herself" is the way Cdr. Paul Taylor commanding officer of the Sioux once expressed it.

**T**HESE patrols ranged from a week or ten days to the record-breaking 50 days the Cayuga logged from the latter part of November until the second week in January. It was four hours on watch, and eight off with no sleep during the daylight hours. By day, off-watch men were busy cleaning mess decks, painting ship. At the end of a patrol there wasn't a man who wouldn't have given a week's leave for a good night's sleep.

In a destroyer at full war complement there is no waste space, there isn't enough space. Men are crowded into messdecks. "It's like living on a crowded street car at rush hour for months on end," said a luxuriantly bearded Cayuga Petty Officer.

The RCN worked with British Commonwealth, USN, Dutch and French units, almost exclusively off the west coast of Korea, ranging from the Yalu River in the north to the Mok-Po Islands at the

southernmost end of the peninsula. The Canadians showed up well in inter-ship competitions. The Cayuga and the Athabaskan both bested American and British ships in anti-aircraft practice shoots. The Sioux won the record for fuelling at sea, chopping a full three minutes off the best time turned in by the Royal Navy. (This record has now passed to the Athabaskan, which knocked the mark down to one minute and 45 seconds.)

Recognition came not only from their comrades in arms, but from the voice of the Kremlin itself. Radio Moscow thought the three Canadian destroyers worthy of an impassioned diatribe.

In a regular newscast a smooth-voiced commentator announced, in English, to his listeners that the "imperialist American Navy in Korea (has) been joined by rice-fed louts from Canada who are paid 50 cents a week."

Actually the "rice-fed louts" had earned at least \$3.50 apiece—7 weeks pay according to Russia's announced wage scale—when Radio Moscow acknowledged their presence in the Yellow Sea in mid-September.

#### IV

**T**HE Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan arrived at the United Nations naval base in South Japan in late July after a 24-day crossing of the Pacific. Starting point had been home port of Esquimalt, B.C., where the three destroyers were busily preparing for their proposed training and good-will cruise to eight different European countries. On June 30 a priority signal changed their mission from goodwill to war. They were ordered with all possible haste to Korea where the Reds had just attacked South Korea.

Extra personnel, war equipment and supplies boarded the three destroyers. Men on leave were hurriedly summoned back to their ships from various parts of Canada and the western United States. The Navy had literally packed its bags in four days. On July 5, the three destroyers steamed out of Esquimalt towards Pearl Harbor—then the war zone.

The destroyers got their first job shortly

after their arrival at the UN base. It was a familiar job—escorting troop ships to Pusan, the large South Korean port, and fuel and supply ships to the operational area on the west coast.

In mid-August the Canadians asked for, and got, a switch to blockade duties in the Yellow Sea. Although these patrols were often monotonous, they gave the Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan their first real action, bombardments and landings.

The Cayuga shelled harbor installations at Inchon, the Athabaskan blasted Taku Chaku-To in the Flying Fish Channel leading into Inchon and then sent landing parties ashore to mop up behind the ROK marines who had landed under the destroyer's gunfire. The Athabaskans met no resistance. Later the Sioux lashed at gun emplacements on Fankochi Point guarding the approaches to Inchon.

The Athabaskan got into another landing late in August. The enemy had a lighthouse and a radio station on tiny Hachibi-To, lying in the Inchon area. The Athabee dropped her "hook" about two miles off the island and prepared to send her landing parties ashore. As Lieut. Cdr. Stewart Peacock of Quebec City and his tin-hatted, armed party left the ship in the two motor cutters, the destroyer sent a load of "bricks" hurtling into the island. The fire power of the Athabaskan apparently sent all inhabitants scurrying off the island. When Peacock and his men arrived at the installations, after carefully crawling up the steep slopes of the island, they found the lighthouse and the radio station deserted. The transmitting equipment was destroyed and the "commandos" took souvenirs of their raid. Three large red lanterns now are among the treasured trophies of the hard-hitting Athabee.

#### V

**W**HEN the ships returned to their base in early September, there was an ominous stillness in the air. There was no indication what the next job would be. But scuttlebutt flew thick and fast. Something big was in the wind. This was only confirmed when captains of ships

zipped about the harbor in their gigs and barges. There seemed to be a major conference every other day.

The inquisitive tars found their answer a week later as they sailed northward. It was Operation Chromite, the Inchon invasion. While the communist forces were making a determined effort to drive the UN forces off the south-east tip of the peninsula, a powerful amphibious force struck a surprise blow behind their lines at Inchon just below the 38th parallel on the west coast.

More than 260 ships, representing eight nations, formed the invasion fleet. Canada's destroyers were assigned to the southern flank of the area to carry out a three-fold task with a number of ROK vessels. This entire task group was under the command of Captain Brock in Cayuga. The group escorted fuel and ammunition ships to keep the supply lines open to the front lines, blockaded the seas between Inchon and Kunsan, and stood by as a hunter-killer submarine force.

Later during the invasion, the Canadians took on another job in a less war-like vein. They helped in the rehabilitation of many South Koreans living on islands which had been under communist domination before liberation by the invasion fleet. The RCN ships re-stocked the sparse larders of the islanders with rice, flour and other foods—the Cayuga's crew cut their own ration to land food on one island which had suffered particularly from the shortages. Fishing sanctuaries were established so the South Koreans could fish unmolested. And the ships also helped the islanders get the lighthouses burning once again. On one island they found a keeper who complained bitterly that the communists had not only forced him to put out the light as they swept down the peninsula, but had also made off with all his matches. The Canadian landing party which visited him presented him with a carton of matches. That night the light was burning once again.

During this time the ships carried extra supplies of rice on board, and perhaps this prompted Radio Moscow to tag them with the label "rice-fed louts."

In the days following the invasion the Cayuga and Athabaskan carried out bombardments of communist strongholds near Kunsan. Athabaskan located and destroyed the minefield in the approaches to that city. The Sioux exploded four floating mines during patrols. The Athabaskan teamed with the ROK's to make a landing on Orang-To. It was the third time the Athabee had made a landing—and again it was unopposed.

During their operations the Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan carried a liaison team from the ROK—one officer and a signalman—to assist in landing and boarding operations. They would act as interpreters and also help in navigation along the island-dotted west coast.

It was the end of September before the crews got back to port. There was a few days of leave and then back to sea.

During October it was blockade patrols again with Cayuga and Sioux operating on the west coast with British Commonwealth units while the Athabaskan worked with the American Seventh Fleet headed by the mighty USS Missouri.

## VI

**E**ARLY in November the three ships sailed for Hong Kong and a well-earned "rest period" of five days. But they got no rest during the three-day crossing of the China Sea to the picturesque British port. They hit the worst weather they had ever experienced. All three ships registered at least a 45 degree roll. The Sioux tilted even further, and was lashed by the heavy seas. Her lifeboats were reduced to firewood, water tight doors were warped, guard rails bent and a two-inch funnel wire-stay snapped. One man on watch during the height of the storm swore that a wave licked the Maple Leaf on the funnel—a full 18 feet above the deck.

In Hong Kong the crews went on shopping sprees and sightseeing tours. They turned up on board carrying silks, carved teakwood boxes and figures, and other souvenirs of the exotic orient. On November 11, a group of 100 officers and men

went to Sai Wan Military cemetery 14 miles outside of Hong Kong, to pay tribute to the Canadian soldiers who lost their lives when the colony fell to the Japanese during World War II.

On November 19, the Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan were back at their UN naval base, lying cheek-by-jowl at familiar X-3 buoy. Next day they sailed on what proved to be their longest patrols of the Korean war. Athabaskan logged 33 days out, the Sioux had ten days more, while the Cayuga was well ahead of the pack with 50 days of sustained patrol. The Cayuga and Sioux spent Xmas at sea, while Athabaskan was in port. All three ships were out in the operational area for New Year's.

ON board the ships, the canteens ran out of practically everything except razor blades, toothpaste, and ball-point pens. There was even a shortage of matches for a time until an American hospital ship in Inchon came through with a supply of Red Cross matches. Blacked out and battened down, the messdecks were jam-packed, hot and stuffy. Up on deck it was bitterly cold, with zero temperatures and harsh winds. "It's like standing on top a church steeple for four hours," one officer of the watch said as he described his bridge duty.

The Canadian's biggest single job of the Korean war occurred during this patrol. It was the support operation carried out during the withdrawal of more than 8,000 wounded, army personnel and civilians, from communist-threatened Chinnampo, port for the city of Pyongyang. When the withdrawal was successfully completed without a single casualty, three destroyers stayed behind to shell and destroy important installations in the port.

The Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan, together with HMAS Warramunga and Bataan, and the USS Forrest Royal—all under the command of Captain Jeffrey V. Brock in the Cayuga—had hurried to the approaches to Chinnampo on December 4 after receiving an urgent message to assist in the withdrawal. It was 40 miles into the city, along a semi-circular route in the Taedong estuary. The stream was

no wider than 600 yards and bordered by minefields, shoals and shifting mud-banks. By daylight it was a difficult passage, but by moonless night it was the longest kind of gamble.

As Captain Brock and the commanding officers were making plans for the passage, another emergency signal came into the Cayuga's radio room from the Commander of the transports and LST's carrying out the withdrawal. "I am uncovered. Take immediate action," it said. At midnight the ships began the tortuous trip. Even the most optimistic estimates expected only three of the six destroyers to complete the hazardous journey, without mishap. Four made it—the Sioux and the Warramunga ran aground on soft mud-banks but both extricated themselves and reported no serious damage.

The Cayuga led the way, and the trip was a navigation miracle performed by Lieut. Andrew (Big Andy) Collier, of Salmon Arm, B. C., the navigation officer. Working almost entirely with radar he fixed Cayuga's position no less than 132 times during the four hour voyage passing information to the ships following. It was better than one fix every two minutes. Lieut. Collier almost wore the corticine off the deck between the radar set and the chart table. "He was like a shuttle with a mechanical brain moving at top clip," said AB Bill Kobes, Inglewood, Manitoba of the plot room scene. "It was asking for trouble to get in his way."

"It's something for the Mariner's Manual," commented an admiring USN officer after it was all over.

## VII

ON arrival in Chinnampo in the early hours of December 5, the four destroyers deployed about the city, their guns trained to cover the entire area. The transports and landing craft of the evacuation fleet were loaded during the day with personnel and equipment. In addition, the Canadians in the supporting destroyers saw thousands of Koreans piling into rickety junks with patched sails, their belongings strapped to their backs or

balanced on their heads, as they fled from the city. They, too, were protected by the destroyers.

By five o'clock in the afternoon the transports and LST's settled low under the weight of personnel, guns, trucks, jeeps and supplies. They weighed anchor and headed out of Chinnampo. The destroyers then opened fire on the military targets along the waterfront. Marshalling yards, oil storage tanks, freight cars, and radio stations were shelled. In 40 minutes the destroyers sent 800 rounds bursting into the targets, which were now a blazing inferno. There was little doubt that the gunfire had taken care of any installations which the enemy might find valuable.

The destroyers and evacuation ships anchored in a sheltered area just outside the city and waited for dawn before beginning the hazardous journey back down the Taedong estuary to the open sea. At ten o'clock on the morning of the December 5, the entire force nosed out of the tricky channel. The transports and LST's were sent south under escort, while the destroyers returned to their patrols. Captain Brock's cryptic signal: "Withdrawal successfully completed," added 30 to the ticklish operation. But UN authorities were quick to hail the Canadian spear-headed operation. Admiral Joy and Admiral Andrews sent their warm congratulations to "all hands for a job well done."

**A** MONTH later the Cayuga figured in another withdrawal. This time it was from Inchon, the UN's major port on the west coast of Korea. As swarms of Chinese communists drove towards Seoul,

25 miles away, the Allied ships began moving out of Inchon. There was no withdrawal of army personnel. It was a naval operation, as fuel and supply ships, hospital ships and ammunition ships weighed anchor and headed up Flying Fish Channel into the Yellow Sea and shaped a course southward. The Cayuga was one of the last ships to leave as she escorted ships of the logistics command out of the harbor and then returned to help cover the withdrawal with units of the American, British and Commonwealth navies.

The Cayuga returned to her "UN naval base in South Japan" where she joined the Sioux and Athabaskan. It was the last time the three "originals"—as they liked to call themselves—were together under the United Nations flag. Five days later the Sioux sailed for home, after being relieved by the Halifax-based destroyer Nookta, a newcomer which was soon initiated into the unorthodox warfare.

In March another east coast destroyer, the Huron, arrived to join the Canadian group, sending the Cayuga back to Canada, and leaving only one of the original trio. In early May the Athabaskan's turn came. After ten months away from her home port of Esquimalt, she was relieved by the Sioux, which returned for a second tour of duty. The Cayuga, after three months at home followed the Sioux back to the familiar stamping grounds, arriving in the Korean area in July to spell the Nookta which with the Huron, had become as much a veteran of the "cockeyed war" as the Cayuga, Sioux and Athabaskan, the first three Canadian warships to fly the United Nations flag.

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### *Idiotic Pursuit*

Pursuit of the impossible is idiocy.

MARCUS AURELIUS.