

COLLETT and five sister destroyers is, therefore, one of the great if overlooked chapters in American naval history.”

Relman Morin, an Associated Press war correspondent, embarked in the U.S. Cruiser TOLEDO, witnessed the gunnery action of the DUCKS at the Battle of Inchon. He wrote:

“You Can Thank Six Brave Ships for Inchon Win”

“A chain of events started by these six ships led directly to the victory at Inchon...Wolmi was the key to the entire operation. Before the main attack could begin on Inchon, Wolmi had to be taken. In an order issued before the battle, Rear Admiral James H. Doyle, commander of Task Force 90, said:

“This mission (Wolmi) must be successfully completed at any cost. Failure will seriously jeopardize or even prevent the major amphibious assault on Inchon. Therefore, press the assault with the utmost vigor despite loss or difficulty.”

“Big questions loomed – what did the North Koreans have on Wolmi to defend it? How many guns? How big? Where? Six brave little ships – six destroyers were sent to find out...The mission frankly was to draw fire from Wolmi – the more the better...they were “sitting ducks.” That’s what they were meant to be, juicy targets for concealed guns on the shore...six brave little ships.”

And as Korean War veteran and historian Jack Sauter wrote, fifty years after the start of that “Forgotten War” in *LEGION Magazine*, September issue 2000: [3]

#### WHY KOREA WAS FORGOTTEN

“Overconfidence in the big bomber and severe budget cuts had left our armed forces (1950) in a precarious position...our Navy was in even worse condition. When North Korea invaded its neighbor, we had exactly one aircraft carrier in the Western Pacific: USS VALLEY FORGE...Unfortunately, little of this information reached the American people. They always thought it was a political decision not to commit more forces. As a result, the Korean War has suffered unjustly. In later years, historians have placed the conflict into a more favorable context, but that viewpoint has not trickled down to the general public...”

“But that isn’t to say there wasn’t plenty of heavy fighting with casualties to watch. (Our annual losses in Korea were higher than in Vietnam.). Our brilliant amphibious assault at Inchon and the heroic

withdrawal from Chosin rank among the greatest exploits in the history of American arms.”

To further define the do-or-die assignment given the DUCKS at Inchon we note “The Taking of Wolmi-do” in the 50<sup>th</sup> Korean War Anniversary issue of “Sea Classics” by Malcolm W. Cagle, CDR, USN:

“Like a mini-Gibraltar, the heavily fortified islands of Wolmi-do guarding the entrance to Inchon had to be silenced before MacArthur’s amphibious troops could mount their perilous invasion. And no finer sacrificial lambs could lure the fire of the North Koreans better than the reliable World War II-era destroyers of DESRON9, classified “EXPENDABLE” by the Pentagon.”

“In military jargon, Wolmi-do thus commanded the sea approaches to Inchon, the harbor, and the beaches. No ship could pass into the port’s tidal basin, the inner harbor, or transit Flying Fish Channel without coming under fire of the island’s guns. Like an unsinkable battleship, it stood flat-footedly in the path of any invasion scheme...Wolmi-do was the whole key to success or failure of the Inchon operation. Admiral Doyle told me that the mission must be successfully completed at any cost; that failure would seriously jeopardize or even prevent the Inchon landing. He emphasized that we had to capture Wolmi no matter the losses or difficulties.”

Fifty years after the start of the Korean War, Jack Sauter sums up the role of that FORGOTTEN war in our history:

“And yet it deserves to be remembered, for the first time, the principle of collective security was tested on the battlefield, and Communist aggression was stopped cold. In the years following, it became popular to think we lost the war, no doubt because we didn’t reunite Korea and our forces were driven out of the North. However in the seesaw battles of that terrible first year (1950), the North Koreans and later the Chinese were pushed out of the South not once but several times...On the other hand the North retreated deeper and deeper from the family of nations, falling into Third World status and scarcely able to feed its own people - the Albania of the East.”

The information in the preceding pages should dispel doubts about the success of the Inchon Invasion and the successful combat role of the DUCKS as expendable targets who proved more than a match for the NKPA guns. Jack Sauter characterized the Battle of Inchon as ranking among “the greatest exploits in the history of American arms.” It is noted that America’s major battles are honored in large block letters on the facades of the Naval Academy Football Stadium. High on the East side façade is the name INCHON.

An interesting facet of the successful Inchon Invasion is revealed in Thomas Buell's "Naval Leadership in Korea: The First Six Months," Naval Historical Center, 2002. Buell relates that Admirals Struble and Doyle were engaged in a running internecine feud before and after the Invasion, and before the Chosin evacuation. What effect this strife had on the evaluation of combat units such as the Sitting DUCKS is open to conjecture.

The previously noted strong words voiced by VADM Struble, who was in command of the entire invasion force, and RADM Doyle, who headed the amphibious force, stressed the absolute necessity for the DUCKS to find and destroy the NKPA shore batteries on Wolmi-do. Those strong views stand in stark contrast to the relatively lesser award of the NUC for what the Bombardment Force Commander, RADM John Higgins, cited as the DUCKS' "extraordinary" combat action. It would seem as if the six old DD's disappeared from the Admirals' radar screens after the DD's brilliant gunnery action. Questions abound on the composition of the Navy Awards Board that decided the DUCKS' combat award; that Board obviously dismissed the opinion of the Flag Officer best positioned to judge the combat action of the six old DUCKS – RADM Higgins. Should the DUCKS' quest for the upgrade to the PUC succeed, it would in no way demean the original Awards Board - it would just mean that they have been overtaken by history.

The military awards business can be capricious, often responding to personal views, political leanings, oversight, and just good or bad timing. As Jack Sauter noted: [6]:

"That (Korea) was my war and somehow it's fallen into one of the cracks of history...but I think the main reason was simple timing...it's difficult to find anyone under the age of 65 who knows anything about the "police action"...in most of our current high school history texts it barely rates a paragraph."

In recent years we have learned of the mishandled combat awards of PVT Jessica Lynch in Iraq and PVT Pat Tillman in Afghanistan. Awards made incorrectly, and awards overlooked, are relatively common. In their previous letters to the Navy Department the DUCKS have noted many retroactive combat awards. A recent example of a retroactive award is shown in an article from MOAA's July 2008 issue of the *Military Officer*. It notes an award made almost forty years after a combat action. The recipient was Vietnam War veteran John C. Loving, who was recommended for a Silver Star Medal by fellow Vietnam veterans. It took two years and the support of members of Congress for the award to go through. Also sent by the DUCKS to the Navy Department were copies of newspaper articles which revealed awards of Bronze Star medals awarded in Iraq for deaths of military personnel in non-combat automobile accidents, and even murder victims in military units.

This writer's attention was drawn to two PUC awards made to U.S. Navy submarines because he spent a lot of time in both diesel and nuclear "boats." Both of

these awards were well earned. The first PUC award was to USS TRITON (SSN 586) for a peacetime circumnavigation of the world – a remarkable feat, but the DUCKS were denied a PUC for gallant action in a “must win” gunnery battle in wartime. The second submarine PUC award was for the World War II action of the USS ARCHERFISH, with its great C.O. Joe Enright, which sank a just-launched Japanese aircraft carrier. History, the great purveyor of truth, revealed that at the time of the sinking, on 29 November 1944, the Japanese carrier was incomplete when it was sunk – “it was manned by an inexperienced and largely untrained crew, and no aircraft were embarked” (Enclosure 10). In a November 2000 letter to the late, and great, Captain Robert Schelling, the C.O. of the DUCKS’ destroyer LYMAN K. SWENSON, he was asked if the DUCKS stood in more peril on 13-14 September 1950 than did the ARCHERFISH on 29 November 1944. Captain Schelling wrote in reply: “We were bait” and the action of the DUCKS “was for the specific purpose of getting shot at.” The crux of the matter is that both the ARCHERFISH and the DUCKS earned glory by proceeding to “extraordinary” combat action not knowing the peril they might encounter. C.O. ARCHERFISH won a Navy Cross, and his ship a PUC; the DUCKS C.O.s were given Silver Stars and their ships a NUC.

One of the glaring inequities in Navy Awards for Inchon combat was that the late Captain Halle C. Allan, USN, the Commodore of the DUCKS’ Squadron, received a Silver Star medal for his role in planning and executing the brilliant combat plan of the Sitting Ducks at Inchon. Captain Allan deserved a Navy Cross Medal. It is surmised that the Navy has, as do most large organizations, internal politics. Could it be that Navy politics played a role in the underrated status of the DUCKS’ combat actions, and by extension the underrating of Captain Allan’s role in the successful destroyer action at Inchon 1950?

There is more than a little suspicion that the Senior Navy leaders of 1950, who fought in the great naval actions of World War II, could not be convinced that the Korean War was anything but a “police action,” as noted in “Blind Man’s Bluff,” a fine book on the heroics of U.S. Navy Submariners in the Cold War. (Sontag and Harper – Harper Collins 1998, pp324-5) it relates:

“In the early days of the Cold War, admirals who had been shot at in World War II weren’t willing to hand out the kind of awards that old friends had gotten – often posthumously.”

This writer is an admirer of the late great RADM Eugene Fluckey, who is one of our country’s greatest heroes. In his World War II submarine war patrols, he and his crew in USS BARB (SS-220) sank more enemy tonnage than any other “boat.” He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. In a 20 March 1996 visit at the Admiral’s home he wrote a couple of paragraphs in the flyleaf of this writer’s copy of the Admiral’s book, “Thunder Below.” He characterized our destroyers’ Korean War actions as “above and beyond the call of duty.” Admiral Fluckey knew how the Navy Awards Boards worked. Always looking out for his men, he tells on page 429 of his book that he could win a NUC for his men “in lieu of another PUC so his men had a different ribbon to

wear.” When writing up the Patrol Report for which he wanted his crew to be awarded a NUC, he simply changed the first sentence to read “for ‘outstanding’ heroism.” In the Patrol Reports which earned BARB’s PUCs, the first sentence read “for extraordinary heroism.” Admiral Fluckey was also not above working with the Board of Awards to get desired award upgrades for his men – see page 409 of his book. This was one Admiral who would not deny awards to deserving Cold War Navy combat veterans – like the “Sitting Ducks.”

#### HISTORY’S PENETRATING LIGHT:

The Navy Department’s entrenched Awards Group blanches at the thought of evaluating any combat action through the prism of history. That is an unfortunate stance, because the importance of the DUCKS’ combat actions in the Cold War have been elevated over the status assigned by SECNAV Kimball in the 1950 NUC awarded the DUCKS. At that time in 1950, the Navy at its highest levels could probably not stomach awarding the PUC to the DUCKS for combat in a “police action.” As historian James E. Alexander stated in a July 2001 address, “Police Action Gone Sour” at Oroville, CA:

“A further consequence of MacArthur’s misinformation was that the Korean War unfortunately got labeled as a “police action.” Actually that statement was originally made by U.S. Senator William Knowland of California, not President Truman. However, a reporter later asked Truman if Knowland was correct, and the President said, “Yes, that’s what it amounts to.” The label stuck. Those of us who fought in the Korean War – yes, it was a war – and the families of those who died in that war, have had to live with that derogatory designation ever since.”

James E. Alexander further stated, regarding the success of the invasion of Inchon:

“On September 15, MacArthur orchestrated a bold and decisive amphibious landing at Inchon, 200 miles behind the enemy’s lines. By September 25, the three-month anniversary of the NKPA invasion – U.S. Marines had recaptured Seoul, and MacArthur triumphantly turned the city back over to South Korean President Syngman Rhee.”

“At this point MacArthur had the Korean War won...Inchon was a huge success. Its success far exceeded anyone’s expectations, so much so, in fact, that MacArthur had no plan as to what to do next.”

The general lack of proper recognition of Korean War veterans was addressed by Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White, when in a May 2002 ceremony presenting retroactive combat awards to a Korean War veteran (Arnold E. Kirk, one of whose daughters had written hundreds of letters urging the Army to honor her father). As reported in *The Washington Post* of 23 May 2002, Secretary White said (Enclosure 11):

“It has often been said that there are not extraordinary men, just extraordinary circumstances that ordinary men are forced to deal with. [Kirk] served in a distinguished unit in the Korean War some 50 years ago and, as was the case with many soldiers of that generation, because of one thing or another, the recognition of a grateful nation for his service was not appropriately rendered at the time of his service. So, we are here today to correct that.”

Secretary White’s words are most applicable to the DUCKS re their actions as expendable targets – turned fierce combat fighters – in the Battle of Inchon. Those actions have been greatly undervalued; an example of the variations in the circumstances of Korean War combat awards is shown by reading the obituary of an honored Navy veteran, who while serving in the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier *BON HOMME RICHARD*, was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal – with Combat “V” for Korean War service (Enclosure 11). Combat has many facets, and heroism occurs in many ways, so there is no questioning the correctness of the award in question. However, it is felt to be true that no U.S. aircraft carrier came under close range enemy gunfire. The DUCKS, on the other hand, were under close range enemy fire, and as noted earlier, the DUCKS’ destroyer *MANSFIELD* suffered heavy damage and had 28 wounded when it struck a Russian-supplied mine: that’s combat!

It is again noted that, in the DNS-35 letter of 6 June 2006, the DUCKS’ actions were judged unworthy of combat status. That judgment appears mean-spirited in view of the fact that in Navy-granted commendations of the DUCKS’ combat actions, such terms as “heroic achievement” and “close range combat” appear. A most pertinent quotation regarding this matter is from a Civil War speech by President Abraham Lincoln:

“But those who faced enemy fire are outstanding heroes that no right-minded person would ever diminish.”

That wrongful decision on combat status should be corrected by the Navy Department.

While the Navy Awards Group deplors any comparisons of combat awards won in different eras, the world is constantly, perhaps unconsciously, making comparisons in sports, as well as wars. Bullets are not discriminating, and shells killed in our Civil War, in World War I, in World War II, in Korea, in Vietnam, and now in Iraq and Afghanistan. A revealing comparison can be made between the 1950 Navy Unit Commendation awarded the “Sitting Ducks” for their battle action on 13-15 September 1950 at Inchon, and the 2003 Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the Navy and Marine personnel in the early 2003 halcyon days of the present war in Iraq. The DUCKS’ NUC speaks to the gunnery actions in a meaningful and detailed account about Inchon combat (Enclosure 12). The 2003 Iraq War PUC is a fine paean to American history and military might, signed by then SECNAV Gordon England (Enclosure 13); it is an ultra broadband document which tells nothing of what the Navy or Marine unit accomplished. When later information in the *Navy Times* of 17 November 2003 told of many thousands of U.S.

Marines and Navy personnel in Kuwait and Iraq being awarded the PUC ribbon, DUCKS veterans were astounded. The DUCKS were not unhappy that the Iraq War sailors and Marines were honored with the PUC. They were astounded by the fact that their own combat action didn't rate a PUC. See Enclosures 14 and 15.

March 2008 started on a high note when this writer received a letter from a valued DUCKS' veteran, Mr. Richard Sierra, who served in HENDERSON. Mr. Sierra was chosen as the Petty Officer Representative of the Korean War Destroyer Sailors; the Officer Representative was Captain Robert Schelling, the C.O. of the DUCKS' ship LYMAN K. SWENSON. These men were honored at the Surface Navy Association's National Symposium on 11 January 2001, where each of them was presented with a citation. These citations were read aloud to the 300 Association members present. Enclosed with Richard Sierra's 1 March letter was a Sitting Ducks keychain, just like the ones given to the HENDERSON DUCKS at their 2008 ship's reunion. It is an understatement to say that Richard Sierra's thoughtfulness was appreciated; it was a great morale builder and made the DUCKS' quest for the PUC award a mission to be completed (Enclosure 16).

In March 2008 a review was made of the correspondence that individual DUCKS, their ship associations, friends, and families have sent to CNOs, the President, SECDEFs, SECNAVs, over 20 U.S. Senators, and an equal number of U.S. Representatives. Those letters requested the upgrade of the DUCKS' combat award – i.e. a PUC vice the NUC. As noted, the first of these letters were written and sent to government entities in 1995 and 1996 by Mr. Joe Carillo – a COLLETT DUCK. Mr. Carillo is now 85 years old and alive and well in Whittier, CA: an available eyewitness!

The DUCKS' letters to U.S. government leaders from 1995 to 2008 were almost invariably answered by letters stating that the President (Senator, and/or Representative) was pleased to receive the letter re the quest for the upgrade of the combat award to the PUC, and that the DUCKS' request was being forwarded to the Navy Department: see illustrative letters from Senators McCain and Mikulski, and the White House (Enclosures 17, 18, and 19). The DUCKS veterans are not naïve, and they fully understand that the President, the U.S. Senators, and the U.S. Representatives probably never got to see the DUCKS' letters; their staffs handle such matters, and most Congressional staffers that the DUCKS encountered knew little or nothing about the Korean War. As columnist Walter Williams wrote in the *Annapolis Capital* on 5 August 2008: "The average American has little or no clout with Congress and can be safely ignored."

Sending the DUCKS' letters re the PUC upgrade to the Navy Department was the kiss of death, as the Navy Awards Group handled White House and Congressional staffers with ease. The Navy's political process is impressive and has caused the awards process, vis-à-vis the DUCKS, to become a monumental bureaucratic farce. Gratefully, the DUCKS have had the good fortune to win the support of two Congressional leaders who went to bat for the DUCKS' PUC quest – they are U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin (MD) and U.S. Representative Anna Eshoo (CA) – each of whom has a DUCKS veteran in their constituency. These two allies have made efforts to obtain proper combat awards

for the DUCKS; however, their efforts have been rebuffed by Mr. Navas and DNS-35. The DUCKS urge Senator Cardin and Representative Eshoo, as well as others in the U.S. government hierarchy, to stay the course with the DUCKS in their quest for the PUC.

Returning to the LT Dry matter, it is noted that there was another hero revealed: that hero was LT Dry's father, Captain Melvin Dry, USN (Ret) a decorated World War II submariner. As the Annapolis *Capital* reported, Captain Dry "died of frustration in 1997, after the Navy Department refused for 25 years to acknowledge his son's death as a "combat loss." The "Sitting DUCKS" empathize with Captain Dry's frustration because they have been stonewalled by the Navy Awards Group's refusal to answer their questions re the handling of the DUCKS' combat award.

The awarding of LT Spence Dry's combat status was a fitting ending to a long struggle for the truth. The DUCKS take heart in the hope that their long quest for proper award recognition will be backed by some person, or group, that shares their desire for fairness in evaluating the DUCKS' combat actions in the Battle of Inchon. A quote that the Navy Awards Group may find pertinent is:

"Any bureaucratization encourages the apparatus to protect its own interest and to forget about the citizens' interests." [8]

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Writing this paper for the proper recognition of the combat action of the "Sitting DUCKS" of Inchon, i.e. Presidential Unit Citation, has been aided by many Navy veterans. Some were kind enough to share significant material with this writer.

First and foremost was Mr. Joe Carillo, the COLLETT DUCKS veteran who wrote to the President, SECDEF, SECNAV, and the CNO in 1995 and 1996, requesting the review of the DUCKS' Inchon combat actions which might lead to a Presidential Unit Citation. Still active in the quest for the PUC, Joe has shared a wealth of his material regarding the Navy, and particularly about the Battle of Inchon. He is now retired at age 85 and lives in Whittier, CA; he has had many articles published in California newspapers.

Two MANSFIELD DUCKS who are avid Korean War historians have shared their writings with veterans groups and the general public. Mr. Richard Bowman of Roy, UT, is the author of "A Tin Can Named MANSFIELD," published in September 1994; a revised edition was published in March 2001. Rich Bowman's book is a meticulous account of the actions of USS MANSFIELD (DD-728) through that ship's life and is especially pertinent about the combat action at Inchon 1950, and the mine explosion on 30 September 1950, which almost severed the ship's bow.

The other MANSFIELD DUCKS veteran is Mr. James Burnside, USN (Ret), who has written on all facets of the Navy's role in the Korean War, but also the actions of



Marine and Army units in that war. He has shared his many original insights on Korean War actions with many veterans' organizations. Jim lives in Rushville, IL.

Mr. Richard Sierra, USN, a HENDERSON DUCKS veteran, is a key point man in the quest for the Presidential Unit Citation. If there is any pertinent news regarding Navy actions in the Korean War, he will track it down and pass it on. Rich has put his heart and soul into the DUCKS and the HENDERSON Ships Association; he lives in South San Francisco, CA.

Mr. Don Snider, USN (Ret), is the very competent editor of the LYMAN K. SWENSON Newsletter and Ship's History. Don has provided encouragement to this writer to keep the DUCKS' PUC quest alive. His letter (Enclosure 20) is right in line with his goal of keeping his SWENSON Association members updated on their shipmates, as witness, he notes the recent deaths of three SWENSON DUCKS. The obituary of one of those heroic DUCKS – Zeke Zettner- is shown in Enclosure 21. Don, who lives in Portland, TN, notes that now is the time for our PUC – we DUCKS are running out of time.

Lastly, my primary acknowledgement is to my wonderful wife of sixty years, Fay, who never complained about the many hours that this writer spent on this DUCKS letter, and the fact that she often lost use of the dining room table, which was routinely covered with books and papers.

*Bill Garner  
For The "DUCKS"*

COMMANDER CRUISER DIVISION FIVE  
c/o FLEET POST OFFICE  
SAN FRANCISCO , CALIFORNIA

FB3-5:P15:01  
Serial: 144  
21 September 1950

From: Commander Fire Support Group (CTG 90.6)  
(Commander Cruiser Division FIVE)  
To: The Destroyer Element (TE 90.62)  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. MANSFIELD (DD728))  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. DE HAVEN (DD727))  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. COLLETT (DD730))  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. LYMAN K. SWENSON (DD729))  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. HENDERSON (DD785))  
(Commanding Officer, U.S.S. GURKE (DD783))

Subj: Commendation for Services rendered during the Bombardment of Inchon, Korea, 13-15 September 1950

1. Commander Cruiser Division FIVE desires to commend the officers and crew of the ships under his command for their meritorious services rendered in support of this Task Group during its recent operations against Inchon, Korea.
2. The ship under your command distinguished itself by extraordinary heroism in action with the enemy and exhibiting gallantry and determination in overcoming difficult and hazardous conditions beyond the call of duty. During the period 13-15 September 1950, the MANSFIELD (DD728), DE HAVEN (DD727), LYMAN K. SWENSON (DD729), COLLETT (DD730), GURKE (DD783), AND HENDERSON (DD785), navigated for the first time, the difficult tide and current conditions we recognized for their navigational hazards and entered the well fortified harbor of INCHON. Anchoring within close range of the enemy shore defenses the destroyers returned, with deliberate and decisive accuracy, the heavy counter battery fire of hidden enemy gun emplacements ashore and, although receiving hits and some casualties refused to depart from their assigned stations until their scheduled time of withdrawal, at which time they retired down the channel to await reentry for the next scheduled bombardment. Well knowing that with each entry the possibility of their meeting with additional resistance was increased, these ships transited a mine field, gallantly passed close to the shore fortifications and, by determined precise bombardment effectively reduced the defenses of the port sufficiently to permit the successful landing of the United Nations Amphibious Forces on 15 September.
3. By their aggressive action and bold execution of the operation the destroyers were responsible for the landing of a large amphibious force within a narrow confined area and with the loss of scarcely any lives. Their outstanding conduct and successful execution of the operation have been an immediate major contribution to the war effort of the Korean Campaign and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Navy.
4. Commander Cruiser Division FIVE has forwarded to the Task Force Commander recommendations for awards proposed for those ships and personnel most vitally concerned in the attack on Inchon. In the meanwhile I trust you will express to the officers and crew of your ship my appreciation for their wholehearted and splendid support I received during the entire operation. To each and all a "Well Done." I feel that we have definitely shortened the Korean Campaign by our successful achievement.

J. M. HIGGINS

Copy to :  
ComDesRon NINE

**Enclosure 1 to  
DUCKS Letter  
of 10/15/08**