

Pathfinder

OCTOBER 18, 1950

p. 20

The Navy Fights on Land

Admiral Sherman makes
unification work, gets his
ships, and turns out a
fighting fleet



Inchon landing. The Navy's reactivated LSTs gave the the Korean War a spectacular military flourish not seen since Okinawa.

If last month's solar-plexus punch on Inchon left the North Koreans gasping, it also left many an American guessing. Where, the armchair strategists wanted to know, did the U.S. find its Navy?

Battle reports of a 261-ship armada—the mightiest to spearhead a landing since Okinawa—were understandably incredible. Cruisers, aircraft carriers and destroyers able to float and fight had supposedly gone under in the backwash of an economy wave that Louis A. Johnson had whipped up more than a year before.

To indignant citizens, the recollection of the former Defense Secretary's "insidious plot" to scuttle the Navy was still painfully fresh. As recently as April 1949 the then Secretary of the Navy, John L. Sullivan, foresaw tragic consequences from Johnson's short-sighted penny-pinching and quit his job.

Six months later Sullivan's smoldering anxiety, brought about by the stop-work order on the supercarrier, the USS United States, was dramatically rekindled in a bitter unification fight. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Louis Denfeld, who had fought the good fight "to save the Navy," was sacked. The President had found his "usefulness" had ended. The Navy's budget barometers picked up warnings of even deeper cuts in ships and manpower. And on the same dark day they banished forever Navy Day, in favor of a new, and ostensibly prejudiced, Armed Forces Day.

The Navy

Amphibious Sailors. Yet 10 months later the prophets of gloom went over the side. Not only did the U.S. have a fiercely efficient Navy fighting in the Korean war, but that Navy was doing everything short of pulling Neptune out of the sea and putting him into a slit trench. Because no seagoing enemy showed himself (the only exceptions were a few sea mines and some radar warnings of Russian submarines) the Navy virtually switched roles: It became a land force.

Before the Inchon landing, as the Red troops pushed south toward Pusan, the Navy contributed greatly to stopping the Communist drive. Serving as seaborne artillery, cruisers and destroyers lay in close to shore and pulverized coastal roads, bridges and communications lines which the North Koreans needed if the assault was to succeed.

Navy helicopters became artillery and naval gunfire spotters, delivered the mail to soldiers and marines in almost inaccessible areas, and betweentimes pulled remarkable rescue stunts. In one case, reported by Capt. Walter Karig, USN, seven minutes after getting a call for help a Navy helicopter dropped on top of a grenade-riddled machine gun position, hauled an injured marine aboard and flew him to an advanced aid station, 17 miles behind the front. Three hours later the marine had undergone major surgery and was safe between clean sheets on a hospital ship, the USS Consolation—in just about the time it takes to treat a victim of an average American traffic accident.

Sharpshooters. Early in the war, when it became apparent that the Air Force's highly touted strategic bombing wasn't seriously hurting Red invaders, carrier planes gave close air support to U.N. troops. Besides strafing enemy columns, Navy pilots upturned a bagful of tricks ordinarily used in dive-bombing and torpedo-bombing at sea. So proficient did the Navy airmen become that at times they were dropping their bombs a scant 200 yards ahead of advancing U.N. troops. But it was during the Inchon landing that the Navy virtually "went ashore." Cruisers, firing 8-inch guns, pounded the hills just south of the Korean port so heavily that landslides resulted. As the North Koreans fled to the flatlands, U.S. destroyers whipped in between the shore and the cruisers to fire—almost at point-blank range—anti-personnel shells, timed with proximity fuses. The devastation was as bad as that from shrapnel or air bursts of artillery shells.

Similarly the USS Missouri became a floating artillery unit. In at least one case the Mighty Mo laid down a pre-attack barrage for the assaulting South Koreans, 20 miles inland. (When the



Joint Chiefs. *The Chief of Naval Operations shows Generals Bradley, Vandenberg and Collins that the world is round.*

Missouri wasn't firing, her giant refrigerators were turning out ice cream by the barrel for the troops.) Through all this the Navy maintained the blockade of Formosan waters and provided all the troop transports and hospital ships.

Magician in Blue. The miracle-man most responsible for this rejuvenated Navy is brilliant, 53-year-old Adm. Forrest P. Sherman, the first air officer (and youngest man) to serve as CNO. On Nov. 2, when Sherman (see cover) took his oath of office, an air of hostility filled Navy Secretary Francis P. Matthews' Pentagon office. Thirty-eight wooden-faced admirals, including Denfeld, Sherman's predecessor, stood impassively by, stern disciples of the ancient Navy gospel of battleships and bullets and spit-and-polish. Below decks in the Pentagon and in far-flung Navy and Marine bases the ominous muttering of "sell-out" was heard. Every skipper and swabbie was certain the author of the first plan for unifying the Navy had now been named to sing its litany of death.

An aloof, abstemious man, Sherman had wasted little time making friends or politicking. After two years as Adm. Chester W. Nimitz' planning-officer in the Pacific, he knew better than his critics the importance of teamwork. Later, as Nimitz's deputy CNO, he produced the compromise between Navy airmen and the Air Force.

But if Sherman was aware of the distrust and dislike he had engendered, he gave no sign. Before the admirals had finished cheering the outgoing Denfeld, Sherman was hard at work. The \$350 mil-

'Copter rescue. *Marooned small-boat sailors are hauled to safety.*



The Navy

lion cut in spending ordered by Johnson had given him a skeleton fleet of 237 ships, cost him 4 more aircraft carriers, 6 cruisers and 21 other ships. Manpower was to drop from 432,000 to 386,000.

No Propaganda. Despite this and without fanfare, Sherman first abolished Operation 23, the propaganda machine that had supplied most of the pro-Navy, anti-Air Force arguments for the Congressional probe of unification abuses. Then he began to teach the other chiefs of staff—the Army's Gen. J. Lawton Collins, the Air Force's Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg and Chairman Omar N. Bradley—that “the world is round,” that three-fourths of the earth's surface is ocean; that one-third of the earth's surface is the Pacific; that above land and sea there is an ocean of air—and that the Navy has a gigantic part in protecting it all.

He took his fellow chiefs to sea; literally coerced them into visiting Japan, Guam, Pearl Harbor and the Aleutians. After six months Sherman's patient, coldly intellectual persuasiveness had begun to tell. General Bradley, no slouch as a military historian himself, came to depend more and more upon Sherman's profound knowledge of the history of wars. Pentagon gossips claim today that Sherman knows what Bradley, Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall and the President are thinking long before Vandenberg or Collins have even a hint.

Last week Sherman had scored his major hits and proved emphatically that he “still knows his uniform is blue.”

Nearly everything Denfeld and the battlewagon set had fought for—and had lost their jobs for—was on its way. Work on the giant aircraft carrier, the *United States*, will soon be resumed.

Growing Fleet. Besides the 62 ships reactivated specifically for the Inchon invasion, 296 more vessels have been ordered out of mothballs. By the end of next June, 20 aircraft carriers, 2 battleships of the Missouri class, 15 cruisers, 200 destroyers, 75 submarines, 118 mine-control craft, 256 amphibious ships and 255 auxiliary vessels would be afloat and in fighting shape. The Navy and the Marine Corps will have 7,355 first-line planes. And sailors will number somewhere between 500,000 and 612,000.

Despite his spectacular success, Sherman knows neither he nor the Navy is entirely safe yet from the potshots of the reactionaries. The Navy is more than an arm of the armed forces. It is a society. And as in any society, changes—no matter how beneficial—are always resisted from within.

You Can't Do That. In 1900 the late Adm. William S. Sims, who was then an obscure gunnery lieutenant, was almost cashiered because he arrogantly fought to prove that a Navy gun could

The Navy

be continuously fired, without waiting for a ship to reach the peak of a roll. Washington brass squashed Sims's improvements for five years *for the simple reason that they were contrary to practices they (the brass) had themselves approved.*

One of the major obstacles to the aircraft carrier was that it could not provide as comfortable sleeping quarters as a battleship. It may seem a superficial reason, but it was a fact even if it did cloak the fundamental reason: a change in the structure of the naval society. For just as improved gunnery raised naval gunners to new importance in shipboard routines and shoreside functions, so did the carrier introduce a new element into what had been a fixed society: the aviators.

Sherman knows that the men who command the cruisers, the battleships and now even the carriers will resent the intrusion of the newest element: the submarine set. Those who are interested only in the *process* and not in the *product* of naval warfare will never stop trying to suppress the upstarts.

New Job in Sight. Fortunately, Sherman will be on deck for at least three more years. When General Bradley steps down as JCS chairman next August, Sherman is slated to replace him. Given this much time, Sherman may be able to puncture enough barnacle-burdened traditions to let the growing Navy continue to grow—within the framework of unification.

Pathfinder