

USS Taylor (DD/DDE 468) Korean War History — 1951–1953

At the end of World War II, The Soviet Union and the United States divided Korea at the Thirty-Eighth Parallel. In 1948, a socialist state was established in the north under the communist leadership of Kim Il-sung, and a capitalist state in the south under the anti-communist leadership of Syngman Rhee. Both governments claimed to be the sole legitimate government of all of Korea and neither accepted the border as permanent. The conflict escalated into warfare when North Korean military forces, supported by the Soviet Union and China, crossed the border and advanced into South Korea on 25 June 1950. The United Nations Security Council authorized the formation of the United Nations Command and the dispatch of forces to Korea to repel what was recognized as a North Korean invasion. Twenty-one countries of the United Nations eventually contributed to the UN force, with the United States providing around 90% of the military personnel.

As tensions increased on the Korean peninsula, the Pentagon had another concern. The government was very worried about the potential danger developing as the Soviet Union increased its fleet of submarines. The United States Navy was limited in its anti-submarine warfare capability. An immediate answer was to recall to active duty many Fletcher Class destroyers. This would include Taylor, which was moved to the San Francisco Naval Shipyard on 9 May 1950. Three days later she began an extensive conversion to an escort destroyer, to be designated DDE 468 on 2 January 1951. The conversion included, among other things, removal of three of the five-inch gun mounts; installation of an anti-submarine warfare weapon, Weapon Alpha; and increasing the ship's speed to over forty knots. On 3 December 1951 Taylor was recommissioned at San Francisco, Commander Sheldon H. Kinney commanding.

On 3 February 1952 Taylor put to sea for a two-month shakedown period off San Diego. On 24 March she headed west to her new home port, Pearl Harbor, and arrived there on the Thirtieth. Following two months in the Hawaiian Islands, Taylor set out to return to the western Pacific for the first time since World War II. She stopped at Midway Island and Yokosuka, Japan, before joining Task Force 77 on 16 June to screen the carriers during air operations off the Korean coast.

During the five months that she spent in the Far East, Taylor drew several different assignments. Initially, she operated with the fast carriers and conducted bombardments of enemy-held positions along the coasts of Korea. During the second week in July, she

returned to Yokosuka for upkeep, and then went to sea again for exercises which included several weeks of hunter-killer operations.

On 1 August, Taylor rejoined TF 77, and in September stood blockade watch off Wonsan for three weeks. Her blockade duty at Wonsan was far from passive, for on numerous occasions she was called upon to shell enemy shore batteries and lines of transportation, and to screen minesweepers during daily sweeps of the heavily-mined harbor.

Later, Don Wade, who served as a Seaman First Class aboard Taylor from 1951 through 1953, would give a vivid account of the Battle of Wonsan Harbor. He wrote, "Our job was to protect the mine sweeper, protect the marines on the island and keep the rail knocked out so the North Koreans couldn't ship supplies to the front line 60 miles below us. I was on the helm when they opened fire. I was given orders right full rudder and all ahead flank. The annunciator, Buddy Wedgeworth, took care of the flank. Captain Kinney went to the open bridge with his binoculars looking for enemy fire and couldn't locate their position. We moved to put up a smokescreen to bring the mine sweeper out to safety. She had to cut loose mining gear before she could move out. While this was going on, I went to my regular battle station in after steering in the near bottom rear of the ship. All I knew after that was shells hitting [nearby] and rocking the boat."

"Years later I found out the rest of the story. The mine sweeper was able to make it to safe water. The marines and South Koreans were on the island. We were out of range for the enemy to fire on us so they turned to the land. The marines tried to get air support but none came. So we went back in between the island and the mainland to give the marines protection. Now they are firing at us again. We got to the point of the minefield and were turning toward the mainland [when] we spotted their position in a cave. Now we could return fire. We fired two tracers to light up the sky. The third or fourth shell hit pay dirt and blew up the cave. We were lucky; we did not take a hit at all and that was our only battle."

Later in September Taylor headed south for a tour of duty on the Taiwan Strait Patrol during which she made a weekend port call at Hong Kong. In Late October, she returned north to the western coast of Korea, where she patrolled with two British warships, the carrier HMS Glory and the cruiser HMS Birmingham. On 21 November, Taylor returned to Yokosuka, completing the first leg of her voyage home.

After conducting patrols in the western Pacific while en route to Hawaii, Taylor entered Pearl Harbor on 8 December. Following a month of leave and upkeep, she entered the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard for a month of repairs. For the next three months, she conducted shakedown training in the Hawaiian Islands in order to integrate her replacements with the rest of the crew.

On 2 May 1953 Taylor exited Pearl Harbor to depart to the western Pacific again. She reached Yokosuka, Japan, on the Twelfth and, after visiting that port and Sasebo, put to sea to join a carrier task group built around Bairoko (CVE 115) and HMS Ocean (L 12) off the western coast of Korea. For the most part, she screened the carriers during air operations. However, on two occasions, she patrolled close to the enemy-held shoreline to discourage the North Koreans from attempting to take offshore islands held by United Nations forces.

Don Wade later wrote of another incident that took place at this time. "One day we were ordered to go look for a plane that went down in the Sea of Japan. The reason we were sent is because we were the fastest ship in the fleet. [Unfortunately] we were not able to locate the plane or pilot."

"On the way back to the fleet we spotted a san-pan floating in the water with five North Korean kids in it. They told us their village was attacked and their entire families were wiped out and they were fleeing North Korea. They went to a Christian school that gave them Korean Bibles and taught them about Christianity. They got in this small boat and went fishing for food. While they were out, a storm came and blew them further out to sea. We found them after five days at sea. The only possessions they had with them were their Bibles. We took them aboard and gave them showers, then offered them food in the chow hall. Before they would eat they blessed the food. It was astonishing they would pause to say the blessing when they hadn't ate in five days."

"Don't remember how long they stayed with us, about one to two weeks. Then the US government made us give them back to North Korea. It was a sad day for all of us; kids and sailors alike cried as we placed them in the Bosun's chair and lifted them to a bigger boat where they were handed back. I always wondered what happened to those kids."

Taylor returned to Sasebo on 1 June for eleven days of upkeep before heading for Okinawa and two weeks of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training. On 25 June she returned to Japan at Yokosuka, but departed again almost immediately for duty with the Taiwan Strait Patrol. During that assignment, she visited Hong Kong once again, as well

as Kaohsiung, Taiwan, where she trained sailors of the Taiwan Navy. Taylor returned to Yokosuka on 20 July and, after two days of voyage repairs, departed the Far East, arriving in Pearl Harbor on 31 July. Taylor's return to Pearl Harbor coincided very closely with the formal end to hostilities in Korea. The armistice came on 27 July 1953 when she had just passed the midpoint of her voyage, five days out of Yokosuka and four days from Pearl Harbor. On 1 August she entered the naval shipyard there for a three-month overhaul.

Taylor saw action in Korean waters during two deployments to the Far East. For her actions which occurred during the last two years of the Korean War, Taylor earned two battle stars.