



# Fighting with Friends

## Coalition Warfare in Korean Waters, 1950–1953

By Corbin Williamson

In late June 1950, President Harry Truman ordered U.S. forces into combat against the North Korean invasion of South Korea. One of the

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first units to respond was a combined U.S. Navy–Royal Navy task force with one aircraft carrier from each navy. Throughout the Korean War, British and American naval forces operated together to support the decisive actions on land. Although Anglo-American naval relations were close throughout the Korean War, these ties could be

strained and frayed when U.S. Navy commanders operated as though the Royal Navy was a mirror image of their own fleet. This case study in managing multinational operations serves as a timely reminder for commanders and operators of the importance of understanding the history and organizational structure of their coalition partners and



Corsairs returning from combat mission over North Korea circle USS *Boxer* as they wait for planes in next strike to launch, September 4, 1951 (U.S. Navy/NARA)

of being prepared to adjust practices and procedures based on this knowledge. The experience of Rear Admiral George Dyer illustrates the dangers of mirror-imaging coalition allies, even those as close as the Royal Navy.

Dyer took command of Task Force 95, the United Nations (UN) Blockading and Escort Force, in June 1951, after ending a tour as the deputy commandant of the National War College in Washington, DC. Dyer brought a great deal of experience to his new command, having held several staff and surface warfare positions in both the Pacific and Atlantic during World War II.<sup>1</sup> Task Force 95 was under the command of Seventh Fleet, which reported to Vice Admiral Turner Joy, Commander Naval

Forces Far East, and General Douglas MacArthur, the overall UN commander. The Task Force was responsible for three task missions: providing air and naval gunfire support along the Korean Peninsula's west coast, blockading North Korea on both coasts, and escorting convoys to and from Japan. The first mission, west coast air and gunfire support, fell to Task Group 95.2, commanded by a British officer, Rear Admiral Alan Scott-Moncrieff.<sup>2</sup>

### Dyer's Approach to Naval Bombardment

Dyer entered his position with a firm conviction about the role of naval power in Korea. He believed that his force should use more firepower

against the enemy than had previously been the case "in an effort to keep up the pressure on the Communists at a high level," a reference by Dyer to the ongoing armistice talks between Chinese and UN negotiators. From his perspective, the UN was giving away too much at the talks and increasing the military pressure on the Communists might force them into greater concessions.<sup>3</sup> Dyer's personal letters to friends and fellow officers back home frequently enumerated the total numbers of bombs and shells expended by Task Force 95. For example, in an August 1951 letter, he approvingly wrote that daily his ships were firing 500–1,000 shells and his planes were dropping 10–25 tons of bombs.<sup>4</sup> Under

his leadership, commanding officers who received fire from the shore and returned fire received top priority for awards and decorations. He told a friend in early 1952, "I believe that those who fight the war, in counter-distinction with those who are merely present while the fighting goes on about them, are deserving of some special recognition."<sup>5</sup>

Dyer's approach to naval bombardment aggravated the British, especially Scott-Moncrieff. He complained about Dyer's practice of judging "a ship's efficiency and aggressiveness . . . in proportion to the ammunition expended." The British admiral also deplored the "injunctions to 'get into the shooting war'" that came down from Dyer's flagship.<sup>6</sup> Britain's economy remained weakened from the strains of World War II and rationing was still in force in 1950. Accordingly, the Royal Navy sought to conserve ammunition by firing only at verified targets and by avoiding the American practice of "harassing fire." British and Commonwealth naval officers frequently complained about the extravagant American expenditure of ammunition. One Canadian officer described the U.S. Navy as an organization "seemingly run without regard for cost."<sup>7</sup>

Rear Admiral Scott-Moncrieff did not keep his negative feelings about Dyer and Dyer's views on bombardment to himself. He sent a message to one of the other senior officers in Task Force 95 describing an upcoming trip Dyer was taking to the west coast, commenting, "I hope he [Dyer] will cause no trouble," knowing full well that the message would be seen by junior officers throughout the Task Force.<sup>8</sup> Captain James Plomer, Commander Canadian Destroyers Far East, reported that he saw examples of other messages that brought Scott-Moncrieff and his staff's dislike of Dyer into the open. Plomer believed the situation was not helped by the "undercurrent of irritation with the Americans" and "frequent discouraging remarks and petty criticisms of the Americans and the American Navy" common on Scott-Moncrieff's staff. He also noted that the "rare exceptions" to this

pattern of criticizing the U.S. Navy were from British officers "who have served in the United States," a reminder that duty with another coalition partner often created advocates for closer cooperation or at least greater understanding. Plomer obliquely referred to Dyer as "the principal trouble-maker," while also pointing out that Scott-Moncrieff's chief of staff, Captain R.A. Villiers, was "strongly anti-American in outlook."<sup>9</sup>

### U.S. Navy Historical Practice

The lavish use of ammunition by the U.S. Navy in Korea did not begin with Dyer's time with Task Force 95. As the British naval advisor in Tokyo wrote in August 1950, in the U.S. Navy "more weight is put on the number of rounds you fire than where they fall."<sup>10</sup> In 1951, Admiral Guy Russell, the senior British naval officer in the western Pacific, ruefully commented to the First Sea Lord about American material abundance, "their ammunition expenditure would buy us another Cruiser Squadron or Carrier Task Force." Russell also reported that the captain of the battleship USS *New Jersey* "is bitterly disappointed if he doesn't fire his whole ammunition outfit each time up the coast."<sup>11</sup> The captain of HMAS *Warramunga*, Commander James Ramsay, described a visit to an American landing craft loaded with 5,000 rockets fired from 20 launchers. The American captain told Ramsay that "he had to restrain himself from firing for too long because the rockets cost the taxpayers 50 bucks each." Ramsay concluded, "it is rare to find the USN [U.S. Navy] practicing such self-restraint in bombardment."<sup>12</sup> As a result of this profligate expenditure of ammunition, in the first 2 years of the Korean War, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps aircraft dropped almost as many bombs as were dropped by these two Services in all of World War II.<sup>13</sup>

However, Dyer's efforts to link ammunition expenditure with rewards and promotions went beyond standard American practice. After Dyer's departure, succeeding American admirals worked to remove the links created by

Dyer between bombardment and promotion. In July 1952, Vice Admiral Robert Briscoe, the senior American naval officer in Korea, and Vice Admiral Joseph Clark, Commander Seventh Fleet, emphasized to their subordinates that evaluation reports "would not depend on the amount of ammunition" fired.<sup>14</sup>

### Diverging Styles of Command

In addition to diverging views about naval bombardment, Dyer's style of command damaged relations with the Royal Navy in Korea. The U.S. Navy divided command functions into three separate lines of authority: operational, type, and logistics. An operational commander assigned missions and ordered ships and aircraft to perform specific missions. The type commander handled administrative tasks such as assigning personnel to a warship, ensuring training requirements were met, and scheduling repairs. Logistics ships were set aside in a logistics force that reported to a logistics commander separate from the type and operational commanders. The purpose of this command structure was to free the operational commander from administrative and logistical responsibilities so that he could focus entirely on combat operations. The system also gave the commander maximum mobility and flexibility in operations, two characteristics that dominated operations in the Pacific theater in World War II.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the British system of command combined operational, administrative, and logistical functions within a single command position located at a shore base.

Due in part to his World War II experience in the Pacific, Rear Admiral Dyer believed that the best way to command Task Force 95 was to be at sea with the fleet as much as possible. Several months after taking command, Dyer wrote to a fellow admiral in Pearl Harbor, "the only way I can do my job adequately is to visit the areas where the fighting is going on."<sup>16</sup> He frequently took his staff to sea with him in the heavy cruiser USS *Toledo* to visit his forces off Korea.<sup>17</sup>

Although Task Force 95 commanders before and after Dyer also went to sea,





Pilot from USS *Bon Homme Richard* bombs Korean bridge, November 1952 (U.S. Navy/NARA)

Dyer did so more frequently. This style of command caused two problems as far as Scott-Moncrieff and his staff were concerned. First, Dyer was frequently not present at his headquarters at Sasebo in Japan, which limited his day-to-day contact with liaison officers from the Air Force, Army, intelligence, and other organizations. This reduction in daily contact led to lower levels of cooperation between Task Force 95 and the various other organizations involved in fighting the Korean War. In the Central Pacific in World War II, the U.S. Navy largely ran the war as it saw fit with minimal contact with organizations not under the control of Admiral Chester Nimitz at Pearl Harbor. But Korea was different. Air support required constant coordination and communication with the Army and Air Force, while raids and island defense missions needed to be coordinated with multiple intelligence organizations.

Second, and more troubling for the British, Dyer's method upset the standing command arrangement in Task Force 95. Dyer's predecessor, Rear Admiral Allan Smith, as well as other previous Task Force 95 commanders, concentrated their attention on east coast operations, giving Scott-Moncrieff considerable autonomy over west coast operations. In contrast, Dyer's frequent trips to the west coast led to "a great deal of backseat driving," according to Scott-Moncrieff. Dyer's technique overturned the arrangement reached between Scott-Moncrieff and Dyer's predecessors under which the British operated with considerable autonomy on the west coast. But Dyer's visits to the west coast undermined this mission command agreement. In addition to diverging approaches to command, Dyer also did not explain the "why" when issuing orders, as was customary in the Royal Navy. Finally, the British found that

"any advice or question [upon receipt of Dyer's orders] appeared to be regarded as criticism or unwillingness." Dyer's leadership led many British captains to conclude that "they were not trusted" by the American admiral. Furthermore, the British desire to conserve ammunition combined with American pressure to expend it led the British to feel that Dyer "thought we were dragging our feet."<sup>18</sup>

Dyer's largely negative impact on relations within the command structure of Task Force 95 demonstrates the importance of understanding the traditions and culture of coalition partners. If Dyer had been more accommodating to the British or pursued closer personal relations with Scott-Moncrieff, perhaps much of the acrimony could have been avoided.

Other British naval officers found that close personal ties could bring considerable benefits in Korea. For example, relations at American naval headquarters

in Tokyo between the U.S. Navy staff and the British naval liaison officer stationed there remained close and harmonious throughout the war. Vice Admiral Turner Joy, the overall American naval commander in 1951, gave the British officer a desk inside the headquarters building and made him a part of the Admiral's staff. The liaison officer, Commander John Gray, helped provide the Admiralty with insight on American naval thinking while providing information to the Americans about British capabilities and intentions. Gray found that the personal connections he developed paid dividends. For example, the U.S. Navy briefed him on the classified plans for the landing at Inchon, information not provided to the British Army or Royal Air Force officers on the British embassy in Tokyo staff.<sup>19</sup>

### Change of Command

On May 31, 1952, Rear Admiral John Gingrich replaced Dyer as Commander, Task Force 95, much to the Royal Navy's relief.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Dyer, who spent roughly half his time at sea, Gingrich preferred to remain at Sasebo, Japan, the task force's headquarters, and let his east and west coast commanders run operations on their own. Scott-Moncrieff reported that "relations became far easier" since Gingrich "has acted in accordance with the original intention, namely to remain for the most part in Sasebo." He concluded that Gingrich "has been most cooperative."<sup>21</sup> By mid-July, Vice Admiral Guy Russell, senior British naval officer in the Far East, reported that he was "happier than I have ever been about Anglo-American cooperation . . . the departure of the rather ambitious and possibly anti-British Admiral Dyer has made a great difference all round."<sup>22</sup> Canadian officers such as Commander John Reed also thought highly of Gingrich. Reed wrote that the American was "an excellent administrator" and a "most pleasant and tactful personality."<sup>23</sup> In addition to reverting to the previous pattern of command, Gingrich took steps to reduce ammunition expenditure, precisely the action Scott-Moncrieff had been advocating. Soon after relinquish-

ing command of Task Force 95, Gingrich told an audience at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces:

*In the Korean action I was commander of Task Force 95 and I was worried about our heavy expenditure of ammunition. When I took over Task Force 95, I found that we were firing 37,000 rounds of 5-inch ammunition on the east coast of Korea and 14,700 on the west coast of Korea [per month]. Much of this was unobserved fire. I gave instructions that I wanted air spots, shore fire-control spots, and director spots at the targets which were worth shooting at. I wanted to know specifically what damage was done, not that "great damage" was done. The result of this was that we cut down to 8,500 rounds on the east coast . . . on the west coast we cut down to 6,500 rounds.<sup>24</sup>*

Scott-Moncrieff could not have said it better himself.

Ironically, Dyer's correspondence reveals that he personally was quite pro-British. In July 1951 he expressed surprise that a French officer would head the new North Atlantic Treaty Organization Defense College, since he thought "it would have been on sounder grounds" for a British or American officer to hold that position. He wrote a friend in November 1952 that "the British are fine people and very friendly once they feel they have struck a response chord in Americans." He recalled in 1973, "I had a British flag officer serving underneath me [Scott-Moncrieff], a very fine one." However, Dyer's personal feelings could not overcome the animosity caused by his lack of consideration for the Royal Navy's patterns of operation.<sup>25</sup>

For the U.S. Navy, the Korean War provided considerable experience operating with coalition navies in combined formations using standard communications books and maneuvering procedures. This pattern of operating with allies continues to the present and foundational U.S. strategic documents highlight the importance of coalitions and partners.<sup>26</sup> However, Rear Admiral George Dyer's time in command of Task Force 95 placed considerable strain on coalition relations due to his failure to

adjust his methods and procedures to accommodate U.S. allies such as the British and Commonwealth navies. A greater appreciation for Britain's economic constraints might have led Dyer to at least exempt the Royal Navy from pressure to expend more ammunition. Ultimately, the U.S. Navy concluded that Dyer's approach to bombardment was not the preferred model. Furthermore, Dyer could have granted the British greater autonomy in their area of operations off the Korean east coast, as his predecessors and successors did. While overall relations between the Americans and the British and Commonwealth fleets were strong during the Korean War, Rear Admiral George Dyer's approach was a prominent exception. JFQ

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Library of Congress Manuscript Division, "Biographical Note," George C. Dyer Papers, 1898–1988, available at <[http://findingaids.loc.gov/db/search/xq/searchMfer02.xq?\\_id=loc.mss.eadmss.ms008050&\\_faSection=overview&\\_faSubsection=bioghist&\\_dmdid=d16974e18](http://findingaids.loc.gov/db/search/xq/searchMfer02.xq?_id=loc.mss.eadmss.ms008050&_faSection=overview&_faSubsection=bioghist&_dmdid=d16974e18)>.

<sup>2</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, U.S. Navy (USN), to Mrs. E. Bacon, July 16, 1951, Folder 9, Box 1, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (LOC).

<sup>3</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Lieutenant Commander David R. Sword, USN, December 20, 1951, Folder 1, Box 2, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC.

<sup>4</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Mrs. E. Bacon, August 22, 1951, Folder 9, Box 1, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC.

<sup>5</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Rear Admiral Clarence L.C. Atkeson, Jr., USN, January 4, 1952, Folder 2, Box 2, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC.

<sup>6</sup> Rear Admiral Alan K. Scott-Moncrieff, Royal Navy (RN), Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Far East Station, "Report of Experience in Korean Operations, July 1951–June 1952," September 15, 1952, Part III, Section III, File 1926-102/11 Pt. 2, "Reports of Proceedings—Commander Canadian Destroyers—Far East, 1951–1953," Volume 8204, RG24-D-1-c, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Commander James Plomer, Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), Commander Canadian





Supply warehouses and dock facilities at this important east coast port feel destructive weight of paradedemolition bombs dropped from Fifth Air Force's B-26 Invader light bombers, Wonsan, North Korea, 1951 (U.S. Air Force/NARA)

Destroyers, Far East, "Korea War Report, Part One" 1952, 26, Folder Korean War Report—Part One, HMCS *Cayuga*, July 1951–June 1952, File 2, Box 109, 81/520/1650-238/187, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH).

<sup>8</sup> Commander James Plomer, RCN, Commander Canadian Destroyers, Far East, "Korea War Report, Part Two" 1952, 4, Folder Korean War Report—Part Two, 1952, File 3, Box 109, 81/520/1650-238/187, DHH.

<sup>9</sup> Commander James Plomer, RCN, Commanding Officer, HMCS *Cayuga*, "Korea War Report, Part Two" 1952, Section I, Folder Korean War Report—Part Two, File 3, Box 109, 81/520/1650-238/187, DHH.

<sup>10</sup> Commander J.M.D. Gray, RN, Naval Advisor Tokyo to Commander in Chief, Far East Station, "NA 41/792/50," August 9, 1950, 7, ADM 116/6227, National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK).

<sup>11</sup> Admiral Guy Russell, RN, Commander in Chief, Far East Station to Admiral Bruce Fraser, RN, First Sea Lord, October 23, 1951, 4–5, ADM 205/76, NAUK.

<sup>12</sup> Commander James M. Ramsay, Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Commanding Officer, HMAS *Warramunga* to Captain (D), 10<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla, HMAS *Bataan*, March 1, 1952, 358/3, AWM78, Australian War Memorial (AWM).

<sup>13</sup> "US Navy—Items of General Interest," Appendix 1 to Commodore Morson A. Medland, RCN, Naval Member, Canadian Joint

Staff (Washington) to Naval Secretary, "CANAVUS Report of Proceedings for November 1952," December 3, 1952, 2, Folder HMCS *Niagara* (Base) 1952, File 5, HMCS *Niagara* (Base) Reports of Proceedings, 1952, Box 145, 81-520-8000, DHH.

<sup>14</sup> Vice Admiral Guy Russell, RN, Commander in Chief, Far East Station to Admiral Rhoderick R. McGrigor, RN, First Sea Lord, "D/010," July 12, 1952, 5, ADM 205/86, NAUK.

<sup>15</sup> For a modern, similar example of the command system at work see Thomas Cutler, *The Citizen's Guide to the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 56–58.

<sup>16</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Rear Admiral John W. Roper, USN, October 28, 1951, Folder 1, Box 2, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC.

<sup>17</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith, USN, July 24, 1951, Folder 9, Box 1, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC; Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Mrs. E. Bacon, July 16, 1951.

<sup>18</sup> Rear Admiral Alan K. Scott-Moncrieff, RN, Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Far East Station, "Report of Experience in Korean Operations, July 1951–June 1952," Part II.

<sup>19</sup> See Commander J.M.D. Gray, RN, Naval Advisor Tokyo to Commander in Chief, Far East Station, "NA 41/16/51, Sixth Report of Proceedings," January 4, 1951, 2, 4, ADM

116/6227, NAUK; Commander J.M.D. Gray, RN, Naval Advisor Tokyo to Commander in Chief, Far East Station, "NA 41/1189/50, Fifth Report of Proceedings," December 1, 1950, 3, 5, ADM 116/6227, NAUK; Commander J.M.D. Gray, RN, Naval Advisor Tokyo to Commander in Chief, Far East Station, "NA 41/912/50, Third Report of Proceedings," September 28, 1950, 3, 4, ADM 116/6227, National Archives of the UK; Commander J.M.D. Gray, RN, Naval Advisor Tokyo to Commander in Chief, Far East Station, "NA 41/792/50."

<sup>20</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Lieutenant Commander Joseph Raymond Tenanty, USN, February 12, 1952, Folder 2, Box 2, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC.

<sup>21</sup> Rear Admiral Alan K. Scott-Moncrieff, RN, Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Far East Station, "Report of Experience in Korean Operations, July 1951–June 1952," Part II.

<sup>22</sup> Vice Admiral Guy Russell, RN, Commander in Chief, Far East Station to Admiral Rhoderick R. McGrigor, RN, First Sea Lord, "D/010," 3.

<sup>23</sup> Commander John C. Reed, RCN, to Commander, Canadian Destroyers, Far East, "Report of Proceedings, February 1953," March 17, 1953, 1, File 1926-355/31 Part 2, "HMCS *Athabaskan*—Report of Experience in Korean Operations, 1950–1953," Volume 11374, RG24-D-22, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Vice Admiral John E. Gingrich, USN, Chief of Naval Material, "Publication No. 154-54, Military Procurement" (Industrial College of the Armed Forces, November 18, 1953), 3, available at <<https://merln.ndu.edu/u2/icafarchive,38044>>.

<sup>25</sup> Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Lieutenant General Harold R. Bull, USA, July 31, 1951, Folder 9, Box 1, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC; Rear Admiral George C. Dyer, USN, to Commander Joseph A. Houston, USN, November 18, 1952, Folder 4, Box 2, George C. Dyer Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, LOC; Reminiscences of Vice Admiral George C. Dyer, USN (Ret.), interview by John T. Mason, Jr., 1973, 521, U.S. Naval Institute Library, Annapolis, MD.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, 2015, 8, available at <[www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/National\\_Military\\_Strategy\\_2015.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/National_Military_Strategy_2015.pdf)>; U.S. Department of Defense, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*, March 2015, 2, available at <[www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf)>.