

Chapter 5: 1953: Korea

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Items marked 'BD' come from Bob Darling, engineering officer aboard the Colahan from 1951 to 1953. Darling gleaned them from letters he wrote to his parents.

BD 12-30-52 Arrive at Sasebo. In port from 1-1-53 to 1-8-53.

BD 1-5-53 Squadron commodore has Personnel and Administrative Inspection of Colahan. Did "good" and "excellent" respectively.

BD 1-9-53 DesDiv 172, less the USS Shields, is enroute to Songjin area of North Korea to join TF-95. The Shields can't go, as they burned out the superheater side of one boiler and had to have 156 tubes replaced by the tender. The USS Erben went to the west coast of Korea and the Twining dropped off at Wonsan, North Korea. We relieved the USS Sullivans. Our job was to interdict shipping into ports and to protect the island garrison off the coast. We were also to fire at targets of opportunity. The weather was cold and the ship was covered with ice.

BD 1-18-53 The Colahan fired 187 rounds of 5" shells at the rail yards in Tanchon, North Korea, with the help of a spotting plane.

BD 1-19-53 Five marines on Yong Do Island came aboard to eat aboard the Colahan.

BD 1-26-53 Colahan arrives back in Sasebo, Japan.

BD 2-5-53 Ens. John Traxler reports aboard to relieve LTJG Crook as supply officer, and LTJG Bunn gets orders to San Diego.

BD 2-8-53 Enroute to join up with the USS Los Angeles and TF-77.

BD 2-10-53 Colahan now with TF-77 and we now have dawn and dusk alerts (GQ) every day and all day.

BD 2-20-53 Enroute to Yokosuka, Japan.

BD 2-21-53 LTJG Darling (that's me) relieved Lt. J.D. Moore as Chief Engineer. A replacement for J.D. was enroute but was a long time coming and hadn't yet arrived. J.D. was my roommate and mentor since I reported aboard in June 1951. He was ordered to report to Squadron Engineering duty aboard the USS Gregory. As long as the USS Gregory was alongside, he did just that.

BD 2-21-53 The Colahan was also nested alongside the tender USS Hamul for availability.

BD 3-2-53 LTJG C.L. Crook leaves the ship for duty as assistant disbursing officer at the Naval Station in San Diego, and Ens. Bunn (maybe LTJG by now, as I made LTJG on 1-1-53) left the ship for duty in the legal office in San Diego N.S.

BD 3-4-53 Colahan has ASW exercises about 50 miles out at sea.

BD 3-7-53 Briefing in Yokosuka.

Fletcher-Class Destroyers Damaged Off Korea

Date:	Ship:	Place:	Remarks:
3 Feb 52	<i>Porterfield (DD-682)</i>	Sokto	Shore battery, minor damage, no casualties.
27 Aug 52	<i>McDermut (DD-677)</i>	Pkg 4-5	Shore fire, 60 rounds from 3700 yards, little damage, no casualties.
3 Nov 52	<i>Uhlmann (DD-687)</i>	Choho	Shore fire, 160 rounds, 3 hits, 13 casualties.
6 Feb 53	<i>Halsey Powell (DD-686)</i>	Hwa-do	Shore fire, 2 casualties, Whaleboat damaged.
2 May 53	<i>Owen (DD-536)</i>	Wonsan	105-mm shore battery, only 1 hit out of 100 rounds, no casualties.
18 Jun 53	<i>Irwin (DD-794)</i>	Wonsan	Shore fire, 5 casualties, 1 hit out of 90 rounds.
8 Jul 53	<i>Irwin (DD-794)</i>	Pkg 2	Shore fire, 5 casualties, 80 bursts close aboard.

BD 3-8-53 Colahan leaves Yokosuka for Okinawa. We have ASW exercises enroute. The captain is "hyper."

BD 3-15-53 Arrive Okinawa. Weather couldn't be better. We're anchored in Buckner Bay.

BD 3-16-53 Refueled at White Beach area, Buckner Bay, and then moved to an anchorage.

BD 3-19-53 Colahan leaves Buckner Bay to go on Southern Formosa Patrol.

BD 3-27-53 LTJG John Knepper reports aboard to relieve J.D. Moore who has left. He now must relieve me. My relief, LTJG Shea, has not yet arrived. Captain decides to keep me on as Chief Engineer with Knepper as assistant until he becomes familiar with the ship. Like Cdr. Brooks, John is a merchant marine sailor who trained at Kings Point. Good man.

BD 3-28 to 3-30-53 In port at Hong Kong. Our two-day stay was to be three days, so tailors had to work overtime to get our inexpensive suits, sportcoats and topcoats made.

[Ray Jones story about Brooks and 21-gun salute in Hong Kong.]

BD As to whether or not Capt. Brooks had a prostitute in his cabin while in Hong Kong, I could not say. Others told me he did. I never saw her. I do know he must have had liquor aboard. You could smell it on his breath after five days at sea. It didn't seem to impair him at all.

Yes, "Wild Bill" was quite a character. I'm sure the second trip with him (after June 1953) had more exciting adventures. I'm sure Jack Kuhn, who was at our reunion in 1994, could tell you more. He now lives in Kearny, AZ, Box 1102, Tel: (602) 363-5326.

I'm just writing things as I think of them. The Colahan had a lot of mechanical problems during the two years I was aboard. I'm sure there was little real maintenance done while inactive. During our last stint with TF-77 in 1953 we wiped the starboard shaft bearing. We had to shut down that shaft, remove that huge bearing and scrape in a new bearing while underway on one shaft. We did it in record time, working around the clock. We nursed it for several days, trying to keep it cool, but finally it had to be replaced. The Colahan got many kudos for that accomplishment.

[Donald T. DuBose, MM, aboard 1950-1953, recalled that task in a "Remember When" for the 1990 reunion in Boston: "Was asked to scrape in new main shaft bearing while in combat area off Korea." DuBose was 20 years old at the time.]

BD 4-1-53 Proceeding to the Northern Formosa Patrol area.

BD 4-3-53 Arrived at the river port of Kaohsiung, Formosa (check spelling) to be refueled by the USS Mispillion. I was senior shore patrol officer. Rough, dusty town, lots of bars, reminded me what the Old West must have been like.

BD 4-4-53 Departed Formosa.

BD 4-5-53 Easter at sea.

BD 4-11-53 Enroute Sasebo.

BD 4-13-53 Arrived Sasebo. Tied up alongside USS Ajax.

BD 4-21-53 Colahan leaves Sasebo for TF-77 in the Sea of Japan. We were to leave yesterday but got a one-day extension. A repaired feed pump wasn't fixed correctly by the Ajax, so it had to be reworked by them. While with TF-77 we were again at GQ every morning at 0430 and again at 1900.

BD 4-26-53 Refuel at sea.

BD 4-29-53 Detached from TF-77 to pick up and escort USS New Jersey. The USS Shields was to pick up and escort USS Rochester.

BD 5-1-53 At Wonsan harbor with the USS New Jersey shelling the port.

BD 4-30 to 5-3-53 Screening New Jersey as she conducts gun strikes at Hungnam area of North Korea.

BD 5-4-53 Rejoin TF-77 after escorting USS New Jersey to Puson, South Korea.

BD 5-13-53 Detached from TF-77. Ordered to proceed to Yokosuka. LTJG Shea took over E-Division. I don't have a record of when he reported aboard. It was after our Hong Kong visit.

BD 5-15-53 In Yokosuka. LTJG John Knepper relieves LTJG Darling as Engineering Officer.

BD about 5-16-53 Colahan leaves Japan for the States.

BD 5-21-53 Arrive Midway.

BD 5-24-53 Arrive Pearl Harbor after a full-power run. Achieved 33.9 knots for four hours.

BD 5-26-53 Enroute to Long Beach. Vacation cruise.

BD 6-2-53 Arrive Long Beach. Offloaded ammo.

BD 6-3-53 Arrived San Diego, Pier 3. LTJG Swicord and LTJG Roy Jones leave the Colahan.

BD 6-6-53 Colahan moved to drydock #1, SDNS.

BD 6-29-53 LTJG Darling leaves the Colahan for home with another 23 years in the USNR, before retirement as a lieutenant commander.

January 1996 letter from Ken Dillard of Arlington, TX:

I was aboard from 1952 to 1956 in the after engine room with guys like "Porky Elliott," Packett, Jim Rutledge, David Marley, M.D. Adams, J.J. Cooney, Genshino, J.R. Dietrick (E-gang) and Chief Taylor. We had some good midnight snacks down in "the hole." When we had an "all hands" work party taking on food supplies, much of it didn't make it past the engine room. Our cooler for meats was under the bilge plates. I sure got lots of boiled (steamed) eggs for a week. We stole a case of eggs — 44 dozen — and put a few under each steam drain on machinery. In an hour we gathered our "loot" for our 12-to-4 midwatch snack. Sometimes we overlooked a case of meat until it started stinking. Then we had to lift all the deck plates to find where the spoiled meat was. Once we got a few cases of weiners from the galley. Barber [the cook] begged us to return them so the crew could have sauerkraut and weiners the next day. Luckily for the crew we had not eaten very many. We reluctantly gave them back.

Old Ferguson had a mustache about 8 inches on each side. Every morning he went to the head for careful grooming and waxing. The mustache had been growing at least a year. One night about 3 or 4 a.m., a couple of after engine room guys thought "Fergie" needed one side cut off. So two guys (I'm still not squealing on them) took scissors to it while he snored away. We had a lookout waiting to see "Fergie" in the mirror, to catch his reaction after the snip that night. Talk about sailors using bad language! He took the prize that morning. It was a long time before we quit laughing.

[Steel ships, awash in the corrosive moisture of the sea, are subject to rusting on a grand scale. For both practical and aesthetic reasons, they require protective coats of paint, inside and out. Captains want their ships to look good. The deck gang, under the first lieutenant, constantly scraps and paints, a tedious chore without end.]

While returning to the States after a tour overseas, it was customary to clean the ship from fore to aft. I was stationed in the after engine room. We had to have the bilges freshly painted with red lead paint. Our first-class machinist's mate was due to

be discharged upon arrival in the States. The night before inspection, the guy got ten gallons of paint and poured the paint on top of the water in the bilges. After the paint evened out, we pumped the bilges dry, and guess what? The result was a quick paint job with very little touchup. We passed inspection with flying colors, and no one but us snipes knew any better.

A Ken Dillard experience at sea: I was the low man on watch in the after engine room, so it was my job to take readings every hour on equipment in the forward food locker in the mess hall. One night E.C. Barber (cook) called back to the engine room and said he had a fresh loaf of hot bread for us. I got the bread, tucked it under my foul weather coat and was about halfway back to the engine room hatch near the torpedo mount. Just as I got near the hatch, a huge wave broke across the opposite side from where I was. I was holding onto the bread under my coat with one hand. I jumped up and caught hold of the net that held like jackets with the other hand. I was straightened out horizontally by the wave as it came over to my side of the ship. Water came down the 2nd-level exhaust vent, bent the armour on a 20-mm gun and scared the hell out of me. I was lucky not be washed overboard that night, but the bread stayed dry.