

Korean war

Duration: 16 July 1950 – 24 January 1955

Number of military personnel: 4,748

Decorations: Distinguished Unit Citation 2, Presidential Unit Citation 2, Silver Star 14, Bronze Star 102, Military Order of William 3, Bronze Lion 5, Bronze Cross 19 and Cross of Merit 4

Fatalities: 121 + 4 missing

Background

After Japan's capitulation in August 1945, a political vacuum developed from India to Korea. In most cases, this vacuum was filled by the returning western colonial powers or by national freedom movements, but neither of these elements was present in Korea. The Japanese had conquered Korea in 1910 and had crushed all resistance since then. It was the Soviet Union and the United States (US) who filled the post-war power vacuum here, thus determining the divided future of the Korean peninsula. The Soviet Union occupied the northern part of Korea, the United States the southern part. The temporary boundary between the two occupation zones quickly became a de facto border and a confrontation line. Korea also became a battle zone in the international Cold War. North Korea developed into an orthodox communist dictatorship, while in South Korea the conservative elite set up a government regime that was 'democratic' in name only.

It was already becoming clear in 1948 that the increasing tension between North and South Korea could develop into a civil war. That tension took on a military dimension when North Korean border troops began to seek confrontation with army units in the south in May 1949. The North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung persuaded both Stalin and Mao Zedong - who had proclaimed the new Peoples Republic of China in September 1949 - that the capture of South Korea would only take a few weeks at most. The surprise attack by North Korea began on 25 June 1950. In the space of six weeks, the poorly equipped South Korean army and the American units who had rushed in to assist were driven back to the south-eastern tip of the peninsula by the North Koreans. Major battles had, however, taken the momentum out of the enemy advance and, at the beginning of September, brought it to a halt. In mid-September, the American commander in chief, General MacArthur, hit back with a landing at Inchon. He managed to drive the North Koreans back as far as the Yalu, but the all-out deployment of Chinese 'volunteers' halted the advancing allies and forced them back to the 38th parallel.

The UN mandate

On the first day of the North Korean attack, a UN Security Council resolution called for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of the North Korean troops to the 38th parallel. Two days later, in the absence of the Soviet Union, the Council mandated the international community to use force to drive back the North Korean troops and restore international peace and security. On 7 July, the Security Council placed all the troops that had in the meantime been supplied to the UN under the unified command of the US.

The General Assembly decided in a resolution on 7 October that the political aim of the UN operation in Korea was to create an independent, sovereign unitary state under a democratic government, and the General Assembly deemed the presence of UN troops necessary until such time as this aim had been achieved.

The Royal NL Navy in Korean waters

On 3 July 1950, the Netherlands government offered the destroyer HNLMS *Evertsen* for the UN operation in Korea; she arrived in the area of operations 13 days later. The UN's maritime forces were under the command of the commander of the American naval forces in the Far East. Until 12 September 1950, the *Evertsen* formed part of Task Group 96.5: Korea-Japan Support Group of Task Force 96. After that date, Task Group 96.5 remained in existence as the independent Task Force 95: United Nations Blockade and Escort Force.

The successive Dutch ships were allocated a wide range of tasks. Task Force 95 conducted patrols along the entire Korean coast, searching for mines and illegal ship movements. On average, each Dutch ship carried out ten patrols, mainly along the west coast of Korea. The ships were also given the task of escorting a US or British aircraft carrier on a regular basis. Special sub-tasks in this context were Bird Dog and Plane Guard Station. In the case of Bird Dog, the ship positioned itself between the aircraft carrier and the coastline in order to get downed pilots out of the water as quickly as possible. The escorting destroyers also took turns to occupy the Plane Guard Station behind a carrier so that they could help any pilots crashing into the sea on take-off or landing. This changeover had to be effected within a few minutes and it was done with so much manoeuvring that it soon earned the nickname *Corpen Crazy Club* (Corpen is the course pennant in the International Code of Signals).

The Dutch ships were also given the task of protecting the lines of communication and bombarding enemy troop concentrations, reinforcements and infrastructure. On the odd occasion that a Dutch ship was sent to the east coast of Korea, it was for the bombardment of the military-industrial complexes based there (such as Wonsan, Chongjin and Hungnam) and of the coastal railway line. During this type of bombardment, observers in helicopters known as 'windmills', a nickname redolent of Hol-

land, registered the strikes of the grenades and transmitted corrections where necessary. This task disappeared after the ceasefire agreement of 27 July 1953.

The first Dutch ship, the destroyer *Evertsen*, left the port of Surabaya for Japan on 7 July 1950 and arrived on 16 July in Sasebo, a run-down naval base on the island of Kiusju in the south of Japan. With 238 on board, the *Evertsen* left the port of Sasebo on 20 July for its first patrol. Shortly after that, on 9 August, the *Evertsen's* bows hit a reef and sustained such damage that she had to go to the naval dockyards in Hong Kong for repairs (Dutch ships were also able to put into the Japanese port of Kure for maintenance). Not until 2 December 1950 was the destroyer once again ready for deployment in Korean waters.

The destroyer HNLMS *Van Galen*, with 246 on board, relieved the *Evertsen* on 18 April 1951. For the duration of the hostilities, the relief of the *Evertsen* and subsequent ships took place in the safe harbour of Hong Kong, although the Dutch ships had little to fear from the weak North Korean and Chinese navies. They faced a greater threat from the large number of typhoons which swept the Korean waters, as was the case on 12 October 1951, when typhoon Ruth forced the *Van Galen* to leave Sasebo and await more clement weather out at sea.

The relief of the *Van Galen* by the destroyer HNLMS *Piet Hein* was somewhat delayed because Quartermaster F. van der Horst was swept overboard and drowned during a violent storm just after leaving the home port of Den Helder. Of all the Dutch ships which were deployed in Korean waters, the *Piet Hein* was the only one which could count itself among the members of the Train Busters Club of Task Force 95. Ships in this task force regularly carried out 'package sweeps' along the Korean coast. These were patrols along stretches of railway line, the 'packages', between two tunnels. During one of these sweeps on the night of 14-15 November 1952, the *Piet Hein* managed to destroy a North Korean train with direct fire.

From 25 August 1952, the *Piet Hein* had to manage without her commander, Commander A.H.W. von Freijtag Drabbe, who was that day taken on board the British hospital ship *Maine* with a serious case of pneumonia. For the remaining months, the command was held by Lieutenant Commander *jhr* H. de Jonge van Ellemeet. The *Piet Hein* was the only ship to carry 14 marines as well as her permanent crew of 229.

It was not another destroyer but a frigate, namely HNLMS *Johan Maurits van Nassau*, which relieved the *Piet Hein* on 18 January 1953. A frigate like the *Maurits* had a smaller crew (183) than the larger destroyers. The *Maurits* was the only Dutch ship to lose a crew member during an operational deployment in Korean waters. While attempting to evacuate a sick South Korean serviceman on 26 February 1953, telegraph operator C. van Vliet was killed by friendly fire from South Korean troops.

In addition to the usual tasks, the *Maurits* was given a special assignment at the end of June 1953. During attempts to recapture the islands of Sunwi Do and Yuk To on the 38th parallel, the Dutch ship directed the planes from the British aircraft carrier HMS *Ocean* to targets on the islands. Three Dutch navy Hawker Sea Fury fighter/bomber

pilots found themselves on board the *Ocean* from May to October 1953 as part of an exchange project. After the truce which was signed on 27 July 1953, the *Maurits* found herself in calmer waters. No longer did the crew have to push themselves keeping war watches (six hours on, six hours off) and, in the event of a high alert, battle watches for three or four weeks at sea. The ship did, however, have to organise the evacuation of the island of Sokto after the truce (Operation *Pandora*), where large quantities of South Korean weapons, ammunition, supplies and vehicles had been stored.

For service with exceptional merit, four Dutch ships which had served in Korean waters from July 1950 to 27 July 1953 as part of the Seventh Fleet were awarded the Korean Distinguished Unit Citation. The two frigates which represented the Royal NL Navy in Korean waters after the *Maurits* had a considerably less stressful time than their predecessors. Their activities were mainly confined to conducting patrols.

HNLMS *Dubois* took over from the *Maurits* in Yokosuka on 5 November 1953. In turn, HNLMS *Van Zijll* relieved the *Dubois* on 9 September 1954. The *Van Zijll*'s stay in Korea was a short one. At the end of December 1954, the Minister of War and the Navy, C. Staf, decided that the ship should return home on 24 January 1955. Both the *Dubois* and the *Van Zijl* had 209 crew on board, which meant that the number of navy personnel who had served in Korean waters exceeded 1,300. In addition, there were still 14 service personnel working at various naval bases in Japan.

Commanders of Royal NL Navy destroyers and frigates

Lieutenant Commander D.J. van Doorninck JAzN: HNLMS *Evertsen* (16 July 1950 – 18 April 1951)

Commander A.M. Valkenburg: HNLMS *Van Galen* (18 April 1951 – 2 March 1952)

Commander A.H.W. von Freijtag Drabbe: HNLMS *Piet Hein* (2 March 1952 – 25 August 1952)

Lieutenant Commander jhr. H. de Jonge van Ellemeet: HNLMS *Piet Hein* (25 August 1952 – 18 January 1953)

Commander N.W. Sluijter: HNLMS *Johan Maurits van Nassau* (18 January 1953 – 5 November 1953)

Lieutenant Commander T. Jellema: HNLMS *Dubois* (5 November 1953 – 9 September 1954)

Commander F.G.H. van Straaten: HNLMS *Van Zijll* (9 September 1954 – 24 January 1955)

Netherlands Detachment United Nations

On 15 July 1950, Secretary-General Trygve Lie once again called upon the Dutch government. The UN was in dire need of reinforcements in the form of infantry battalions. Bowing to immense pressure from the US, the cabinet announced its intention

on 11 August 1950 to provide an infantry unit made up of volunteers: the Netherlands Detachment United Nations (NDVN). The influx of 1,670 potential Korea volunteers exceeded all expectations. After a medical and a security screening, some six hundred people remained, of whom another hundred failed to turn up. The vetting process was none too stringent, however, as shown by the presence in the NDVN of a number of individuals who had collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War. Five hundred military personnel were by no means sufficient to fill the reinforced infantry battalion required by the Americans. The number was eventually pushed up to 636 by extending the period of enlistment, taking on 75 marines and engaging a number of extra volunteers from Indonesia. From 27 July 1953, the NDVN briefly numbered 1,093 military personnel.

These volunteers were divided into two (instead of the organic three) rifle companies, a support company and a headquarters and headquarters company. The quality of the military personnel was high on the whole, given that many had had combat experience in the Netherlands East Indies. The American army decided to organise and equip the battalion in the American style. The NL Marine Corps, which was the only unit in the Netherlands that was already set up that way, was willing to lend some of its weapons to the NDVN for training purposes during the voyage to Korea. The American instructors at the United Nations Reception Centre in Taegu were, therefore, surprised at the skill with which the Dutch handled the weapons. In order to bring the headquarters and headquarters company to the standard required for inclusion in the British or American support chain, it was augmented with a few additional support personnel and a medical detachment. Two chaplains, an interpreter and a war correspondent also set off for Korea. At the request of US army chiefs, two liaison officers had also set off on 27 September in order to prepare for the arrival of the battalion. The Royal Netherlands Army (RNLA) assigned the battalion administratively to the Van Heutsz regiment. The chief of the general staff, General H.J. Kruls, designated 15 October 1950 as the date of the official inauguration of the NDVN.

The battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel M.P.A. den Ouden, embarked on 26 October, left the following day for Korea and arrived in Pusan on 23 November. A day later, the NDVN continued its journey to the training camp in Taegu for supplementary training. The alarmingly rapid North Korean advance, the huge losses among the allies as well as the NDVN's high level of proficiency and its suitability for counter-guerrilla warfare meant that the training programme could be curtailed substantially and the battalion was already on its way to the front after just one week.

On 13 December, after the short training period, the battalion was assigned to the American 38th 'Rock of the Marne' regiment. This regiment in turn formed part of the 2nd 'Indianhead' Division, which itself came under the 8th Army. An American regiment normally consisted of three battalions, but the NDVN was added to the 38th Regiment as a fourth battalion. Unfortunately, it turned out that the regiment's support

company was not set up for this, which was to cause hiccups in the supply process. From 14 December, the battalion commander was able to call upon a hundred *Katusas* (Korean Army Troops United States Army), also known as ROKS (Republic of Korea Soldiers). In July 1952, the number of *Katusas* rose to as many as three hundred. They performed all sorts of tasks and were used where necessary to make up organic short-falls in the companies. Around twenty of the *Katusas* assigned to the NDVN paid for their deployment with their life. Like the Dutch service personnel, the *Katusas* were also awarded the Cross for Justice and Liberty.

The Korean ground war progressed in roughly three phases (see map, page ???). The first phase began on 25 June 1950 with the North Korean offensive and lasted until 31 December 1950. During that time, the fighting swept over the entire country. At the end of December 1950, the situation stabilised along a front line to the south of the 38th parallel. In the years that followed, the war would be fought mainly in this area. Nevertheless, there were still major front movements in the second phase of the war, in some cases with a depth of some eighty to a hundred kilometres. During the third phase, from 10 July 1951 to the truce of 27 July 1953, the front ran approximately from the mouth of the Imjin river via Chorwon, Kumhwa and Mundungni to the east coast. There was still some movement in the front line, but it never moved more than fifteen to twenty kilometres. Generally speaking, the operational tasks of the NDVN were closely linked to the phase in which the Korean war found itself. Periods on the front were alternated with rest periods or periods in the regiment, division or corps reserve (see also the map on page ???).

February 5th 1951 saw the start of Operation *Roundup*, the aim of which was to drive the North Koreans and Chinese back to the north. The enemy, however, launched a counterattack on 11 February. The South Koreans fled en masse while the Americans attempted to fight their way back along the Hongchon-Hoengsong road, which became known rather ominously as Massacre Valley. The NDVN were tasked with covering the retreat near Hoengsong. The disorderly retreat by the allied troops created a gap on the NDVN's right flank, which meant that in the evening of 12 February 1951, Chinese troops were in a position to attack the battalion's command post. The Chinese tactics were to first find a weak point in the defence, mark the target with fire and then, to the accompaniment of terrifying bugle calls, launch an all-out attack. The hastily organised defence led by Lieutenant Colonel Den Ouden ultimately cost the lives of fifteen people, including the battalion commander. Lieutenant Colonel Den Ouden was posthumously awarded a Military Order of William, the highest Dutch military award. The battalion command was taken over by the deputy battalion commander, Major W.D.H. Eekhout, who was on reconnaissance at the time of the attack. The NDVN took up positions more or less immediately to the west of Wonju. The actions here focused on capturing and holding Hill 325. The relentless counterstrikes had weakened the battalion mentally and physically to such an extent that the commander decided to form an assault group from, amongst others, the writers, cooks and

drivers from the support company. This group mounted two unsuccessful attacks on Hill 325, but on the third attempt, early in the morning of 15 February, managed to capture the top. Lieutenant J. Anamaet and Private J.F. Ketting Olivier both received the Military Order of William, the latter posthumously.

The severely demoralised NDVN was taken off the front line and assigned to the army corps reserve from 23 February to 8 April 1951. Rest did not, however, mean that things were restful. There was of course time for relaxation, but there was also intensive training and the battalion had to undertake such activities as surveillance tasks behind the front. On more than one occasion, the NDVN was also ordered to remove returning Korean civilians from the forward area.

After the deployment at the Hwachon reservoir in April 1951, where the NDVN once again covered the retreat, the third rifle company finally arrived on 24 May 1951, one day after the start of a new allied counteroffensive. Unlike the original battalion, the relief detachment no longer received their US weapons training in Taegu but in Pusan, the new home base of the United Nations Reception Centre. The aim of the offensive was the successive capture of Hyonni, Inje and Kansong, thus heading off the enemy in the east. At Inje, enemy resistance proved too fierce and the NDVN even had to entrench in order to survive two nighttime counterattacks. Twenty NDVN personnel were killed and 31 wounded. During the ceasefire negotiations from 10 July to 23 August, there was no question of large-scale actions. There was one exception: 2nd Division, including the NDVN, was ordered to occupy [the shallow circular depression known as] the 'Punchbowl' and the area immediately to the west.

The months of August and September 1951 were characterised by the departure of the original battalion, the arrival of the third relief detachment and the setting up of a new battalion, which was to be operational at the beginning of October. The NDVN still had two rifle companies and had 29 military personnel from Surinam in the ranks. Six marechausees joined the NDVN on 26 February 1952. The number of marechausees was to be increased by four in February 1953 and by one in January 1954. Because of a car accident, the new battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel G.H. Christan, ended up in hospital on 22 September 1951. It was not until 7 November that he was able to take on the command. The outgoing detachment commander, Lieutenant Eekhout, took over the command at first, but on 4 October he had to handover the baton to the deputy commander, Major C.L. Trieling.

The ground war had by now entered the third phase. The front had stabilised to such an extent that it consisted of virtually uninterrupted positions, protected by a double wire fence, supplemented where necessary by mines. The sectors in which the battalions of 2nd Division were to operate were very wide, which meant that there was hardly any defence in the depth. The operational methods changed too. No longer were separate battalions deployed to win ground. From 5 October, the entire division launched an attack with tank support on a broad front. The NDVN received orders to

start mopping up the seized area on 9 October. This meant destroying all enemy resistance during the day and conducting ambush patrols against infiltrators at night. As part of 38th Regiment, the Dutch were deployed from 20 December 1951 to 7 April 1952 in the Iron Triangle (located between the towns of Chorwon, Pyonggang and Kumhwa). On two occasions the battalion was the regiment reserve. The aim of the allies in the Iron Triangle was to seize several enemy-occupied elevations which threatened their own forward positions. Because of the wide front, Lieutenant Colonel Christan was forced to switch to intensive patrols, with the aim of deterring the enemy, gathering intelligence and, if possible, taking prisoners. In addition, there were several successful attempts to capture certain elevations or destroy enemy fortifications. These actions led to various US military decorations for a number of NDVN personnel. After months of heavy fighting, the NDVN was suddenly given a completely different task. From 20 April to 12 July 1952, the unit served as prison guards on the island of Kojedo. After returning from Kojedo, the battalion was the division reserve for more than a month.

During the rest of 1952, the NDVN served for the second time in the Iron Triangle. On the first day of active service on the front, 20 August 1952, the commander of the NDVN, Lieutenant Colonel Christan, transferred the command to Lieutenant Colonel C.M. Schilperoord. The enemy had adapted its tactics in response to the allies' intensive patrolling. No longer did the Chinese and North Koreans wait in their positions for the allies, but went out looking for the patrols to head them off and destroy them. From then on, Lieutenant Colonel Schilperoord only sent out patrols consisting of an assault group and a support group. The support group kept a certain distance from the assault group, thus enabling it to withstand any enemy attack on the flank and prevent the neutralisation of its assault group.

After the new year, the US high command transferred 2nd Division, and with it the NDVN, to a completely different area on the Samichon river on the 38th parallel. The first few months passed relatively peacefully. In the second half of March 1953, however, the NDVN had to fend off four Chinese attacks on its battalion sector, which left eight dead and dozens wounded. In April, May and June 1953, the NDVN stayed in an encampment known as 'Betuwekamp'. where the troops underwent a period of intensive training and exercise. The camp itself lay in a civilian zone outside the forward sector, which meant that Commander Schilperoord had his work cut out to prevent undesirable contact between the Dutch and the local population.

The ceasefire negotiations in Panmunjon resulted in an agreement on 8 June 1953. In the weeks that followed, the parties were to establish the 'official' front line and a four-kilometre-wide neutral zone along the front line, in accordance with the armistice stipulations. By means of two so-called peace-line offensives, the Chinese nonetheless attempted to win ground. The NDVN was involved in the second offensive, which started on 12 July. Two days before the signing of the armistice, at which Lieutenant

Colonel Schilperoord was to represent the Netherlands, Chinese soldiers attacked a battalion patrol. Five Dutchmen were killed.

Once the armistice had come into force on 27 July, the allied troops removed all the equipment from the abandoned forward positions. This was used to set up new positions for the outpost battalions, which lay immediately alongside the demilitarised zone. Behind these, the allies took up what were called their post-armistice main battle positions. The NDVN was assigned the right-hand sector of 38th Regiment and stayed there, with slight adjustments, until 15 November 1953, when it went into reserve. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Schilperoord had transferred the command of the NDVN to Lieutenant Colonel C. Knulst on 3 August 1953, just after the armistice came into effect. After 27 July, the battalion provided officers with drivers and jeeps for several armistice commissions. There was little in the way of training in this period, so the commander of 38th Regiment decided that the battalions should alternate between two weeks in position and two weeks in a training camp in Hari-dong.

On 10 June 1954, the NDVN became the army corps reserve in Camp Kaiser in Hari-dong. The battalion was to stay there until its departure. The last change of command took place on 27 July 1954, when Lieutenant Colonel Knulst handed over the command to Lieutenant Colonel J. Raaijmakers. The Americans relieved the battalion of its duties on 30 September. The NDVN was officially disbanded on 15 December 1954 after returning to the Netherlands. Its deployment was rewarded with one Presidential Unit Citation and two Distinguished Unit Citations. The Dutch also received fourteen American Silver Stars and over a hundred Bronze Stars.

Commanders of the NDVN

Lt Col M.P.A. den Ouden (15 October 1950 – 12 February 1951)

Lt Col W.D.H. Eekhout (12 February 1951 – 7 November 1951)

Lt Col G.H. Christan (7 November 1951 – 21 August 1952)

Lt Col C.M. Schilperoord (20 August 1952 – 3 August 1953)

Lt Col Knulst (3 August 1953 – 8 July 1954)

Lt Col J. Raaijmakers (8 July 1954 – 15 December 1954)

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