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SHROPSHIRE REGT. LEAVES FOR KOREA ON US SHIP, GIVEN HEARTY SEND OFF

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED BY THE HONG KONG
STANDARD ON MAY 9, 1951.

To the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" several hundred bronzed and battle ready British soldiers comprising the main unit of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. First Bn. left for the Korean War front yesterday afternoon by the USS Montrose.

Trained in Hong Kong for the past 18 months the Shropshires are joining the Kings Own Scottish borderers in the 28th Brigade which is relieving the Argyll and Sutherland and Middlesex of the 27th brigade. Sixty percent of the Regiment are National servicemen.

Wishing the troops farewell, Lt. Gen. sir E.C. Robert Mansergh, GOC-in-C Hong Kong, told them that they will be the only unit of British Light Infantry in Korea taking their turn as part of the British Army in fighting against aggression.

"I am sorry to lose you from my command. But the other side will be equally sorry when you get there". Gen. Mansergh said as he addressed tanned and smiling troops aboard ship from the bridge of the American troop ship.

Thanking the Shropshires for the "good job you have done in Hong Kong", Gen. Mansergh remarked that they are traveling on an American troop ship. "By the end of the voyage, I am sure you will be great friend with personnel of the United States Navy".

"At the end of the Korean campaign, I am sure too that you will not only be friends with the United States Army personnel but also with those of 14 other United Nations countries" he stated.

Fight Aggression

"I am sure you will do well in Korea, as well as your regiment has done for the past 200 years," he added.

The Shropshires, the general declared, have upheld the standard of British infantrymen while in Hong Kong. "Higher than that you cannot go," he said. He added: "I may be

allowed to visit you shortly in Korea".

In conclusion, Gen. Mansergh said: "On behalf of GHQ, in Hong Kong, the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the people of Hong Kong, I wish you good luck and good fortune".

Embarkation of the troops was completed by 2 p.m. at Holt's Wharf. A few families were at the pier to send their kin off. Many of them had only arrived some three weeks ago to rejoin their husbands stationed here. Some have been reunited since Christmas last year. Evidently illustrating the sudden separation of the families, a young wife hurried into the wharf pushing her baby daughter in a pram to the aft of the

Montrose. A "MP" guarding the gangway stopped her. But three officers standing nearby noticed the weeping wife and permitted her to get nearer to her sergeant husband.

The combined military band of the Shropshires and the South Staffordshire was in attendance to entertain the departing troops with light selections including items from "Annie Get Your Gun", which the troops joined in chorus on and off.

Gen. Mansergh boarded the Montrose shortly after 3 p.m. He was traditionally "piped" up the gangway. Captain G.T. McCready Jr., commander of the troopship greeted the British general aboard ship. Other high ranking military heads waited on the pier.

Among the troops are three sergeants of the 3rd Bn. Royal Australian regiment, who arrived here from Korea by the Montrose. According to Sgt. Peter Smeaton, they will train certain sections of the Shropshire regiment in the usage of the 3.5 bazooka. "Training will be conducted aboard ship en route to Korea", he added.

Cheerful and evidently "resigned" to their departure from Hong Kong, the Shropshires are "all to one man" happy about their new duty. Said a youthful soldier: "At least this will take us away from the drudgery her".

Many veterans of the last war, the troops seemed quite enthusiastic about "visiting Korea".

Another Job

CSM William Jones of Swansen, N. Wales, has this to say, which he claimed "echoes the general feeling among us". A veteran of World War II, he said: "Our regiment has been designated to fight in Korea.....our turn has come and it is just another job to do.

This is to be expected in military service."

Lieutenant Colonel A.S. Shaw-Ball will take his men into the first battle on the Korean war front. He will leave for home on furlough after that initial action, it was learned.

The Montrose cast away from Holt's Wharf shortly after 4 p.m. The Bule Band of the Shropshire, which leaves with the regiment, accompanied their "mother" band in playing the "Old Towler", the regimental march as the trooper slid off the pier.

After a momentary hushed pause, the combined band on the pier played "Auld Lang

Syne" as the Montrose steamed off the wharf into the bay for her northern voyage.

The King's Own Scottish Borderers left the Colony on april 19 for Korea to relieve the "Ladies from Hell and the "Diehards". The Argylls and Sutherlands returned here on April 29 from Korea by the Montrose. The Middlesex is due to arrive here shortly, it was learned.



Photos courtesy of Harold Moyer

"THE PASSAGE TO FREEDOM"

1954

by

Alfred Avila GMGC, USN, Retired

I had been in the Navy approximately three years. I had served overseas in the Korean Theater from 1951 to 1953. I rotated back to the states in December 1953. In January 1954 I reported aboard the USS Montrose APA-212 in San Diego, CA. We

deployed to the Far East in February 1954. August of 1954 found us in Kobe, Japan for R & R after amphib ops with the Korean marines in Chinhae, Korea. Our R & R was suddenly cut short and we pulled out of Kobe, Japan. The next morning found us

in Pusan, Korea where we loaded pallets and pallets of life jackets. We left Pusan that day and the following morning we arrived in Sasebo, Japan where we loaded sacks and sacks of rice from a Navy Stores Supply ship in the harbor. Finally that afternoon we left Sasebo and headed out to sea. Many rumors began to spread throughout the ship but in reality only a few knew of our destination. We were steaming south and the weather was beginning to shift from cool to hot. On the evening of the 15th of August our captain, J.D. Andrews, USN, announced our destination over the ship's 1 MC, everyone was suddenly quiet and attentive as our skipper spoke. We were headed to Tourane (now Da Nang) French Indo China (Vietnam). Our purpose was to assist in the evacuation of refugees from the North to the South. We arrived in Tourane on a foggy morning where we were to meet up with a couple of other ships in our squadron and then we headed for Henrietta pass with French frigates escorting us. It is located where the Haiphong river flows into the sea.

The next morning the USS Telfair APA-210 was loaded with refugees that French landing craft (LSM) had brought down from Haiphong on the Haiphong River. We were a little relieved because we had been told earlier that our LCVP's and LCM's were to go up the river to load refugees and would be accompanied by members of the landing parties with their weapons, in case the Vietminh Communist would attack the boats going up the river or on their return trip. I was a member of the landing party and was to carry a Thomson sub-machine gun and we would be in our green uniforms. It was so nice to see the French bringing the refugees down the river. The USS Telfair was the first US Navy ship to commence one of the greatest humanitarian

operations undertaken by the US Navy. It was called the "Passage to Freedom", CON

DUONG TO DO CUA BAN. It would be the largest evacuation of North Vietnamese/Chinese refugees escaping from the democratic Republic of Vietnam that was to be established under Ho Chi Minh. It was the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the defeat of the French forces in Indochina that created this situation. In the negotiations in Geneva in July 1954 the French agreed to withdraw from Indochina. Independence

was granted to Cambodia and Laos but Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel. The Republic of South Vietnam was established and Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established. The French received the right to withdraw from the North over a period of

300 days or less, depending on the area that was to be evacuated. These were the circumstances that created the "Passage to Freedom", the Catholic Vietnamese were the first to flee and were followed by the Chinese and other groups. They came aboard the ship tired, hungry and frightened and with what little hope they could muster. They were driven by a great fear that drove them to abandon their villages, their properties and their belongings. To sacrifice so much only to face an unknown future. A few died aboard the ships but many were born. They left happier and stronger than they arrived. They left a very strong impression on me, these strong people that passed before my eyes, I can still clearly and remember those days. The USS Montrose became the second ship to sail with these Vietnamese/Chinese refugees. Other ships in our squadron also carried refugees: the attack cargo ships USS Algol, USS Skagit and USS Andromeda and the attack transports USS Calvert, USS Mogoffin and USS Telfair.

I hoped that the people we helped found their freedom in the south but with America entering the war in 1964 and then abandoning Vietnam in 1973, followed by the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists, the people once again found themselves in the same situation that they sought to escape. Many that could not escape with American

help became the unfortunate boat people. Many still linger in the refugee camps in Asia, now forgotten and abandoned by political policies of our time. I sincerely hope that these people find peace and happiness that so many suffered and died for in the Vietnam Wars.

When I returned to Vietnam aboard ship in 1968 as a Chief Gunner's Mate it was a different Vietnam. It was not the Vietnam of my youth, the peaceful sunny street of Cholon and Saigon with street names of Rue Catinat, Rue Chasse, Blvd de la Somme, Rue Diespange, Blvd Gallient, Rue Talbert and so many other. As I look to the past, I realize now, it was just the calm before the storm.....

I am writing this article to let people know of this small piece of history that has been forgotten and overshadowed by the American War in Vietnam. Many younger Vietnamese I have met and talked with are not even aware of the "Passage to Freedom" evacuation of North Vietnam. Many were born after 1954 and the American

involvement in the Vietnam Vietnamese history will be their only memo red. A small trib e many Officers and EnlistedMen in theNavy tha on the many ship ore units that assisted in



Passage to Freedom 1



Passage to Freedom 2

this now forgotten humanitarian effort.

(Webmaster: This is a very moving story and it will not be forgotten. Mr Alfred Avila who wrote this in December of 2000 passed away February 1, 2001. "Godspeed Old Friend")

MONTROSE STORY BRINGS SEVEN SETS NEW

MONTROSE STORK BRINGS SEVEN; SETS NEW
RECORD
THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED BY "THE AMPHIBIAN"
SEPTEMBER 27, 1954

In sharp contrast to World War II and Korean duty performed transporting heavily armed Marines to enemy beaches the USS Montrose has taken on a new job and an even newer title.

The job of transporting Vietnamese refugees in the current Indochina "Freedom " Operation - the title "Maternity Hospital Afloat".

Seven tiny Vietnamese babies were born in the ship's sick bay during recent weeks of operating between Haiphong and Saigon.

The parents of these Vietnamese youngsters were among the thousands of refugees being carried aboard TF 90 ships from Communist dominated Northern Indochina to the free land of the South.

Six of the Montrose babies were girls. The crew named the first "Rose" in honor of the ship-the single boy was named "Monty" also in honor of the APA.

The heaviest of the group was six pounds ten ounces and the lightest tipped the scales at four pounds six ounces.

The ship's doctor Lt.(jg) Eugene Mauch commented that he hadn't expected any childbirth experience while serving with the seagoing Navy.

BY
CAPTAIN JAMES BROWN

About mid-July 1958 the Montrose was at Sasebo, Japan with restricted availability for upkeep and repairs. Without warning we suddenly received orders to proceed to Buckner Bay, on the eastern side of Okinawa; upon arrival there we moored to a wharf. Soon we learned that we were to embark a Battalion Landing Team of Marines for possible operations in Lebanon (eastern Mediterranean), where an international "crisis" was brewing at the time. Another APA and a stores ship (AF) whose names I cannot recall were involved in the operation.

The three ships sailed as a task group for Subic Bay, Philippines, where we arrived on a mid-afternoon, moored to piers at the naval Station and took on fuel and supplies. Departing late that night, we headed southward through the South China Sea for the Strait of Singapore which we transited at nighttime, ships darkened and showing no lights. By dawn we were out into the Strait of Malacca and in due course out and headed westward in the Indian Ocean. Perhaps 3 or 4 days later we received orders to reverse course, return to Singapore and await further orders.

Everybody had a good time in Singapore, where we sojourned for two weeks. The climate was fiercely hot but the Royal Navy Dockyard helped by manufacturing a considerable number of awnings for the ship and installed air conditioning equipment in crew spaces provided by the U.S. Navy. Sightseeing ashore was good. At the end of our visit we returned to Okinawa and off loaded the Marines.

"My best wishes to all my shipmates in the Montrose, I never sailed in a finer ship".