



The DPRK “Mother Ship” which was sunk on 21 December 2001 by the Japan Coast Guard being salvaged in September 2007. (Japan Coast Guard)

Welcome to *KPA Journal*

Hello and welcome to the inaugural issue of *KPA Journal*. The goals of this modest publication are to allow me to freely share with readers new, interesting or updated information concerning: all aspects of the Korean People's Army (KPA, more commonly known as the North Korean Army) from its birth until present; ballistic missile development; intelligence operations (e.g., seaborne infiltration operations, etc.); and other defense and intelligence issues concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, more commonly known as North Korea).

As I have researched, written and lectured on these subjects during the past 25+ years I've frequently come upon fragments or collections of interesting information that either didn't fit into then current projects or that was deleted by editors in order to save space. Recently, while conducting research for three book projects—*Combat History of the Korean People's Army, DPRK Intelligence Services 1945-1975*, and an update to my earlier *North Korean Special Forces: Second Edition*—I once again encountered numerous examples of these fragments and collections. Rather than let this information remain in my files unused I've decided to use it for *KPA Journal*.

Additionally, as I have written reports and articles concerning recent DPRK related issues new information has subsequently come to light. It is my hope to utilize *KPA Journal* to share such updated information with readers.

While it is my hope that *KPA Journal* will eventually be a monthly publication, initially it will be distributed on an irregular basis until the time arrives when I can dedicate more energy to it.

A *KPA Journal* website is under construction and should be online later this year at www.kpajournal.com. It will

eventually serve as a repository for issues of *KPA Journal*, declassified documents, longer research projects, previously authored articles and more.

Should readers find any of this information of interest or value, and decide to use it in your own research efforts, I would greatly appreciate your citing *KPA Journal* as your source.

Readers are encouraged to share *KPA Journal* with friends and colleagues. If they wish to be added to the mailing list, or should you not desire to be on the mailing list, please contact me at kpajournal@gmail.com.

—Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

Salvage of a DPRK “Mother Ship”

By Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

(All images courtesy of the Japan Coast Guard)

On 22 December 2001 Japan Coast Guard (JCG) vessels identified and pursued an unidentified vessel in the East China Sea. The vessel was believed to be an intelligence agent “mother ship” from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) involved in either narcotics trafficking or the insertion/recovery of intelligence agents. After a ten-hour chase, which at times exceeded 35+ knots and witnessed gunfire from both sides, the unidentified vessel was suddenly racked by an explosion and sunk in 200 meters of water. The explosion was subsequently assessed as having been the result of a scuttling charge designed to both kill the crew and prevent the capture or recovery of the vessel.¹

Following extended diplomatic talks with China the JCG conducted a salvage operation in September 2002, raised the vessel, and confirmed its origin as being the DPRK.

The salvaged vessel has been identified as a VEGA 1-class “mother ship” operated by the DPRK Operations Department and probably based in the west coast port of Namp’o.²

The blue painted vessel is approximately 30 meter long, displaces 100 tons and is believed to have had a crew of about 15. Most of its cabin, wheel house, masts and deck cargo were lost in the explosion and sinking. It’s high speed is attributable to a specially designed v-shape hull and four three-bladed props powered by high-speed marine diesels amidships.



Unique among the features of the vessel are its clamshell stern doors which open to provide access to a wet berth for a smaller high-speed infiltration landing craft (ILC)—sometimes referred to as a “daughter” or “child” craft.



The ILC craft found aboard the salvaged vessel is based upon an older design that has been frequently encountered during operations against the Republic of Korea (ROK). It has an overall length of 11 meters and a maximum width of 3 meters. It is constructed with five main compartments (engine, steering, passenger, main cargo and forward cargo). Stored within the main cargo



was a small swimmer delivery vehicle. The deckhouse is constructed of wood and the hull is coated with fiber resin plastic. The steering compartment has a single wheel and three throttle levers to control the three high-speed marine engines and basic instrumentation. The ILC also mounted a small 20 cm by 30 cm cylindrical explosive charge to be employed to kill the crew and prevent the capture of the craft.



The small swimmer delivery vehicle (SDV) found within the ILC is similar in construction and dimensions to previously captured SDVs. It is approximately 1.7 meters long, .3 meters in diameter and has a .4 meter diameter caged prop. Handles for swimmers and attachment points for equipment are welded to the SDV.

Numerous other weapons (e.g., AK-47 rifles, 82 mm

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B-10 recoilless rifle, RPG-7, SA-16, ZPU-2, etc.) and items of equipment (e.g., candy, cigarettes, Kim Il-song pin, etc.) were also recovered from within the vessels and on the seabed. All of which conclusively identified the vessel's country of origin as the DPRK.

Notes

1. DPRK infiltration agents and Reconnaissance Bureau personnel engaged in intelligence operations have routinely committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner. Defectors have reported that suicide, and group fratricide, are a routine component of agent training.
2. The Operations Department is one of at least four intelligence agencies subordinate to the Korean Worker's Party.

KPA Engineer River Crossing Units During the Fatherland Liberation War, Part 1

By Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

Introduction

The development of specialized engineer capabilities within the Korean People's Army (KPA) dates to before the official establishment of the army itself. When, during September 1946, the Interim People's Committee established the headquarters of the Peace Preservation Officers' Training Bureau (a.k.a., Security Battalion Headquarters). The primary missions of this newly established organization were security of the rail network, internal security and absorption and training of personnel for a future army. Among the sections subordinate to this headquarters were training, culture, aviation, artillery and engineering. The Peace Preservation Officers' Training Bureau was subsequently reorganized to officially establish both the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Korean People's Army on 7 and 8 February 1948, respectively.¹ Both organizations were headquartered in the capitol of P'yongyang.

Engineer Bureau, General Staff Department²

The new General Staff Department became the highest level operations staff at the MND level. It exercised operational control over all tactical units and all other KPA staff groups, with the exception of an attached Political Defense Bureau detachment. Subordinate to the General Staff Department was the Engineer Bureau under the command of Senior Colonel Pak Kil-nam. It was formed directly from the Engineer Section of the Peace Preservation Officers' Training Bureau.

Initially the Engineer Bureau consisted of a headquarters staff and training section. The headquarters staff was responsible for administration, operations, maintenance and supply. While the training section consisted of a staff, engineer school and training battalion. The later two organizations are believed to have been stationed in the village of Kan-ni, northwest of P'yongyang. The training section was responsible for establishing training requirements and overseeing their implementation throughout the developing KPA. A small staff of Soviet Army advisors was attached to the Engineer Bureau and supervised its activities. These Soviet engineering officers invested considerable time and energy into the training of KPA engineer units. They oversaw the translation of Soviet Army engineer manuals into Korean and were frequently seen at KPA engineer training sites.

During September 1948 the Engineer Bureau's subordinate engineer training battalion was enlarged to create the 1st Engineer Regiment (frequently identified as the 576th Engineer Regiment). This was the first of two independent engineer units established before and during the war. Its mission was to both serve as the army-level engineering reserve and as a training unit for engineer officers and personnel.

According to high-level KPA officers, who subsequently fled the DPRK during the late 1950s and 1960s, the Engineer Bureau played an important role in finalizing the June 1950 invasion plan. The basic invasion plan for the Fatherland Liberation War (i.e., Korean War) was prepared by a Soviet advisory group led by Lt. Gen. Bashilev. In May 1950 the plan was passed to Chief of the General Staff Kang Kon, who in turn passed it to Maj. Gen. Yu Song-ch'ol to translate. The plan was subsequently reviewed and modified by a small group of high-level KPA officers consisting of: Maj. Gen. Yu Song-ch'ol, commander of the Operations Bureau; Maj. Gen. Kim Pong-yul, commander of the Artillery Command; Maj. Gen. Chong Hak-jun, Chief of Staff of the Artillery Command; and Senior Colonel Pak Kil-nam, commander of the Engineer Bureau. It was this revised plan that the KPA utilized during its subsequent invasion.

At the time of the invasion in June 1950, the Engineer Bureau was located in P'yongyang and had one subordinate unit—the 1st Engineer Regiment. Elements of this unit were attached first to the Forward Headquarters and then to the I and II Corps to provide them with river

crossing capabilities, while the remainder of the unit remained subordinate to the Engineer Bureau. During the first phase of the war the main body of the Engineer Bureau remained in P'yongyang, however, an advanced detachment moved forward with the Forward Headquarters to Seoul during the last week of June and oversaw the operations of the 1st Engineer Regiment. During August the Engineer Bureau established an additional engineer regiment at Kan-ni—the 2nd Engineer Regiment (sometimes identified as the 503rd Engineer Regiment). Following an abbreviated training cycle this unit was transferred south and attached to the Front Headquarters (a.k.a., Front Line Command).

The successful 15 September 1950 United Nations Command (UNC) amphibious Inch'on landing forced a rapid disorganized withdrawal of almost all KPA forces in the Republic of Korea (ROK). The 1st and 2nd Engineer Regiments, however, remained behind to both secure river crossing sites, prepare defensive minefields and fortifications and serve as a rearguard until the main body of the KPA made good its withdrawal. During these rearguard operations the regiments were dispersed and subsequently annihilated. As UNC forces subsequently advanced on P'yongyang the Engineer Bureau withdrew north to Sinuiju and Manchuria along with the General Staff Department.

Following the intervention of the Chinese Volunteer Army (CVA) in October 1950 the remnants of the KPA began a reorganization and re-equipment program. During which engineering battalions were established at front and corps levels. Both the 1st and 2nd Engineer Regiments were subsequently reconstituted to provide river crossing and other specialized engineering capabilities to the KPA.

(Continued in next issue)

Notes

1. The DPRK celebrated 8 February 1948 as the KPA's foundation day until the late-1970s, when it was changed to 25 April 1932. The reason for this was the claim that Kim Il-sung established the KPA on this earlier date in southern Manchuria while conducting partisan activities against the Japanese.
2. Interview data acquired by Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr.; "Yu Song-chol's Testimony, Part 7," *Hanguk Ilbo*, 8 November 1990, p. 10, as cited in FBIS-EAS-90-225, 21 November 1990; "Yu Song-chol's Testimony, Part 8," *Hanguk Ilbo*, 9 November 1990, p. 10, 22 November 1990; "Yu Song-chol's Testimony, Part 9," *Hanguk Ilbo*, 11 November 1990, p. 10, 23 November 1990; U.S. Army. *Research Supplement: Interrogation Reports*, GHQ, FEC, MIS, GS, ATIS, Issue No. 104, pp. 2-32; and U.S. Army. *North Korean Engineers, Engineer Intelligence Study 323*, Chief of the Engineers, February 1962, p. 9.