

A ROUGH RIDE

By John Peskett

It was a wild night, in August 1951 when the troop, consisting of 40 men, were tucked up in our sleeping bags, in a tent on the side of a mountain, on an island in the Sea of Japan. We were a few miles from the mainland and 100 miles behind the fighting line. Yes, it was North Korea and we were members of 41 Independent Commando, Royal Marines and we were raiding the coast, blowing up railway lines and bridges and generally making ourselves a nuisance.

We should have been out this night but the storm of typhoon proportions made a canoe or an eight man rubber boat out of the question. The landing craft crew were successfully keeping the craft off the beach. This craft was 45ft long and about 16ft wide and powered by a single diesel engine. It was an American design and suitable only for short trips from a mother ship to shore and back again.

I was required to relieve my weary chum, in the morning, being the only other

qualified coxswain in the troop. I was accompanied by three young Marines Peter, Stan and Jimmy and the Troop Sergeant Major. My task was to drive the craft out to sea and round to the other side of the island where the wind was much less fierce—or that was the plan.

First, the engine refused to start but after a little persuasion, reluctantly burst into life. Up with the anchor and away. The wind blew and the rain lashed down and again the engine stopped. This time we were adrift at the mercy of the wind which was blowing the tops off the waves which were as high as a house. The intake for the cooling sea water became blocked with debris and the engine overheated. Imagine trying to release a rusted nut by clouting it with a rifle butt. Eventually it loosened and I was able to clean the sand trap and get the engine going again. It was then that I noticed that my companions were definitely unwell.

By now it was about midday, the weather was still blowing heavens. With no landmarks I decided to turn towards where I thought the island would be. Wrong! A steering wire broke so the

rudder was useless. However, we had a rope anchor cable so I fixed one end to the top of the rudder. I could turn the wheel to the left but I needed to turn right. I had to shout to Peter, Stan and the Sgt Major to haul on the rope. The noise of this storm was terrific and drowned the sound of the engine. All this time Jimmy, the youngest Marine was baling out and far from happy. To keep the stern of the boat into the wind and to slow us down we took the bottom boards out, used a bit more rope and dragged them over the stern.

At about 6pm I saw the land. However, not the land I wanted but the mainland. More by luck than judgement we managed to beach the boat in a small lagoon in Wonsan Bay. At which point the Sergeant Major took over. The following morning we were all captured but that is another story as are the following two years. Jimmy died in the Interrogation Centre; the rest of us survived that hellish evil place. Now the others have 'crossed the bar;' (Navy speak for died) and I am the only one left out of that small crew who tried to save a damned single engine boat.