

Veterans remember Korean War landing

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INCHON, South Korea — In the moonless wee hours 50 years ago, U.S. Navy warships and Marines navigated a narrow, muddy channel to face enemies on the shore of this west coast port.

"It was something we had to do," retired Navy Capt. Robert Schelling of Seattle said matter-of-factly. "We had a little more fortune than they did."

On Thursday dozens of graying U.S. sailors and Marines gathered at the Inchon Amphibious Operation Memorial Hall to remember the bold maneuver that turned the tide of the 1950-53 Korean War. As 100 relatives and active-duty U.S. soldiers watched, a military honor guard and brass band welcomed the veterans.

The ceremony began by remembering the six "Sitting Duck" destroyers that sailed up Flying Fish Channel to approach Wolmi-

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do, an island that commanded entry to Inchon.

Their mission was to find out — the hard way — what North Korean troops had on the island. They anchored within range of concealed North Korean guns, making themselves tempting targets.

Soon the shore lighted up with gun flashes. The destroyers fought back in a slugging match that lasted an hour and returned the next day. The ships suffered only one death and eight sailors injured.

"By D-Day the fortifications were reduced so that our Marines could land and do their great job with minimal casualties," said Schelling, who commanded the Lyman K. Swenson, one of the six destroyers.

The destroyers also led the Sept. 15, 1950, landings, which put 13,000 Marines ashore with only 21 deaths.

The 33-foot tides, hidden guns and seawalls, and the danger of landing in an exposed harbor made the operation seem suicidal. But it also meant the invasion was a complete surprise.

Seoul, 25 miles inland, fell to allied forces within 12 days, stemming the assault of North Koreans sweeping down South Korea in the war's early weeks.

"As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of this so-called 'Forgotten War,' no Korean can and no American should ever forget what you did here," said Rear Adm. William. D. Sullivan, commander of the U.S. Naval Forces in South Korea.

The city of Inchon has been commemorating the landings by building the memorial hall and a 20-foot statue of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the Army mastermind of the landings.

South Korea scaled down the war's 50th anniversary events so as not to hurt thawing relations with

communist North Korea after their summit in June. But U.S. officers and veterans said Seoul should maintain its wariness toward North Korea.

The summit "would not have been possible without the hammer of a capable and determined U.S. and [South Korea] military providing a deterrent to war and ready to fight and win tonight if necessary," Sullivan said.