John S. McCain, *Fitzgerald* take part in anti-submarine exercises

Important message of deterrance sent as ROK commemorates 60th anniversary of Soul's liberation

By Donna Miles,
American Forces Press Service

The U.S. and Republic of Korea navies kicked off anti-submarine warfare exercises Sept. 27 in the waters off the Korean peninsula, sending what officials call an important message of deterrence to North Korea as the Republic of Korea commemorates the 60th anniversary of Seoul's liberation.

The five-day exercises are the second in a series and are focused on anti-submarine tactics, techniques and procedures, U.S. Forces Korea officials reported.

USS John S. McCain (DDG 56) and *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), both guided-missile destroyers forward-deployed to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, Military Sealift Command's ocean surveillance ship *USNS Victorious* (T-AGOS 19), a fast-attack submarine, and P-3C Orion aircraft from Patrol Squadron 9, home-ported at Kaneohe Marine Corps Base, Hawaii, are participating in the exercise, officials said.

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56) is underway on a regularly scheduled deployment in the western Pacific Ocean. *McCain* along with *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) participated in anti-submarine warfare exercises in the waters off the Korean peninsula, sending what officials call an important message of deterrence to North Korea as the ROK commemorates the 60th anniversary of Seoul's liberation.

U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Stephen W. Rowe

South Korea has deployed two destroyers, a fast frigate, a patrol craft, P-3C aircraft from Carrier Air Wing 6 and a submarine.

The first exercise in this series, Combined Naval and Air Readiness Exercise Invincible Spirit, was conducted in the seas east of the Korean peninsula in July.

Officials emphasized that the exercises are defensive in nature and designed to improve interoperability within the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Meanwhile, thousands of ROK, U.S. and U.N. allied representatives gathered in Seoul to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the recapture of the South Korean capital from North Korea during the Korean War.

The North Korean army seized Seoul three days after stampeding across the border June 25, 1950 and launching the Korean War. U.N. forces liberated Seoul Sept. 28, 1950, less than two weeks after a massive amphibious landing in Inchon enabled them to break the North Korean army's supply lines.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki led the U.S. delegation during two days of commemorative events that began Sept. 27 in Seoul. U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Kathleen Stephens, Secretary of the Army John McHugh and Andrew Shapiro, assistant secretary of State for political-military affairs, accompanied Shinseki.

During the ceremonies, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak thanked the U.N. and U.S. forces who came to his country's aid during the war.

"We will remember your sacrifice and dedication forever," he said.

Speaking as North Korea's ruling party convened its biggest meeting in 30 years, and as North Korean leader Kim Jong-il promoted his son and expected successor, Kim Jong-un, Lee also offered a stern reminder that the North Korean threat continues.

Lee pointed to the sinking of the ROK navy frigate Cheonan in March, killing 46 of its 104 sailors.

Despite North Korea's denials, an investigation team led by South Korea with input from the United States, Australia, Great Britain and Sweden confirmed that North Korea was responsible for the attack.

"The evidence points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the torpedo was fired by a North Korean submarine," the team concluded. "There is no other plausible explanation."

Lee also called for a "drastic transformation" within ROK military forces to improve their defensive capabilities.

ROK already is on a path to assuming wartime operational command of its forces in 2015, a target that Lee had asked to delay from 2012 to 2015 in light of North Korea's latest provocations.

Details of the transfer plan are spelled out in the new Strategic Alliance 2015 agreement, which Army Gen. Walter L. "Skip" Sharp, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, Combined Forces Command and United Nations Command, announced earlier this month.

According to Sharp, the plan covers not only transferring wartime operational command to South Korea, but also developing new war plans, introducing broader and more realistic exercises, reviewing both countries' military organizational structures and timing the movement of U.S. forces south of Seoul and ensuring South Korean forces are ready.

The guided-missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), underway in the Pacific Ocean, took part in anti-submarine exercises in waters off the Korean peninsula. The five-day exercises were the second in a series and focused on tactics, techniques and procedures.

U.S. Navy photo by MC1 John M. Hageman

Sharp said the plan also will help to identify military capabilities South Korean forces will need in 2015, and ensure that South Korean military acquisitions, training and organizational efforts are geared toward achieving them.

"Strategic Alliance 2015 will enable the Republic of Korea and U.S. forces to successfully confront future security challenges and set the conditions for lasting peace in the Korean peninsula and the region," Sharp told the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this month. "The Republic of Korea and the United States are more strongly united than ever before to deter North Korean provocations and aggression, and to defeat them if necessary."

The editor asks:

"Did you know, according to NAVADMIN 245/10, the Navy's Tuition Assistance (TA) program will apply quarterly monetary caps on TA funds distributed to the fleet?

"This policy change will allow the Navy to fairly and equitably distribute funds throughout the year, which will enable Sailors who are unable to take advantage of the program at a certain time to leverage the opportunity when their schedule allows.

"Quarterly cap amounts will be determined based on historic usage rates and available funds. Sailors may continue to submit TA applications at any time; however, applications will be processed no more than 30 days from the beginning of the quarter for all courses that begin that quarter. Applications will be processed on a first come, first serve basis until the quarterly cap is reached.

"Sailors are encouraged to look at the full range of educational opportunities, such as Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), and Pell Grants, in order to maximize their voluntary education."