

LEGACY OF VALOR: KOREA

To honor the service of U.S. Naval Academy alumni who served during the Korean War, Shipmate is sharing some their stories of as part of its continuing Legacy of Valor series. Shipmate is gathering stories of Vietnam War-era alumni and will share them in 2025. To see more content from the Legacy of Valor series, visit usna.com.

ALUMNI CONNECTION LIT UP THE NORTH KOREAN SKY



Then-MIDN Charles Burlin '44

Commander Charles W. Burlin '44, USN (Ret.), and Lieutenant Commander William S. Berkshire Jr. '45, SC, USN (Ret.), were separated by nearly 5,000 miles but intrinsically linked to a critical mission.

While serving as supply officer of SubGroup One of the Pacific Reserve Fleet in Hawaii, Berkshire found himself “overwhelmed with tons of parachute flares” in the early 1950s. Initially, Berkshire was startled, thinking they were ordered to combat Russian submarines aiding the North Koreans.

The Korean War was raging, and the parachute flares were requested to assist Marines on the ground. Berkshire said he later learned during one battle the Marines and the Army had driven North Korean soldiers to the Chinese border. Chinese troops responded by coming over the border “in great numbers at night” to aid the North Koreans.

U.S. soldiers and Marines were pinned down. Berkshire said there were rumbblings of an Army commander telling his Marine counterpart they were contemplating retreating.

The Marine then, purportedly, gave the Army officer a “15-minute, standard Marine dressing down,” according to Berkshire. The soldiers and Marines held their position. The Marines received the air support required to beat back the threat.

“They were never in the dark, they had parachute flares,” Berkshire said. “I got them out there and

they ran these all night. The Chinese came pouring over and (U.S. forces) just mowed them down. They carried all their dead and wounded with them and retired to the sea.

“Every night, they were never in the dark.”

Flying a four-engine Consolidated PB4Y-2 Privateer, Burlin might have dropped some of the parachute flares Berkshire directed to the Korean theater. Burlin, who was a submariner in World War II and later earned his lighter than air wings and wings of gold, said his plane carried 150 flares in its bomb bay.

With the Chinese delivering armaments and other supplies to the North Koreans, Burlin said a coordinated nighttime air-land strategy was required.

“We would fly over with a bomb bay full of flares at night up over the main line of resistance,” Burlin said. “You could look down and see the fire flashes going off. We’d light that up with four or five flares so the operators down below could look out and see what was coming.

“That was very successful. It was something that most people don’t think about but it was very important.” ⚓

Editor’s Note: LCDR Berkshire passed away on 7 January 2024 and CDR Burlin passed away on 25 July 2024. We are privileged to share part of their stories of service.



Then-MIDN William Berkshire '45