

Vice-Adml Sir Charles Mills

Fine staff officer who commanded a destroyer in the Korean War

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES MILLS, who has died aged 91, was a talented staff officer whose one chance of independent command came in the destroyer *Concord* during the Korean War; he later became a popular governor of Guernsey.

In the course of six patrols over 95,000 miles with Dutch and New Zealand ships of the United Nations force, he first enforced a coastal blockade. He then steamed at full speed overnight to launch a dawn attack far behind the North Korean front line. After impressing his young officers by leaving them to navigate the dangerous passages while he stayed in his cabin to be fresh for the morning, he directed firing on ammunition dumps and trains passing between tunnels and over bridges.

Entering the Yalu Gulf in October 1951, Mills bombarded Kojo and, on Trafalgar Day, Wonsan. North Korean artillery was active and accurate, and *Concord* was straddled by shells exploding either side of her. But Mills manoeuvred expertly, and the next shells landed in the wake at the stern.

The following March he bombarded North Korean marines as they advanced at low tide in the Haeju Gulf to capture off-lying islands and, using the precision fire of his 4.5-inch guns, drove off the enemy. However while bombarding Sonjin on the west coast, *Concord* was hit on Y turret, killing two men and injuring four.

Mills was awarded the DSC by the Crown and the US Legion of Merit.

The son of a London solicitor, Charles Percy Mills was born on October 4 1914 and joined Dartmouth in 1928.

Between 1933 and 1938 he served in the cruisers *Danae* and *Enterprise*, visiting America, the West and the East Indies. In the early months of the war Mills, still a lieutenant, took command of the destroyer *Brazen* when her captain fell ill with jaundice. After specialising as a signals officer, he joined the battlecruisers *Renown* and then *Hood*, which he left a few months before she was lost.

Mills served on the training staff of the Captain (Destroyers) at Liverpool



Mills: his golf was a diplomatic tool

in 1941. Two years later he was on the staff of the C-in-C, Western Approaches, where, with his calm and deliberate manner, he did much to improve signals communications. He served briefly at the allied landings in North Africa, but his brilliance as a staff officer meant that he could not be spared for a command at sea during the war.

From 1943 to early 1945 his thorough planning skills were needed on the staff of the Allied Naval C-in-C, Expeditionary Force, planning for Operation Neptune, the invasion of mainland Europe. He was commended for his backroom role and, in 1945, while serving in the cruiser *Royalist* as communications officer to the Rear-Admiral, Aircraft Carriers, in the Far East, was mentioned in dispatches.

After the war Mills's appointments included being desk officer in the signals division of the Admiralty; serving on the staff of Flag Officer Air (Home); being second-in-command of the signals school HMS Mercury at Petersfield, Hampshire, and being deputy director of the Signals Division.

In 1957 he was appointed CBE as chief of staff to the Flag Officer, second-in-command, Mediterranean,

with whom he had helped to plan the Suez invasion.

Two years later Mills led the 2nd Destroyer Squadron from *Daring*; not an easy appointment when three other ambitious captains under his command strained his natural urbanity. However, in 1961, he became director of the Royal Naval Staff College at Greenwich, responsible for the mid-career education of officers.

As a signals officer Mills had shown interest in the technical aspects of his chosen profession, rather than the social duties which it normally entailed. He became an effective Director, General Weapons, while the Navy was introducing new systems into its armoury and, in 1964, was appointed CB.

Mills became flag officer, second-in-command of the Far East Fleet, where, with his small staff, he was involved in the end of confrontation with the Indonesians and Britain's discreet help to the Americans in Vietnam. He used his enthusiasm and skill as a golfer as a diplomatic tool. Masking his intelligence, he had the knack of remembering everybody's name. His final appointment was as the last C-in-C, Plymouth, from 1967 to 1969. He was appointed KCB in 1968, and a knight of St John in 1969.

After leaving the Navy Mills became a popular Lieutenant-Governor and C-in-C, Guernsey, from 1969 to 1974, impressing the islanders by visiting the submarine tunnel being built to carry away sewage and walking through its full length despite the dankness and the damp. He regularly attended the island's States of Deliberation and its churches.

When he retired to Aldeburgh, Mills's natural though unthreatening air of authority led him to be chairman or president of everything from the golf club to the fishermen's co-operative and the Aldeburgh Society.

Charles Mills, who died on July 27, married Anne Cumberlege in 1944, a wartime Wren who worked at Norfolk House, General Eisenhower's London headquarters: she survives him with his two daughters.

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