

## **Mar 1968 - North Korean Seizure of U.S.S. “Pueblo.” - Panmunjom Meetings of U.S. and North Korean Military Representatives. Increase in North Korean Attacks in Demilitarized Zone. - North Korean Commando Raid on Seoul.**

A serious international incident occurred in the Far East during the night of Jan. 22–23 when four North Korean patrol boats captured the 906-ton intelligence ship *Pueblo*, of the U.S. Navy, with a crew of 83 officers and men, and took her into the North Korean port of Wonsan. According to the U.S. Defence Department, the *Pueblo* was in international waters at the time of the seizure and outside the 12-mile limit claimed by North Korea. A broadcast from Pyongyang (the North Korean capital), however, claimed that the *Pueblo*—described as “an armed spy boat of the U.S. imperialist aggressor force” —had been captured with her entire crew in North Korean waters, where she had been “carrying out hostile activities.”

The Pentagon statement said that the *Pueblo* “a Navy intelligence-collection auxiliary ship,” had been approached at approximately 10 p.m. on Jan. 22 by a North Korean patrol vessel which had asked her to identify herself. On replying that she was a U.S. vessel, the patrol boat had ordered her to heave to and had threatened to open fire if she did not, to which the *Pueblo* replied that she was in international waters. The patrol boat continued to circle the *Pueblo* and an hour later three more North Korean patrol vessels appeared, one of which said that she had a pilot on board and ordered the *Pueblo* to follow in her wake. The four ships closed in on the *Pueblo*, “taking different positions on her bow, beam, and quarter.” While two North Korean Mig fighters were sighted circling off the *Pueblo*’s starboard bow. At 11.45 p.m. the *Pueblo* radioed that she was being boarded by the North Koreans, and at 12.20 a.m. (Jan. 23) she further reported that she had been “requested” to follow the North Korean skips into Wonsan and that she had not used any weapons. The final message from the *Pueblo*, received at 12.32 a.m., said that she had come to “all stop” and was “going off the air.”

The Defence Department said that the *Pueblo* had been boarded in international waters in the Sea of Japan, about 25 miles off the North Korean coast, and that the *Pueblo* had reported the position as 127 deg. 54.3 min. E. longitude, 39 deg. 25 min. N. latitude. The statement added that the *Pueblo*'s complement was 83, comprising six officers, 75 enlisted men, and two civilians, identified as Navy hydrographers performing oceanographic research. The maximum speed of the *Pueblo* was given as 12.2 knots.

It was later disclosed by the Defence Department that four members of the crew of the *Pueblo* had been wounded, one critically; the Pentagon declined to state how the men had been wounded.

The *Pueblo* the first American naval vessel to be captured at sea since the 1812 war with Britain—was described by the *New York Times* as “a vessel that carries highly secret electronics equipment designed to intercept radar and other electronic signals and gather information for intelligence.” She was reported to be armed only with two machine-guns, whereas the North Korean patrol boats, according to U.S. military sources, were each armed with four 25-mm. automatic anti-aircraft guns; moreover, the North Korean craft were reported to be capable of speeds of 28 to 40 knots, compared with the *Pueblo*’s maximum speed of little more than 12 knots. As pointed out in the American, British, and European Press, vessels of the *Pueblo* type are extensively used by both the United States and the Soviet Union for intelligence-collecting and monitoring purposes—the Soviet vessels used for this purpose being usually converted fishing trawlers.

Mr Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State, said on Jan. 23 that the seizure of the *Pueblo* was “a matter of the utmost gravity,” adding that the United States was negotiating with North Korea “through the channels that are available to us” to obtain the immediate release of the vessel and her crew. On the following day, in testimony to a closed session of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr Rusk described the ship's seizure as “in the category of actions that are to be construed as acts of war,” and said that “my strong advice to the North Koreans is to cool it.”

**General Pak Chung Kook** said that on Jan. 21, 22, and 23 the U.S. authorities had sent “armed spy boats,” together with 100-odd South Korea fishing vessels, into North Korean coastal waters on the east coast. During the night of Jan. 22–23 the U.S. side had committed “a crude aggressive act” by sending into North Korean waters off Wonsan “an armed spy skip of the U.S. imperialist aggressive navy equipped with various weapons and all kinds of equipment necessary for espionage purposes.” After giving the location of the “spy ship” as 39 deg. 17 min. N., 127 deg. 46 min. E., General Pak said that North Korean vessels on routine patrol duty had returned the fire opened on them by the “piratical group that intruded deeply into our coastal waters”; as a result several men of the “U.S. imperialist aggressive forces” had been killed or wounded and over 80 captured, together with the “spy ship” itself.

Addressing Rear-Admiral Smith, General Pak went on: “Notwithstanding that you have committed overt aggressive acts, you have indulged in an attempt to cover up the truth... by distorting the facts as if your armed ship had been in international waters. Year preposterous charge graphically reveals the barbarous and shameless nature of the U.S. imperialist aggressors.... I strongly demand that you frankly admit the violations, provocations, and aggressive acts committed by your side in the demilitarized zone and in our coastal waters, apologize to our side for them, and severely punish... the criminals who organized and directed the incidents....”

Rear-Admiral Smith replied that General Pak's “wild statement” and “the distorted version of your piracy off Wonsan” were an attempt “to divert attention from your regime's attempt to assassinate the President of the Republic of Korea [see below] and your actual capture of a U.S. vessel in international waters....”

General Pak Chung Kook retorted that if the U.S. had the “slightest intention to preserve the Korean armistice” all that was necessary was “to admit the military provocations and aggressive

acts committed by your side, apologize for them, and assure this table that you will not re-commit such criminal acts.”

On the same day (Jan. 24) the North Korean radio broadcast a purported “confession” by the captain of the *Pueblo*, Commander Lloyd M Bucher.

In this alleged “confession” Commander Bucher was represented as having said that the *Pueblo* had been sent to Sasebo (Japan) “to execute assignments given by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.” On Dec. 2, 1967, it had received an assignment at Sasebo from Rear-Admiral Frank A Johnson, U.S. Navy commander in Japan, “to conduct military espionage activities on the Far Eastern region of the Soviet Union and then on the offshore and coastal areas of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea” [North Korea]. The alleged confession quoted Commander Bucher as saying that the *Pueblo* had “conducted espionage activities on a number of occasions for the purpose of detecting the territorial waters of the Socialist countries.”

After allegedly saying that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency “promised me that if this task would be done successfully a whole lot of dollars would be offered to all crew members of my ship and particularly I myself would be honoured,” Commander Bucher's purported confession went on to say that the *Pueblo* had entered North Korean coastal waters on Jan. 16 and on subsequent days had carried out monitoring “in a clandestine manner” off Wonsan, Chongjin, and other North Korean ports of “the radar network, accommodation capacities of the ports, the number of incoming and outgoing vessels, and the manoeuvrability of the naval vessels of the Korean People's Army.”

The alleged confession continued: “Furthermore, we spied on various military installations and the distribution of industry and the deployment of armed forces along the east coast areas, and sailed up to a point 7.6 miles off Node when naval patrol craft of the Korean People's Army appeared. We... tried to escape, firing at the patrol craft. But the situation became more dangerous for us and thus one of my men was killed, another badly wounded, and two others slightly wounded. We had no way out and were captured.... Having been captured now, I say frankly that our act was a criminal act which flagrantly violated the armistice agreement, and a sheer act of aggression....

In conclusion, the alleged “confession” of Commander Bucher said that, although he and his crew had committed an “indelible crime” and “a grave criminal act,” they hoped and desired, for the sake of their wives, children, and parents, that they would be “forgiven leniently by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.”

The U.S. Defence Department described the “confession” attributed to Commander Bucher as “a travesty of the facts,” adding that its style and wording “prove unmistakable evidence in themselves that this was not written or prepared by any American.”

“The major point which this propaganda utterance attempts to make,” said the Defence Department, “is that the *Pueblo* had violated North Korean territorial waters and was in fact violating those waters when the North Korean patrol craft appeared. This is absolutely untrue.

“The *Pueblo* reported her position at that time to be 39 deg. 25 min. N. and 127 deg. 55 min. E. The *Pueblo*’s position as determined by the radar track of the North Koreans themselves was 39 deg. 25 min. N. and 127 deg. 56 min. E. These two reported positions are within a mile of one another, and both show conclusively that the *Pueblo* was in international waters....

“Typical of this propaganda sham is the suggestion that the Central Intelligence Agency had promised Commander Bucher and his crew ‘a lot of dollars’ for their mission. Commander Bucher is a naval officer commanding a naval ship and performing a naval mission. He is not employed by the Central Intelligence Agency and was promised nothing by the Central Intelligence Agency. Nor were any members of his crew....”

A Washington announcement of Jan. 25 stated that President Johnson,” after intensive consultation with his senior advisers,” had instructed Mr. Goldberg (the U.S. permanent representative at the United Nations) to request an urgent meeting of the security Council “to consider the grave situation which has arisen in Korea by reason of North Korean aggressive action against the Republic of Korea and the illegal and wanton seizure of a U.S. vessel and crew in international waters.” A White House statement said that this action by the President “reflects his earnest desire to settle the matter promptly and, if at all possible, by diplomatic means.”

On the same day President Johnson ordered the call-up of 14,700 Air Force and Naval reservists to active duty, while two squadrons of U.S. fighter aircraft were moved from Okinawa to airfields in South Korea. It was also stated in the U.S. Press that the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Enterprise* (76,000 tons), the world’s largest warship, had moved to about 200 miles off Wonsan, with escorting destroyers and support ships.

President Johnson made the following statement on the Korean situation in a televised broadcast on Jan. 26:

“Over the past 15 months the North Koreans have pursued a stepped-up campaign of violence against South Korea and the American troops in the area of the demilitarized zone. Armed raider teams in very large numbers have been sent into South Korea to engage in sabotage and assassination.

“On Jan. 19, a 31-man team of North Korean raiders invaded Seoul with the object of murdering the President of the Republic of Korea. In many of these aggressive actions Korean and American soldiers have been killed and wounded.

“The North Koreans are apparently attempting to intimidate the South Koreans and are trying to interrupt the growing spirit of confidence and progress in the Republic of Korea. These attacks may also be an attempt by the Communists to divert South Korea and U.S. military resources, which together are now successfully resisting aggression in Vietnam.

“This week the North Koreans committed yet another wanton and aggressive act by seizing an American ship and its crew in international waters. Clearly this cannot be accepted.

“We are doing two things. First, we are today taking the question before the security Council. The best result would be for the whole world community to persuade North Korea to return our ship and our men and to stop the dangerous course of aggression against South Korea.

“We have been making other diplomatic efforts as well. We shall continue to use every means available to find a prompt and a peaceful solution to the problem.

“Second, we have taken and are taking certain precautionary measures to take sure that our military forces are prepared for any contingency that might arise in this area.

“These actions do not involve in any way a reduction of our forces in Vietnam.

“I hope that the North Koreans will recognize the gravity of the situation which they have created.

“I am confident that the American people will exhibit in this crisis, as they have in other crises, determination and unity.”

At the United Nations, the security Council met on Jan. 26 and decided by 12 votes to three (the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Algeria opposing) to place the U.S. complaint against North Korea on its agenda. As the decision was a procedural one, no question of the veto was involved. Mr. Goldberg presented the American case to the Council on this date.

Mr. Goldberg said that a “virtually unarmed vessel of the U.S. Navy, sailing on the high seas, has been wantonly and lawlessly seized by North Korean patrol boats and her crew forcibly detained” —a “warlike action [which] carries a danger to peace which should be obvious to all.” The *Pueblo*, he emphasized, had been given strict instructions to stay at least 13 nautical miles from the North Korean coast. At the time she encountered a North Korean patrol boat the *Pueblo* had radioed her position as 39 deg. 25 min. N. latitude, 127 deg. 55 min. E. longitude—that is, about 25 miles off the port of Wonsan. At exactly the same time the North Korean vessel which intercepted the *Pueblo* had reported its own position as 39 deg. 25 min. N. latitude, 127 deg. 56 min. E. longitude. “In other words,” said Mr. Goldberg, “these two reported positions are within a mile of each other and show conclusively that according to the North Korean report, as well as our own, the *Pueblo* was in international waters.”

After describing how the *Pueblo* had been seized and taken into Wonsan, Mr. Goldberg went on: “The *Pueblo* was so lightly armed that the North Koreans in one of the conversations which we have monitored even reported it as unarmed. The *Pueblo* was therefore in no position to engage in a hostile, warlike act towards the territory or vessels of North Korea; and the North Koreans know this. Nevertheless, the *Pueblo*, clearly on the high seas, was forcibly stopped, boarded, and seized by North Korean armed vessels. This is a knowing and wilful aggressive act... which no member of the United Nations could tolerate. I might add... that Soviet ships engage in exactly the same activities as tile *Pueblo*, sailing much closer to the shores of other States. One such Soviet ship right now is to be found in the Sea of Japan, and currently is not far from South Korea shores.”

Mr. Goldberg continued: "I turn now to the other category of aggressive actions taken by the North Korean authorities: their systematic campaign of infiltration, sabotage, and terrorism across the armistice line, in gross violation of the Armistice Agreement—not only in the vicinity of the demilitarized zone but also in many cases deep in the territory of the Republic of South Korea, culminating in the recent raid against the capital city of Seoul, the Presidential palace, and the person of the President of the Republic.

"The gravity of this campaign has already been made known to the security Council. Last November I conveyed to the Council a report from the U.N. Command in Korea summing up the evidence of a drastic increase in violations by North Korea of the Korean Armistice Agreement.... This report noted that the number of incidents involving armed infiltrators from North Korea had increased from 50 in 1966 to 543 in the first 10 months of 1967; and that the number of soldiers and civilians killed by these infiltrators had increased from 35 in 1966 to 144 in the same period of 1967. The further report of the U.N. Command, for the whole year 1967, filed today, shows a total of 566 incidents for 1967 and a total of 153 individuals killed by North Korean infiltrators....

"The terrorist campaign thus now reached a new level of outrage. Last Sunday, Jan. 21, security forces of the Republic of Korea made contact with a group of some 30 armed North Koreans near the Presidential palace in Seoul. In a series of engagements both in Seoul and between Seoul and the demilitarized zone, lasting through Jan. 24, about half of this group were killed and two captured. It has now been ascertained that the infiltration team totalled 31 agents, all with the rank of lieutenant or higher, dispatched from the 124th North Korean Army unit; that these agents had received two years' training, including two weeks of training for the present mission, in special camps established in North Korea for this purpose; and that their assigned mission included the assassination of the President of the Republic of Korea....

"It is obvious that this long series of attacks by North Korean infiltrators... has steadily increased in its tempo and scope until it threatens to undermine the whole structure of the armistice regime under which peace has been preserved in a divided Korea for 14 years. In the interest of international peace and security, this deterioration cannot be allowed to continue...."

In conclusion, Mr. Goldberg called upon the security Council to "promptly and effectively help to secure forthwith the safe return of the *Pueblo* and her crew, and to restore to full vigour and effectiveness the Korean Armistice Agreement."

Mr Platon Morozov (Soviet Union), who spoke before Mr. Goldberg, accused the United States of engaging in a "manoeuvre in a most unworthy cause." Asserting that the U.S.A., in bringing the *Pueblo* incident before the Council, was not actuated by any desire to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security, he urged the Council to reject what he described as a U.S. attempt to use it "to implement imperialist plans in the Far East." Describing the charges against North Korea as "utterly unfounded," Mr Morozov said that the aggressor was not North Korea but those "who invaded the territory of the Korean people many years ago and continue to occupy South Korea territory, striving to impose upon the Korean people the puppet regime of a clique of venal traitors." Saying that the "U.S.–Japan–South Korea triangle" was the "basis for aggression in the Far East," Mr Morozov declared that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Korea

was the pro-requisite for peace in the area. The captain of the *Pueblo*, he added, had admitted that he was in North Korean waters, and the intrusion by the “spy ship” was a violation of North Korea's sovereignty and not within the purview of the security Council.

Lord Caradon (United Kingdom) said that the Korean Armistice Agreement, which was apparently accepted by all, should be reaffirmed by the security Council, and all concerned should be asked to maintain and respect it. There was thus a framework for overall agreement, and it was necessary to go forward on the basis of it. This could be done by quickly reducing tensions and allowing the *Pueblo* and its crew to go free.

After further debate, the security Council accepted on Jan. 27 a proposal by the Canadian delegate, Mr George Ignatieff, that private discussions should be held between the members with a view to resolving the *Pueblo* issue. Such talks were accordingly held on Jan. 28–29, including a meeting between Mr. Goldberg and Mr Morozov. A projected meeting of the Council on the latter date was postponed indefinitely pending a decision on whether North Korea should be invited to send a representative to take part in the debate on the seizure of the *Pueblo*.

In a televised programme on Feb. 4 in which both the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defence took part, Mr McNamara was asked whether the Navy “knew for sure” that the *Pueblo* was at no time in North Korean waters. He replied: “I think we cannot say beyond a shadow of doubt at no time during its voyage it entered North Korean waters. We can say this: First, the commander had the strictest of instructions to stay in international waters. We believe he did. Second, at the time of seizure we are quite positive it was in international waters. Thirdly, there was a period of radio silence appropriate to its mission from the period of roughly Jan. 10 to Jan. 21; it is in that period that we lack knowledge, and we will not be able to obtain knowledge of that until the crew and the commander are released.” To a further question, Mr. Rusk said that “we cannot be 1,000 per cent sure until we get our officers and crew back and we have a chance to interrogate them and look at the log of the ship.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. Defence Department had announced on Jan. 30 that it had received word that one crew member of the *Pueblo* had died; the statement was issued by the Pentagon a few hours after a White House announcement that the United States had been informed that the crew of the *Pueblo* were being “properly treated” and given medical attention. It was understood, though not officially confirmed, that the U.S. Government's information had been obtained through diplomatic channels.

The first indication that the North Koreans might be prepared to negotiate for the return of the *Pueblo* and her crew was given on Jan. 31 in a statement by Mr Kim Kwang Hyop, secretary of the Korean Workers' (Communist) Party, which was broadcast by Pyongyang radio. Mr. Kim said that the “U.S. imperialists” would be making a “miscalculation” if they thought that they could” solve the incident of the intrusion of the *Pueblo* into the territorial waters of our country by military threats, or by the method of aggressive war, or by illegal discussions at the United Nations.” He added, however, that it would “be a different story if they want to solve this question by methods of previous practice.” [This was taken in Washington to refer to the release by the North Korean authorities in May 1964 of two U.S. pilots whose helicopter had inadvertently flown across the demarcation line separating North and South Korea; the pilots’

release was negotia The State Department said on Feb. 1 that the United States was prepared to resolve the *Pueblo* crisis through the Military Armistice Commission.

The M.A.C. accordingly met again at Panmunjom for four hours on the following day (Feb. 2), no transcript of the proceedings being published. President Johnson stated in Washington afterwards that this meeting had “not produced any satisfactory results as far as the United States is concerned,” and added: “The crew [of the *Pueblo*] are being well treated, the wounded have received medical treatment, the body of the man who died is being held, and that is about the extent of our knowledge.” Between Feb. 4 and Feb. 16 four more meetings were held at Panmunjom between the U.S. and North Korean military representatives, no statements being issued by mutual agreement and secrecy being maintained about the discussions. As at the meeting on Jan. 24, the United States was represented by Rear-Admiral John V. Smith and North Korea by Major-General Pak Chung Kook.

It was disclosed in Washington on Feb. 6 that the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* had withdrawn from her position off the North Korean coast, tiffs action being seen in the U.S. Press as a conciliatory gesture by the United States towards North Korea. According to press reports—of which, however, there was no official substantiation—the move had been suggested by the Hungarian mission at the U.N., which was believed to be the channel through which the North Korean authorities were maintaining contact with the United States.

A second purported “confession” by the commanding officer of the *Pueblo* was broadcast by Pyongyang radio on Feb. 12, in which Commander Bucher was claimed to have said that all the “top secret espionage information” gathered by the *Pueblo* had fallen into the hands of the North Korean authorities, as it had not been destroyed before the *Pueblo* was captured but been stored in the ship's files. On Feb. 16 Pyongyang radio broadcast another purported confession, this time in the form of a joint apology by the 82 officers and crew of the *Pueblo*, in which—according to the broadcast—they were said to have admitted having committed a “grave crime,” to have expressed appreciation of the fact that they were being well treated, to have admitted that they “deserve any punishment,” but to have expressed the hope that they would be leniently treated by the North Korean authorities. The U.S. State Department said that the language and substance of the purported “confession” were undoubtedly those of the North Korean authorities and not of the crew of the *Pueblo*, adding that any attempt to punish the crew would be regarded as a “deliberate aggravation of an already serious situation.”

On March 4 the State Department announced that an 800-word letter to President Johnson, purported to be signed by all officers and men of the *Pueblo*, had been handed to the U.S. negotiators at Panmunjom the previous day (at the 10th in the series of conferences with the North Koreans since the seizure of the vessel). In this letter the officers and crew members of the *Pueblo* appealed to the President for assistance in their repatriation, and said that “our repatriation can be realized only when our Government frankly admits the fact that we intruded into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and committed hostile acts, and sincerely apologizes for these acts and gives assurances that they will not be repeated.” Purporting to describe the *Pueblo*'s movements and intelligence missions, including the 10-day period of radio silence just before her seizure, the letter said that the ship did in fact violate North Korea's territorial waters in an endeavour to collect “electronic and visual intelligence” in the

vicinity of four North Korean ports—Chongjin, Songjin, Mayang-do, and Wonsan. It was stated that all on board the *Pueblo* were being treated humanely and that the wounded were in the final stages of recovery. The letter to President Johnson ended: “We know that you do not consider us as mere pawns, but as U.S. naval officers and men who attempted to do only as they were ordered.... We firmly believe... that you will take all necessary steps for our expeditious return....”

The *New York Times* commented: “After initial readings, American officials said that the letter seemed quite different in tone and phrasing from previous ‘confessions’ broadcast by North Korea. Those statements contained awkward English phrases that suggested that they had been fabricated by North Korean propagandists. With only a few passages considered questionable, the present letter has an air of authenticity that the earlier statements lacked. State Department officials cautioned, however, that no final judgment could be made until the letter and the signatures affixed to it had been analysed.”

The text of the purported letter of March 4, like that of the previous alleged “confessions,” was broadcast by Pyongyang radio.