

## **USS Pueblo Capture – 1968**

On 23 January 1968, while I was stationed in Misawa, Japan, a historic event happened. The USS Pueblo, a US Navy spy ship was sailing the international waters by North Korea when it was intercepted by North Korean patrol boats. The North Koreans claimed that the ship was within their 12-mile territorial waters which the US claimed it was in international waters, approximately 16 miles from shore. Since I was in an Air Force intelligence wing at the time, I saw the actual tracking route of the ship after it was captured, it was extremely close to the 12-mile territorial boundary. The Korean gunboat opened fire when the Pueblo attempted to sail from the area, wounding the commander and two sailors. The Pueblo then stalled for a while so those on board could destroy classified material and listening equipment. The Pueblo's task was the same as our intelligence wing; to intercept foreign military radio transmissions, decode them and report to the National Security Agency. While in the process of destroying material, the Koreans fired more rounds wounding several more Pueblo sailors. Eventually the Koreans boarded the Pueblo and the ship was taken to Wonson harbor in North Korea. From there the crew was bound and blindfolded and taken to Pyongyang where they were charged with spying within North Korea's boundary.

The US maintained that the ship was in international waters and demanded its release. Ships were sent to the area, including an aircraft carrier, the USS Enterprise. The commander of the Enterprise was given three options; 1 use whatever force necessary and retrieve the ship and crew, 2 wait for diplomatic channels and 3 an option that even we in intelligence could not see. I later learned that there was confusion at the Pentagon because they could not verify that a US ship named the Pueblo even existed. Officially, the ship was a research vessel designed for "oceanographic, electromagnetic and related research projects...to help the Navy and mankind toward the complete understanding of the oceans." Another complicating factor was that the US was being attacked in Vietnam in a campaign known as the Tet Offensive where the North Vietnamese was attempting to capture all of South Vietnam. More research revealed that the Pueblo was an originally an Army general cargo ship, transferred to the Navy in 1966, converted to a spy ship and recommissioned in May 1967. It was on its maiden voyage and only mission was as an electronic intelligence platform. Its mission was to gather military intelligence on not only North Korea but also Russia.

Meanwhile in Misawa, Japan, our base also was home to a fighter wing and the base went on 24-hour alert with no one being allowed off-base. Except for our security wing since we were always on 24-hour alert. We could go off-base. We had the local bars to ourselves.

On 23 December 1968, the crew was released by the North Koreans at the DMZ and the most of the crew spent Christmas 1968 with family.