

January 28, 1968

Information about the Incident with the Ship Pueblo

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Summary:

With tensions high in Korea, the Embassy of the CSSR in Pyongyang concludes that "the Pueblo problem is beginning to outgrow the context of the Korean Peninsula."

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□ Ministry of Foreign Affairs □□□□

□ 3. Territorial department □□□□

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□ Information about the incident
with the ship Pueblo

Political report no. 10

Written by: B. Schindler

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On January 23rd, 1968, navy vessels of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea intercepted an American ship Pueblo of tonnage about 1,000 tones. According to the information from the DPRK (including the published confession of the captain of the ship), this ship is equipped as an oceanographic vessel but its main mission was to be spying.

According to the information from the DPRK, the ship Pueblo was intercepted in the territorial waters of the DPRK in the area of the Eastern Korean Bay at the point of 39 degrees 17 minutes 4 seconds of northern latitude and 127 degrees 46 minutes 9 seconds of eastern longitude. According to these reports, the ship was intercepted 7.6 miles from a small island of Yeodo in the vicinity of a port town of Wonsan at the eastern coast of the DPRK.

The deputy Kim Jae-bong [Kim Jae Bong], who briefed the ambassador to the DPRK on January 23rd, in agreement with the DPRK press stated the following: The ship of about thousand tones was armed and was carrying the total of 83 armed persons: 6 officers, 75 sailors and 2 members of technical personnel. The latter were identified as CIA operatives. It was published that one crewmember was killed when the DPRK ships approached Pueblo, three were injured, one of them seriously. As for the weaponry, the ship was equipped with an anti-aircraft machine gun, tens of thousands of hand grenades and other military material. According to these reports, the ship was equipped with special electronics for radio-surveillance and locating radars.

Some other information: According to the DPRK press, the Captain of the ship Lloyd Mark Bucher, military number 58215401, born in Pocatello, Idaho, USA, admitted to spy activities and also stated that Pueblo belonged to the Pacific Navy and that it was on a special mission from the CIA. According to Bucher's testimony, on December 2nd 1967, Pueblo received orders in the Japanese port of Sasebo from Rear Admiral Frank A. Johnson, commander of the US Navy in Japan, to carry out military reconnaissance in the Soviet littoral and in the area of the eastern coast of the DPRK. As per testimony published in the DPRK, Bucher said that his ship has carried out similar activity in territorial waters of other socialist countries, with special emphasis on reconnaissance of these waters in order to gather information about military installations located along the coast of socialist countries. The collected data was

passed on to the CIA. The ship was to operate under the cover of oceanographic research on the open sea, examination of electric and magnetic phenomena, and so on. Bucher said that Pueblo explored the far eastern coast of the USSR and then on January 16th 1968 arrived in the DPRK waters where, in the area of Cheongjin, Wonsan and elsewhere, data was secretly collected about the depth of coastal waters, water currents, water temperature, quality of the sea bottom, translucency and salt concentration of water, location of DPRK radars, capacity of ports, number of departing and arriving ships and maneuvering capabilities of military ships of the Korean People's Army (KPA).

According to Bucher's published testimony, Pueblo opened fire on the approaching patrol boats of the KPA (South Korean news also mentioned two fighter jets MIG, and the deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Heo Seok-tae [Ho Sok Thae] allegedly said that the military vessels of the KPA approached Pueblo from the open sea, thus cutting off its way to retreat) but when the situation became critical for Pueblo, and one sailor was killed and three injured, one of them seriously, Pueblo surrendered, as per Bucher's testimony.

In his confession published in the DPRK, Bucher stated that he was aware it was a criminal act, violation of the Ceasefire Agreement, and that the operation of his ship was of aggressive nature from the beginning to the end.

Bucher also said "the ship was not flying US flag in order to keep ship's operation secret" ... "the crime my sailors and I committed cannot be redeemed in any way."

South Korean news reacted very quickly to the Pueblo detention, and the South Korean high command put the South Korean Navy on alert immediately after the report that the nuclear aircraft carrier Enterprise was on its way to the area. However, as it appears from some other news from South Korea and Tokyo, USA did not accept the South Korean offer yet and so far is trying to resolve the matter on its own. Some other uncorroborated news from South Korea talked about US nuclear submarines, headed by Polaris, supposedly coming to the Wonsan area. On the other hand, South Korea aired reports about the movements of KPA submarines in the Wonsan area. Also, ships from the USSR were mentioned twice - the first report was describing movements of a Soviet tanker and a destroyer which at the time of detention of Pueblo were in the vicinity and allegedly changed direction to the east towards Cuchima. South Korean news talked about some meetings in South Korea, concerning these two Soviet ships. Another South Korean report talked about two Soviet military ships that on 26th January were allegedly approaching the Wonsan area from the north but changed direction suddenly and sailed back to Vladivostok.

Besides reports of the ship's detention, articles connecting incursion of Pueblo into DPRK waters with the heightened US efforts to ignite a new war in Korea, confession of Captain Bucher and news about a press conference for newspaper and radio journalists held at an undisclosed location, the daily press has not published any international reaction to this incident. On the other hand, the confidential monitor CTAK was closely following reaction in America to the detention of Pueblo, and reports about the efforts of the American ambassador in Moscow to secure the mediation of the USSR in this matter. However, daily news did not even reprint the reaction of TaSS (USSR Press Agency) to the incident with Pueblo.

As it became clear from the discussion between the Hungarian ambassador to the DPRK Kadesh and the deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Heo Seok-tae, the DPRK disagrees in principle that the UN Security Council should deal with this problem; on the other hand, Heo Seok-tae conveyed to the Hungarian dignitary the decision of the DPRK government to attend the UN Security Council meeting if there are conditions for that and should South Korea and the USA badmouth the DPRK there, which (part of sentence not copied) the DPRK to the UN.

As shown in the reply of the Major General Pak Jung-guk [Pak Jung Guk] to the Admiral Smith, the DPRK is willing to negotiate the issues of Pueblo through the military commission for ceasefire in Korea with the provision that DKNS (acronym unknown) in this matter is inappropriate.

Reports about the continuing concentration of military arsenal and units north of the demilitarized zone, together with the news about the ongoing evacuation of civilians from the capital of the DPRK, together with the decision of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs not to allow foreigners to leave Pchjongjang (Panmunjeom), create very high tension. If we take into account the concentration of the South Korean forces not only as a consequence of the Seoul incident on 21st January, and unverified reports of KPA jets making patrol flights over the demilitarized zone and the area of Wonsan, it is understandable that the Pueblo problem is beginning to outgrow the context of the Korean Peninsula and is becoming one of the new serious problems that can have very serious consequences sooner or later.

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