

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

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Bring the Pueblo home!

A Pueblo sailor tells his story - on page 7

by *Dave Featherly*

Forty years is long enough.

Forty years is far too long.

There was a brief period (basically 5-7 years) in U.S. naval history when a handful of ships were put into service to carry out highly valuable intelligence gathering missions. As valuable as the 11 ships were, they were even more vulnerable.

Of the eight "technical research" ships that were manned with personnel of the U.S. Navy, two were victims of incidents that have etched their names in Navy annals. The incidents both involved attacks by other countries - one an enemy but one an ally. And the two incidents took place within a 229 day period.

The USS Liberty was attacked by Israeli Defense Forces on June 8, 1967 and the USS Pueblo was attacked and seized by North Korea on January 23, 1968. The deliberate attack on the Liberty resulted in 34 sailors killed and 173 wounded. More than half the ship's normal complement of 358 were injured or killed in a day-time attack by air and naval forces of Israel, reputedly America's staunchest ally.

But this story is about the Pueblo.

The tiny ship, in comparison to the earlier commissioned technical research (spy) ships, was only 177' long and the Pueblo was only 32' at its beam.

It's top speed was 12.7 knots (23.5 mph) and the ship was armed with only two Browning 50 caliber machine guns.

The technical research* ships were:

Oxford Class	USS Oxford	AGTR-1
	USS Georgetown	AGTR-2
	USS Jamestown	AGTR-3

Belmont Class	USS Belmont	AGTR-4
	USS Liberty	AGTR-5

	USS Banner	AGER-1
	USS Pueblo	AGER-2
	USS Palm Beach	AGER-3

* The final three ships were much smaller and designated "environmental research" ships. There were also three USNS ships.

I have more than a passing interest in the seizure of the Pueblo - in international waters, by a hostile act of a rogue nation. Not only because I am myself a Navy veteran but because I served 20 months aboard the Jamestown.

The Jamestown, whose symbol is a turtle, was 441' long and 59' at its beam (widest point). We shared three critical elements with the Pueblo. We were slow. We were unarmed. And we were a treasure trove of highly classified intelligence-gathering equipment. We also traveled alone and were a sitting duck for a hostile enemy (or even friendly, but deadly) action. The Jamestown was twice confronted by patrol craft of non-friendly nations.



USS Pueblo (AGER-2)

Two Cuban patrol craft approached our ship during its shakedown cruise and took provocative actions against us. Our crew was ordered to general quarters, even though most of the CT's on board hardly knew which end of the clip went which way into the 45 - and none could effectively fire either of our machine guns.

But our call for help was answered, unlike the Pueblo's and unlike the Liberty's. We were not attacked. We were not boarded. We were simply bothered. We did not fear hostile action. After all, we were the United States of America. No two-bit island would dare try anything against a US Navy ship. Then, less than four years later, all hell broke loose for the Liberty and then the Pueblo.

Assigned to secondary con (control) with the Jamestown's executive officer that day, everything happened in full view of me. We were unprotected and unarmed but had a great vantage point of the patrol craft off our port (left) side. Confident nothing would happen to a ship from the most powerful nation on earth, sailors along the hull were "flipping off" the Cuban sailors until an announcement was made over the PA system to stop.

Within minutes, a U.S. P2V loaded with depth charges arrived from Gitmo. Flying low over the patrol craft while the Cuban sailors trained their armament on the plane as it passed close overhead, a couple strafes and the patrol craft left to return to shore. In the distance, we could see the USS Bainbridge, a nuclear powered cruiser, also steaming to our rescue. If only the Pueblo had the same cover.

The Jamestown also had an uneventful encounter off the coast of Angola. There we just played "you first" until that patrol boat dipped its flag in friendly greeting - we did the same and they skedaddled.

By the time the Pueblo was deployed off the coast of North Korea, the Navy knew our intelligence-gathering ships were at risk. No country could have posed more danger than North Korea.

But, as sailors in the '60s, we just knew that our country would not abandon us if we were in trouble. The Bainbridge could almost skip over the water. It was headed our way at probably near its flank speed of 55 mph. Our country - our Navy - did not let us down. They did not leave our already vulnerable ship, laden with cryptographic equipment and highly classified materials and manned by "spies", not combat soldiers, to the caprices of rogue nations and hateful enemies.

But our country did exactly that to the USS Pueblo. And then some criticized the ship's captain, Cdr. Lloyd Bucher, for "allowing" his unarmed vessel to be pirated in international waters by North Korea. Rescue planes were not dispatched or were called back. We allowed the full complement of U.S. sailors to be held prisoners by North Korea for eleven months. One sailor was killed while Bucher tried to buy time to destroy classified materials, but our country did not recover his body until all sailors were released together. Now, North Korea uses the Pueblo as a museum - a tourist draw to stir anti-American sentiment. It is far past time to bring the Pueblo home. (P. 7)



USS Jamestown (AGTR-3)

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