

## **Pueblo Incident of 40 Years Ago**

On January 23, 1968, the US army spy ship *Pueblo* intruded into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and was seized by the Navy of the Korean People's Army (KPA).

The *Pueblo*, which belonged to the Pacific Fleet of the US Navy, was the electronic intelligence ship equipped with modern facilities including the code-breaking machine "KW-7" and the wiretap receiver "KLW-1". The US Navy had only three of its kind. It was built to be able to be at sea for several months with over 80 crewmen on board and obtain military information from all parts of the world. It was armed with various kinds of weapons including two large-calibre machine guns, and was also possessed with a small-sized incinerator and a paper crusher for destroying documents in emergency.

The ship received the directive of the "Operation Pink Route-1", according to which it should sail the East Sea of Korea and spy out the number and position of the KPA Navy vessels, the military objects and distribution of radar network, detect all kinds of radio waves and the capacity of ports, the movements of the navy units of the KPA and the former Soviet Union at three coastal spots.

It was sailing southward from the northern tip of the East Sea of Korea, conducting espionage acts, when it was seized by the KPA Navy off Wonsan.

It was the first time for the US since its founding in 1776 that an espionage vessel, which costed a great deal, was captured "alive" by a small country like the DPRK less than two years after it was put into commission.

The US administration was stunned and the whole US was confused.

The National Security Council and Congress hurriedly decided an "immediate and strong countermeasure". They tried to replay the tricks of threat and blackmail that had been employed in the Caribbean Crisis in 1962 and the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in 1964.

It referred to the UN security Council the serious "violation of the international law" by north Korea that had "seized a peaceful vessel, whose mission is the research into the oceanography and route, in the open sea". It even sent an "ultimatum", saying that it would use the armed forces to take back the *Pueblo* unless the ship and its crewmen were returned within a fixed time. It took concurrent military actions to back up its words. A large group of US

warships, with the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Enterprise*, the aircraft carrier *Ranger* and the anti-submarine carrier *Yorktown* as its main force, was concentrated in the East Sea of Korea, and hundreds of warplanes including squadrons of “B-52” strategic bombers, which are capable of carrying H-bombs, and “F-4” fighter-bombers flew from the US mainland into the air bases in Osan and Kunsan, south Korea. The “order of stand-by for an emergency” was delivered to the GI stations in south Korea and the south Korean army, and any furlough and outings were forbidden. The discharge was suspended in the US army and more than 14,600 men were recruited to pilot 750 warplanes. Forty to sixty percent of the strategic air force got fully prepared for aerial transport and ground alert.

The US thought it would be enough to bring the DPRK, a small country, to its knees. At that time, the US had just won a “victory” in the nuclear confrontation with the former Soviet Union where Khrushchev was in power, and was escalating the bombing on the northern part of Vietnam. It was, therefore, beyond its imagination that Korea would put up a fight against the US. The former Soviet Union and some other countries, the alleged Korean allies, hardly lent any support to or voiced solidarity with Korea. They rather “advised” Korea to return the ship and its crewmen without much ado. But things turned out contrary to their expectations.

Pyongyang exploded a bombshell that it would “answer ‘retaliation’ with retaliation and an all-out war with an all-out war”. The order was delivered to the Korean army and people to take wartime mobilization posture.

The US, startled by the decisive measure of the DPRK, immediately shrank within itself. Only two weeks after it declared “military retaliation”, the US silently withdrew its armed forces from in and around south Korea, and proposed negotiation to Pyongyang.

After 28 rounds of negotiation held for 11 months from February that year, the US couldn’t help but offer its letter of apology to the government of the DPRK in the name of the US government, in which it fully accepted the demands of Korea for acknowledgement and apology of its crimes and on its assurance of preventing recurrence. And the crewmen of the *Pueblo*, who had been prisoners for nearly one year, were released in the form of exile from Korea. But the vessel remained a trophy of the KPA.

The *Pueblo* incident gave the US a heavy blow in the fields of military, politics and diplomacy in front of the world and disclosed its weakness.

The incident of 40 years ago was the historic one showing that the US can never bring the Korean people to their knees however desperately it would resort to military or politico-diplomatic methods.