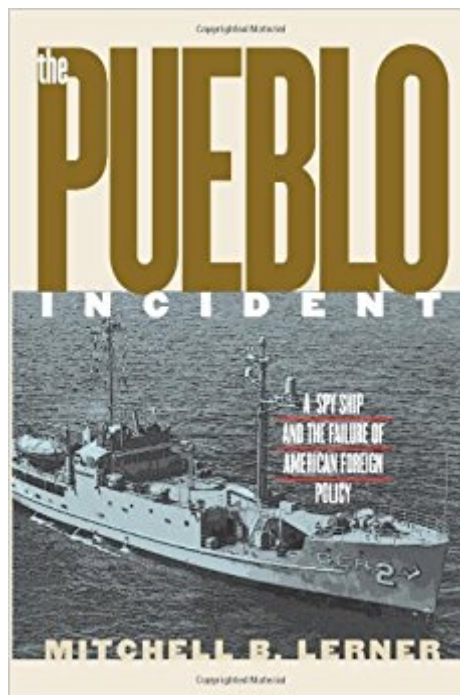




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# The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship And The Failure Of American Foreign Policy (Modern War Studies (Paperback))



## Synopsis

"Remember, you are not going out there to start a war," Rear Admiral Frank Johnson reminded Commander Pete Bucher just prior to the maiden voyage of the U.S.S. Pueblo. And yet a war—*one that might have gone nuclear*—was what nearly happened when the Pueblo was attacked and captured by North Korean gunships in January 1968. Diplomacy prevailed in the end, but not without great cost to the lives of the imprisoned crew and to a nation already mired in an unwinnable war in Vietnam. The Pueblo was an aging cargo ship poorly refurbished as a signals intelligence collector for the top-secret Operation Clickbeetle. It was sent off with a first-time captain, an inexperienced crew, and no back-up, and was captured well before the completion of its first mission. Ignored for a quarter of a century, the Pueblo incident has been the subject of much polemic but no scholarly scrutiny. Mitchell Lerner now examines for the first time the details of this crisis and uses the incident as a window through which to better understand the limitations of American foreign policy during the Cold War. Drawing on thousands of pages of recently declassified documents from President Lyndon Johnson's administration, along with dozens of interviews with those involved, Lerner provides the most complete and accurate account of the Pueblo incident. He weaves on a grand scale a dramatic story of international relations, presidential politics, covert intelligence, capture on the high seas, and secret negotiations. At the same time, he highlights the very intimate struggles of the Pueblo's crew—through capture, imprisonment, indoctrination, torture, and release—and the still smoldering controversy over Commander Bucher's actions. In fact, Bucher emerges here for the first time as the truly steadfast hero his men have always considered him. More than an account of misadventure, *The Pueblo Incident* is an indictment of Cold War mentality that shows how the premises underlying the Pueblo's risky mission and the ensuing efforts to win the release of her crew were seriously flawed. Lerner argues that had U.S. policymakers regarded the North Koreans as people with a national agenda rather than one serving a global Communist conspiracy, they might have avoided the crisis or resolved it more effectively. He also addresses such unanswered questions as what the Pueblo's mission exactly was, why the ship had no military support, and how damaging the intelligence loss was to national security. With North Korea still seen as a rogue state by some policymakers, *The Pueblo Incident* provides key insights into the domestic imperatives behind that country's foreign relations. It astutely assesses the place of gunboat diplomacy in the modern world and is vital for understanding American foreign policy failures in the Cold War.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The January 1968 North Korean seizure of the intelligence-collecting ship USS Pueblo came close to sparking a second Korean War. Lerner, an assistant professor of history, synthesizes newly available documents and a large number of participant interviews to attribute the crisis to the Johnson administration's unsophisticated interpretation of contemporary international relations as bipolar global rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Sending the Pueblo to monitor electronic communications and naval activity off North Korea's coast was regarded as a routine mission in the general context of the Cold War. The ship, its crew and captain were poorly prepared for any unexpected occurrences, able neither to resist nor escape the North Korean gunboats. Johnson and his advisers processed the seizure as having been orchestrated by the Soviet Union. U.S. responses focused on Moscow and on international agencies like the Red Cross and the World Court. Lerner, however, offers extensive documentary evidence that the U.S.S.R. was not involved in the Pueblo's seizure. Instead, he makes a convincing case that North Korea acted on its own and for domestic reasons. Kim Il Sung, according to Lerner, was increasingly committed to structuring North Korea around the ideological principle of *juche*, or "self-identity." *Juche* required the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea to act in all areas without regard for external influence. Even in its early stages, attempts to apply the concept had generated economic shortages and political dissent sufficient to impel Kim to assert "self-identity" in another way: seizing a ship whose presence, even in international waters, was in any case provocative. American efforts to resolve the crisis, pointed as they were in the wrong direction, only exacerbated it. In the absence of North

Korean documents, Lerner's argument cannot be regarded as definitively proven, but expect it to get serious (if quiet) play among historians and policy makers. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The title of this study by Lerner (history, Ohio State Univ.) refers to the capture of the intelligence gathering ship, the U.S.S. Pueblo, by the North Koreans in January 1968. The Pueblo was nothing more than a made-over cargo vessel with the addition of an electronic shack for eavesdropping. It was prone to steering loss and engine failure, and its crew and captain were new and untrained. Unarmed except for two machine guns and some small arms, the ship was in no condition to attempt an intelligence mission off the North Korean coast. Unfortunately for the captain and crew, that is exactly where they were captured. Lerner does an excellent job of detailing the crew's torture and imprisonment for almost a year. He draws on interviews with those involved, as well as recently released documents relating to the Johnson administration, to show how badly the administration handled foreign policy challenges during the 1960s. This excellent read sheds light on the incident, which is still debated in some circles today. Recommended for both public and academic libraries. Mark Ellis, Albany State Univ. Lib., GA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Great book. Remember the incident well. It is a disgusting indictment of what was then, a fledgling intelligence operation.

I read the very first book on this incident many many years ago. In my mind it is still fresh. I was in Nam when this happened. Have not read this book yet but am anxious to do so.

Johnny Walker, Navy spy, told the Russians the Pueblo was coming to No. Korea, ship was betrayed by US Govt., so was USS Liberty off Israel

This book was very interesting to read. thank you for listing this book. It gives insight to how our government works behind closed doors. The crew deserved better treatment from our government then what they received.

Their suffering was worse than mine on board USS Liberty. At least mine didn't last as long as Pueblo's did.

An account of an international incident of greater importance than we realized at the time. The ship is now a tourist attraction in N. Korea.

This was excellent on many levels. From the scholarship of the research to the craftsmanship of telling a story to the flagrant display of political incompetence it is a very good book about a very interesting story. Having seen the bungling and incompetence of the military from the inside the tale it weaves is very believable. Good men are sacrificed and the person responsible never suffers. Those who suffer are the grunts who live and die at the hands of such people.

I am very satisfied does exactly what it is supposed to do, nothing more, nothing less Works great! Really high quality and excellent value I hesitated whether to buy before, but when I got it, I have to say I made a nice decision to buy this. Exactly what we were hoping for. Perfect as a gift, but make sure to get one for yourself as well!

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