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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 23 December 2014

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(U) A commissioned U.S. Navy vessel currently lies moored on the Botong River in North Korea. It is the USS *Pueblo*, seized by North Korean forces in January 1968, and held since then. The ship's crew was returned in December of that year.

(U) The *Pueblo* was a SIGINT platform tasked to collect signals off North Korea's eastern coast. Its officers and crew, detained under harsh conditions, were released on December 23. But the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not let go of the ship, and it has continued to be a valuable museum artifact for the country -- all while being closely linked to another former American ship of historical significance.

(U) The *Pueblo* has remained in North Korea, but its location was changed over time. For over three decades, the ship was in the port of Wonsan, in the vicinity of the place it was moored on the day of its capture. In 1999, the North Koreans disguised the ship and towed it over a thousand nautical miles around the Korean peninsula. This move was not detected at the time.

(U) Subsequently, the ship was anchored on the Daedong River near the capital city of Pyongyang. Although not understood by Americans at the time, the choice of this second site was no accident. In fact, the spot offers an insight into the role of history for the North Korean leadership. That location, Mangyongdae, is historically significant for several reasons -- first of all because it is the site of the Korean Kingdom's victory over an American raider in 1866.

 (U) The Pueblo as a tourist attraction

(U) Korea in the nineteenth century was a true "Hermit Kingdom" that conducted little business with outsiders. Korea's Joseon Dynasty kept closed to the outside world, having seen the devastation that foreign influence had wrought in China. The Korean king refused all entreaties -- including the earliest American commercial mission in 1853 -- to open up to international trade.

(U) In August 1866 the steamer *General Sherman* entered Korean waters. Formerly a Confederate blockade runner captured in 1863, it was sold to commercial interests, and wound up in East Asia. Eventually, W. B. Preston, an American adventurer, fitted it out for a trip to Korea, where he hoped he could conduct barter trade, especially for ginseng. In addition, the soldiers of fortune who chartered the vessel were seeking to loot a reputed hoard of gold in royal tombs in the Pyongyang area.

(U) Heavy rains allowed the ship to ply normally impassible parts of the Daedong River as far upstream as Pyongyang, in spite of warnings to turn back. At this point, the ship set anchor, and at Preston's behest, its American captain made demands upon the Korean government.

(U) Robert J. Thomas, a missionary active among the Korean community in China, was aboard the *General Sherman* to act as its "interpreter," although he could only communicate with Koreans through the use of Chinese characters; he also planned to proselytize among the people when a chance arose.

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(U) Hostilities soon broke out. Preston directed the crew to take hostages from the local populace in order to entice a royal representative to enter into negotiations. The Koreans not only steadfastly refused to talk but launched a successful rescue mission of the captives.

(U) The ship fired its cannon on local townsmen, but Preston stayed too long in an inlet. The high waters unexpectedly subsided and his ship became stuck. The Koreans began earnest efforts to dislodge the *General Sherman*, but it was shielded by iron bulkheads, and was unaffected by their antiquated cannon. On September 5 the Koreans set rafts ablaze and drove them into the vessel. The multinational crew quickly abandoned ship; Reverend Thomas threw copies of Bibles on shore. All from the ship were slaughtered in the surrounding mud flats.

(U) The incident has never been forgotten by the Koreans. A nobleman who participated in the assault took pages from the Bibles tossed ashore by Thomas and wall-papered his home; when discovered many decades later the house achieved the status of a shrine.

(U) The founder of the North Korean regime, Kim Il-song, was born in Mangyongdae, and the regime has often said that his family's anti-American credentials go back to his grandfather, who, they say incorrectly, led the attack on the *General Sherman*. The presence of the *Pueblo* at this location links the two incidents in a distortion of history for propaganda.

(U) The photograph shows the *Pueblo* as a tourist attraction in North Korea.

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