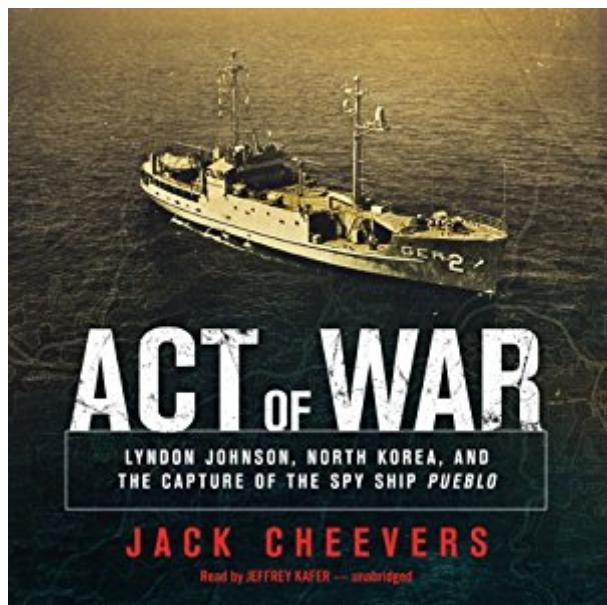


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Act Of War: Lyndon Johnson, North Korea, And The Capture Of The Spy Ship Pueblo



Synopsis

In 1968, a small, dilapidated American spy ship set out on a dangerous mission to pinpoint military radar stations along the coast of North Korea. Packed with advanced surveillance equipment and classified intelligence documents, the USS Pueblo was poorly armed and lacked backup by air or sea. Its crew, led by a charismatic, hard-drinking, ex-submarine officer named Pete Bucher, was made up mostly of untested sailors in their teens and twenties. On a frigid January morning while eavesdropping near the port of Wonsan, the Pueblo was challenged by a North Korean gunboat. When Bucher tried to escape, his ship was quickly surrounded by more patrolboats, shelled and machine-gunned, and forced to surrender. One American was killed and ten wounded, and Bucher and his young crew were taken prisoner by one of the world's most aggressive and erratic totalitarian regimes. Less than forty-eight hours before the Pueblo's capture, North Korean commandos had nearly succeeded in assassinating South Korea's president in downtown Seoul. Together the two explosive incidents pushed Cold War tensions toward a flashpoint as both North and South Korea girded for war - with fifty thousand American soldiers caught between them. President Lyndon Johnson rushed US combat ships and aircraft to reinforce South Korea, while secretly trying to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis. *Act of War* tells the riveting saga of Bucher and his men as they struggled to survive merciless torture and horrendous living conditions in North Korean prisons. Based on extensive interviews and numerous government documents released through the Freedom of Information Act, this book also reveals new details of Johnson's high-risk gambit to prevent war from erupting on the Korean peninsula while his negotiators desperately tried to save the sailors from possible execution. The backdrop of an international diplomatic poker game, *Act of War* offers lessons on the perils of covert intelligence operations as America finds itself confronting a host of 21st-century enemies.

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Customer Reviews

It's perfectly clear to me, having read Jack Cheevers' well-researched and well-written book, that much of what went on regarding the U.S.S. Pueblo was never revealed to the world--until now. A debt of gratitude is owed the author by all of us, for without his book we'd remain greatly misinformed about a tragedy which could and should have been prevented. Anyone who is even remotely interested in imprisonment, intelligence gathering, the Korean Peninsula, military culture, naval activity, politics, post-traumatic stress, psychology, the Second Indochina War, or torture should read this book. Obviously, those interested in the seizure of the U.S.S. Pueblo and the fate of its crew will find this book enlightening. While not wanting to give anything away, as it's all of a piece, I'll nevertheless address a subject about which I've retained some small knowledge: destruction of classified documents and equipment. Imminent capture of such items by a hostile force was, during the period examined in this book, a scenario not taken seriously by relevant authority. The U.S.S. Pueblo's crew had neither the means nor the training necessary to destroy classified machines and materials on a moment's notice, as the ship captain's repeated requests for proper destruction equipment had been denied. In short, the "blue water" navy and its admirals had little respect for crews and ships embarked on intelligence-gathering missions. (This nonchalant attitude, however, did not prevail within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.) Shocking as such high-level incompetence is, it's equally shocking to learn of treatment accorded some of the U.S.S. Pueblo's crew upon their release from captivity. The sole fatality aboard U.S.S. Pueblo was Damage Controlman Third Class Duane Daniel Hodges (1946-1968) from Creswell in Oregon. May he and Commander Lloyd Mark Bucher (1927-2004) rest in peace, along with their 18 shipmates who have also passed away.

This is a tremendous read about 86 sailors and their 11 months as POWs of the North Koreans. If you are in your mid-late 50s (I am) you may remember the story so many years ago. This book covers the work-up of the doomed voyage, the capture, the imprisonment, and homecoming in a very fast paced read. As I said before, I knew about the incident before (think forest) now I know about the branches of the trees! Bravo Zulu!

Great but sad story and well researched. I believe the Russians received 15 crypto machines from capturing the Pueblo. Those machines fit nicely with the key lists John Walker sold to the KGB starting just before the Pueblo was taken. In his 18 years of spying, the Russians probably paid less than \$1 million dollars for a treasure trove of information about the U.S. military's secrets. In the words of top KGB officials, had a war broken out during the 18 years of John Walker's spy ring, they would have won because they had a seat at the Pentagon. Starting in 1985, it cost the U.S. about \$1 B to set up a new security system. Yes, John Walker was a traitor and should have been executed. His ring was probably the worst spy ring the U.S. ever encountered. John Walker also gave the Russians information about how noisy their subs were. They bolted motors to the hull which sends noise out into the ocean. Noise in the ocean will always be detected by the United States. Look at all the submarine disasters --- The U.S. Sosus program discovered the locations of all the sub disasters, including Russian Subs. North Korea captured the Pueblo from International Waters and turned over the crypto machines to Russia. North Korea still holds the Pueblo. The U.S. should have demolished the Pueblo as it was tied to the dock in North Korea. Demolish the Pueblo and the crypto machines would not have been available to the Russians. The crew of the Pueblo could not destroy the crypto machines partly because they were welded to steel work surfaces. Lyndon Johnson did us no favors by allowing Walker to stay alive. Walker wrote a book.. I refuse to read it.....

The "Pueblo Incident" was a first of its kind in my memory, and clearly the worst possible scenarios were not covered in the OpPlan. The '60s was a difficult period of trial & error in hard lessons for all branches, but 11 months of captivity was too great a price to pay for oversight by the officers and crew of the USS Pueblo. I've read "Bucher: My Story" and Cmdr. Bucher, a career officer and professional, spared the Navy his criticism. I cannot be as generous. This book objectively reports the plight and treatment of the men as well as the aftermath and finger-pointing session to follow when they were repatriated. I was on active duty at the time and marveled at the inability of the chain of command to promptly respond, to take decisive action. While this book better explains that, it was still evidence of poor planning on the part of Bucher's command structure, a hard lesson that would benefit future operations. This book was well researched, I enjoyed it and recommend it.

I never knew or fully understood what I did know of this sad time in US history. The captain of the Pueblo. Although less than politically correct was the type of officer this country needs in its military.

The book is an indictment of the US Navy playing the "blame game". Every US serviceman knows in his heart that if captured by an enemy. His immediate brothers and sisters in uniform will do anything they can to bring them home. Unfortunately, once that immediate time has passed you're no more than a political pawn.

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