

USS PUEBLO AGER-2 and The International Date Line. The International Date Line (IDL) now passes between Samoa and American Samoa, which remains on the eastern (American) side of the line. Tokelau is a territory of New Zealand north of Samoa whose principal transportation and communications links with the rest of the world pass through Samoa. For that reason, Tokelau crossed the IDL along with Samoa in 2011.

If you were on board the USS FRANK KNOX headed North from a port call in Wellington, NZ the feeling of homeward bound was on everyone's mind. The two-ship group consisted of us and the USS COONTZ (DLG-9 until 1975 then DDG-9). The night of January 22nd and the 23rd the two ships pushed toward calmer waters and sunnier skies. Notice of the USS PUEBLO's seizure likely circulated to OICs and COs first then several hours later the All Navy message told the hard to believe news that North Korea had seized the PUEBLO and its package of intelligence and communication gear.

Jim Lasswell, the ship's Weapons officer, clearly recalls "Definitely remember the nervous energy wondering which direction we would head." Korean waters or Samoa and home to San Diego. Jim also recalls meeting CDR Lloyd Bucher at PG School (Navy Post Graduate School) Monterey CA. Bucher was the skipper of the PUEBLO at the time of the ship's seizure.

Denny Conley, our Engineering Officer, recalls "I remember seeing the all-fleet message announcing the seizure of the PUEBLO. Prior to seeing the message, I recall we increased speed for some period before reducing speed back to our fuel-efficient cruising speed and directing our course to American Samoa, our next refueling stop."

Jerry Harken, Our Operations Officer, recalls "I remember the message and our first reactions, but nothing that followed. Interestingly enough the ship I reported to in March as XO was the USS JOHN R. PERRY (DE 1034). Our mission was "spec ops" and the PUEBLO incident was the focus of many messages, discussions and 'drills'."

Steve Cross, the ship's ASW Officer, recalls meeting the future XO of PUEBLO, Ed Murphy in an Intelligence class. The shock of seeing his name on the list of captured personnel is a lasting memory.

YN-2 Bill Atkinson added a fascinating insight. Bill handled the officer's records and typed fitness reports in the ship's office. Bill recalled "that our XO, LCDR Don Pfister, received orders to USS BANNER a sister ship of USS PUEBLO. Part of the orders included a stopover in Pearl Harbor so LCDR Pfister could be briefed on his new assignment at CINCPACFLT headquarters and



initiate a security clearance [for him] with something called Blue.” The photo shows LT Harken, QMC Whitehead, QMSN Giles and LCDR Pfister on the FRANK KNOX bridge about September 1967. Not much is known about Pfister’s departure time from the ship or his command period on USS BANNER. The seizure of the PUEBLO and the attack on another intelligence ship USS LIBERTY in the Mediterranean on 8 June 1967 changed much about how these ships were deployed and utilized. USS LIBERTY has a FRANK KNOX connection.

The skipper of the USS LIBERTY at the time of the attack in 1967 was Captain William McGonigal, a former FRANK KNOX officer who attended several of our reunions. McGonigal was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions on June 8 and 9, 1967.

There is little mention of the PUEBLO in the literature of 1968. Beginning with the PUEBLO the news of civil disobedience, assassinations and bleak news was broken in August when FRANK KNOX was awarded the “Battle ‘E’ for excellence and in November when VADM Baumberger came to San Diego to present the Arleigh Burke Fleet Trophy to our ship and crew. Good news at last.

So, what about the IDL? In crew quarters the talk was our ship was racing to cross the IDL and prevented being redirected back to Vietnam or Korean waters. More likely than not the high-speed run north was to position both ships, COONTZ and FRANK KNOX, closer in case they needed to be recalled. Fortunately, that did not happen. The IDL takes an eastward bend to accommodate American Samoa and Western Samoa because Western Samoa trades heavily with Australia and New Zealand and others in the area. American Samoa, where the ship fueled (through that incredibly small fuel hose), trades heavily with US, Canada and other North and Central American countries