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THEY DARE TO SPEAK OUT

People and Institutions
Confront Israel's Lobby

BY PAUL FINDLEY

A Congressman from Illinois for twenty-two years



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Shera Scoville

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PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS
CONFRONT ISRAEL'S LOBBY

by Paul Findley

James M. Estes, Jr. Research Papers


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Chapter 6

The Assault on "Assault"

Although Israel's lobby seems able at will to penetrate our nation's strongest defenses in order to gain the secret information it wishes, when the lobby's objective is keeping such information secret, our defenses suddenly become impenetrable.

After seventeen years, James M. Ennes Jr., a retired officer of the U.S. Navy, is still having difficulty prying loose documents which shed light on the worst peacetime disaster in the history of our Navy. In this quest, he has encountered resistance by the Department of Defense, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the book publishing industry, the news media, and the Israeli Foreign Ministry. The resistance, seemingly coordinated on an international scale, is especially perplexing because Ennes' goal is public awareness of an episode of heroism and tragedy at sea which is without precedent in American history.

As the result of a program of concealment supported by successive governments in both Israel and the United States, hardly anyone remembers the miraculous survival of the USS *Liberty* after a devastating assault by Israeli forces on June 8, 1967, left 34 sailors dead, 171 injured, and the damaged ship adrift with no power, rudder or means of communication.

The sustained courage of Captain William L. McGonagle and his crew in these desperate circumstances earned the *Liberty* a place of honor in the annals of the U.S. Navy. But, despite energetic endeavors, including those of Ennes, McGonagle's officer of the deck that day, the entries remain dim and obscure. Ennes's stirring book-length account of the attack, *Assault on the Liberty*, itself continues to be under heavy assault five years after publication.

The episode and its aftermath were so incredible that Admiral Thomas L. Moorer, who became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff a

month after the attack, observes, "If it was written as fiction, nobody would believe it."

Certain facts are clear. The attack was no accident. The *Liberty* was assaulted in broad daylight by Israeli forces who knew the ship's identity. The *Liberty*, an intelligence-gathering ship, had no combat capability and carried only light machine guns for defense. A steady breeze made its U.S. flag easily visible. The assault occurred over a period of nearly two hours—first by air, then torpedo boat. The ferocity of the attacks left no doubt: the Israeli forces wanted the ship and its crew destroyed.

The public, however, was kept in the dark. Even before the American public learned of the attack, U.S. government officials began to promote an account satisfactory to Israel. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee worked through Congressmen to keep the story under control. The President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, ordered and led a cover-up so thorough that sixteen years after he left office, the episode was still largely unknown to the public—and the men who suffered and died have gone largely unhonored.

The day of the attack began in routine fashion, with the ship first proceeding slowly in an easterly direction in the eastern Mediterranean, later following the contour of the coastline westerly about fifteen miles off the Sinai Peninsula. On the mainland, Israeli forces were winning smashing victories in the third Arab-Israeli war in nineteen years. Israeli Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, announcing that the Israelis had taken the entire Sinai and broken the blockade on the Strait of Tiran, declared: "The Egyptians are defeated." On the eastern front the Israelis had overcome Jordanian forces and captured most of the West Bank.

At 6 A.M. an airplane, identified by the *Liberty* crew as an Israeli Noratlas, circled the ship slowly and departed. This procedure was repeated periodically over an eight-hour period. At 9 A.M. a jet appeared at a distance, then left. At 10 A.M., two rocket-armed jets circled the ship three times. They were close enough for their pilots to be observed through binoculars. The planes were unmarked. An hour later the Israeli Noratlas returned, flying not more than 200 feet directly above the *Liberty* and clearly marked with the Star of David. The ship's crew members and the pilot waved at each other. This plane returned every few minutes until 1 P.M. By then, the ship had changed course and was proceeding almost due west.

At 2:00 P.M. all hell broke loose. Three Mirage fighter planes headed straight for the *Liberty*, their rockets taking out the forward machine guns and wrecking the ship's antennae. The Mirages were

joined by Mystère fighters, which dropped napalm on the bridge and deck and repeatedly strafed the ship. The attack continued for over 20 minutes. In all, the ship sustained 821 holes in her sides and decks. Of these, more than 100 were rocket size.

As the aircraft departed, three torpedo boats took over the attack, firing five torpedoes, one of which tore a 40-foot hole in the hull, killing 25 sailors. The ship was in flames, dead in the water, listing precariously, and taking water. The crew was ordered to prepare to abandon ship. As life-rafts were lowered into the water, the torpedo boats moved closer and shot them to pieces. One boat concentrated machine-gun fire on rafts still on deck as crew members there tried to extinguish the napalm fires. Petty Officer Charles Rowley declares, "They didn't want anyone to live."

At 3:15 p.m. the last shot was fired, leaving the vessel a combination morgue and hospital. The ship had no engines, no power, no rudder. Fearing further attack, Captain McGonagle, despite severe leg injuries, stayed at the bridge. An Israeli helicopter, its open bay door showing troops in battle gear and a machine gun mounted in an open doorway, passed close to the deck, then left. Other aircraft came and went during the next hour.

Although U.S. air support never arrived, within fifteen minutes of the first attack and more than an hour before the assault ended, fighter planes from the USS *Saratoga* were in the air ready for a rescue mission under orders "to destroy or drive off any attackers." The carrier was only 30 minutes away, and, with a squadron of fighter planes on deck ready for a routine operation, it was prepared to respond almost instantly.

But the rescue never occurred. Without approval by Washington, the planes could not take aggressive action, even to rescue a U.S. ship confirmed to be under attack. Admiral Donald Engen, then captain of the *America*, the second U.S. carrier in the vicinity, later explained: "President Johnson had very strict control. Even though we knew the *Liberty* was under attack, I couldn't just go and order a rescue." The planes were hardly in the air when the voice of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was heard over Sixth Fleet radios: "Tell the Sixth Fleet to get those aircraft back immediately." They were to have no part in destroying or driving off the attackers.

Shortly after 3 p.m., nearly an hour after the *Liberty's* plea was first heard, the White House gave momentary approval to a rescue mission and planes from both carriers were launched. At almost precisely the same instant, the Israeli government informed the U.S. naval attaché in Tel Aviv that its forces had "erroneously attacked a U.S.

ship" after mistaking it for an Egyptian vessel, and offered "abject apologies." With apology in hand, Johnson once again ordered U.S. aircraft back to their carriers.

When the second launch occurred, there were no Israeli forces to "destroy or drive away." Ahead for the *Liberty* and its ravaged crew were 15 hours of lonely struggle to keep the wounded alive and the vessel afloat. Not until dawn of the next day would the *Liberty* see a U.S. plane or ship. The only friendly visit was from a small Soviet warship. Its offer of help was declined, but the Soviets said they would stand by in case need should arise.

The next morning two U.S. destroyers arrived with medical and repair assistance. Soon the wounded were transferred to the carrier hospital by helicopter. The battered ship then proceeded to Malta, where a Navy court of inquiry was to be held. The inquiry itself was destined to be a part of an elaborate program to keep the public from knowing what really had happened.

In fact, the cover-up began almost at the precise moment that the Israeli assault ended. The apology from Israeli officials reached the White House moments after the last gun fired at the *Liberty*. President Johnson accepted and publicized the condolences of Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, even though information readily available showed the Israeli account to be false. The CIA had learned a day before the attack that the Israelis planned to sink the ship. Congressional comments largely echoed the president's interpretation of the assault, and the nation was caught up in euphoria over Israel's stunning victories over the Arabs. The casualties on the *Liberty* got scant attention. Smith Hempstone, foreign correspondent for the *Washington Star*, wrote from Tel Aviv, "In a week since the Israeli attack on the USS *Liberty* not one single Israeli of the type which this correspondent encounters many times daily—cab drivers, censors, bartenders, soldiers—has bothered to express sorrow for the deaths of these Americans."

The Pentagon staved off reporters' inquiries with the promise of a "comprehensive statement" once the official inquiry, conducted by Admiral Isaac Kidd, was finished. Kidd gave explicit orders to the crew: "Answer no questions. If somehow you are backed into a corner, then you may say that it was an accident and that Israel has apologized. You may say nothing else." Crew members were assured they could talk freely to reporters once the summary of the court of inquiry was made public. This was later modified; they were then ordered not to provide information beyond the precise words of the published summary.

The court was still taking testimony when a charge that the attack had been deliberate appeared in the U.S. press. An Associated Press

story filed from Malta reported that "senior crewmen" on the ship were convinced the Israelis knew the ship was American before they attacked. "We were flying the Stars and Stripes and it's absolutely impossible that they shouldn't know who we were," a crew member said. The Navy disputed the story, saying the U.S. "thoroughly accepted the Israeli apology."

Testimony completed, Admiral Kidd handcuffed himself to a huge box of records and flew to Washington to be examined by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral McDonald, as well as by Congressional leaders before the long-awaited summary statement was issued. When finally released, it was far from comprehensive. It made no attempt to fix blame, focusing almost entirely on the actions of the crew.

The censored summary did not reveal that the ship had been under close aerial surveillance by Israel for hours before the attack and that during the preceding 24 hours Israel had repeatedly warned U.S. authorities to move the *Liberty*. It contained nothing to dispute the notion of mistaken identity. The Navy reported erroneously that the attack lasted only 6 minutes instead of 70 minutes and asserted falsely that all firing stopped when the torpedo boats came close enough to identify the U.S. flag. The Navy made no mention of napalm or of life-rafts being shot up. It even suppressed records of the strong breeze which made the ship's U.S. flag plainly visible.

The report did make one painful revelation: Before the attack the Joint Chiefs of Staff had ordered the *Liberty* to move further from the coast, but the message "was misrouted, delayed and not received until after the attack."

Several newspapers criticized the Pentagon's summary. The *New York Times* said it "leaves a good many questions unanswered." The *Washington Star* used the word "cover-up," called the summary an "affront" and demanded a deeper and wider probe. Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, after a closed briefing by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, called the episode "very embarrassing." The *Star* concluded: "Whatever the meaning of this, embarrassment is no excuse for disingenuousness."

In early July, the Associated Press quoted Micha Limor, identified as an Israeli reservist who had served on one of the torpedo boats, as saying that Israeli sailors noticed three numbers as they circled the *Liberty* but insisted the numbers meant nothing to them.

Lieutenant James M. Ennes, Jr., a cypher officer recovering in a hospital from shrapnel wounds, was incredulous when he read the Limor story. He had been officer of the deck. He knew the ship's name appeared in large letters on the stern and the hull number on the bow. He knew also that a breeze made the Stars and Stripes easily

visible during the day. He had ordered a new 5-by-8 foot flag displayed early on the day of the attack. By the time the torpedo boats arrived, the original flag had been shot down but an even larger 7-by-13 foot flag was mounted in plain view from a yardarm. He knew that the attackers, whether by air or surface, could not avoid knowing it was a U.S. ship. Above all else, he knew that *Liberty's* intercept operators had heard the Israeli reconnaissance pilots correctly reporting to Israeli headquarters that the ship was American.

Disturbed by the Limor story and the exchange of public messages concerning the assault, Ennes determined to unravel the story. During the four months he was bedridden at Portsmouth, United Kingdom, he collected information from his shipmates. Later, while stationed in Germany, he recorded the recollections of other crew members. Transferred to Washington, D.C., he secured government reports under the Freedom of Information Act and also obtained the full Court of Inquiry report, which was finally, after nine years, declassified in 1976 from being top secret.

The result was Ennes's book, *Assault on the Liberty*, published in 1980, two years after he retired from the Navy. Ennes discovered "shallowness" in the court's questioning, its failure to "follow up on evidence that the attack was planned in advance"—including evidence that radio interceptions from two stations heard an Israeli pilot identify the ship as American. He said the court, ignoring the ship's log, which recorded a steady breeze blowing and confirming testimony from crewmen, concluded erroneously that attackers may not have been able to identify the flag's nationality, because the flag, according to the court, "hung limp at the mast on a windless day."

Concerning Israeli motives for the attack, Ennes wrote that Israeli officials may have decided to destroy the ship because they feared its sensitive listening devices would detect Israeli plans to invade Syria's Golan Heights. (Israel invaded Syria the day after the *Liberty* attack, despite Israel's earlier acceptance of a ceasefire with its Arab foes.)

Ennes learned that crewmen sensed a cover-up even while the court was taking testimony at Malta. He identified George Golden, the *Liberty's* engineering officer and acting commanding officer, as the source of the Associated Press story charging that the attack was deliberate. Golden, who is Jewish, was so outraged at the prohibition against talking with reporters that he ignored it—risking his future career in the Navy to rescue a vestige of his country's honor.

The American embassy at Tel Aviv relayed to Washington the only fully detailed Israeli account of the attack—the Israeli court of inquiry report known as "Israeli Preliminary Inquiry 1/67." The em-

bassy message also contained the recommendation that, at the request of the Israeli government, it not be released to the American people. Ennes believes this is probably because both governments knew the mistaken identity excuse was too transparent to believe.

Another request for secrecy was delivered by hand to Eugene Rostow, undersecretary of state for political affairs. It paralleled the message from the embassy at Tel Aviv imploring the Department of State to keep the Israeli court of inquiry secret because "the circumstances of the attack [if the version outlined in the file is to be believed] strip the Israeli Navy naked." Although Ennes saw that message in an official file in 1977, by 1984 it had vanished from all known official files. Ennes believes Israeli officials decided to make the Israeli Navy the scapegoat in the controversy. With the blame piled on its Navy, the orphan service that has the least clout in Israel's military hierarchy, Israel then asked the U.S. to keep the humiliation quiet. United States officials agreed not to release the text of the Israeli report.

Legal Adviser's Report Becomes Top Secret

During this same period—the weeks immediately following the assault on the *Liberty*, an assessment of the "Israeli Preliminary Inquiry #67" was prepared by Carl F. Salans, legal adviser to the secretary of state. It was prepared for the consideration of Eugene Rostow. The report, kept top secret until 1983 and apparently given only cursory examination by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, examines the credibility of the Israeli study and reveals as has no other single document the real attitude of the U.S. government toward the Israeli attack on the *USS Liberty*. It was a document too explosive to release.

Item by item, Salans demonstrated that the Israeli excuse could not be believed. Preparing the report immediately after the attack, he relied mainly on the limited information in Admiral Isaac Kidd's court of inquiry file. He never heard Ennes, Golden, nor any of the principal witnesses. He found enough there to discredit the Israeli document thoroughly. The items Salans examined were the speed and direction of the *Liberty*, aircraft surveillance, identification by Israeli aircraft, identification by torpedo boats, flag and identification markings, and time sequence of attacks. In each instance, eyewitness testimony or known facts disputed the Israeli claims of innocent error.

For example, the Israeli report contended that the *Liberty* was traveling at a speed of 28 to 30 knots, hence behaving suspiciously. Its actual speed was five knots. Israeli reconnaissance aircraft claimed to have carried out only two overflight missions, at 6:00 and 9:00 A.M.

Aircraft actually overflew the *Liberty* eight times, the first at 5:15 A.M. and the last at 12:45 P.M.

The Israeli report charged that the *Liberty*, after refusing to identify itself, opened fire. Captain McGonagle testified that the only signals by the torpedo boats came from a distance of 2,000 yards when the attack run was already launched and torpedoes on their way. The blinker signals could not be read because of intermittent smoke and flames. Not seeing them, the *Liberty* could not reply. Immediately thereafter it was hit by a torpedo and 25 sailors died instantly.

The Israeli report contended that the *Liberty* did not display a flag or identifying marks. Five crewmen testified that they saw the naval ensign flying the entire morning and until the attack. When the flag was shot away during the air attack, another larger flag was hoisted before the torpedo onslaught began. Hull markings were clear and freshly painted. The Israelis tried to shift responsibility by asserting that the attack originated through reports that the coastal area was being shelled from the sea. Salans said it should be clear to any trained observer that the small guns aboard the *Liberty* were incapable of shore bombardment.

The Salans report was forwarded September 21, 1967, to Under Secretary of State Rostow. This means that high officials of the administration knew the falsity of Israeli claims about the *Liberty* soon after the assault itself.

With a document in hand so thoroughly refuting the Israeli claims, the next logical step obviously would be its presentation to the Israeli government for comment, followed by publication of the findings.

Instead, it was stamped "top secret" and hidden from public view, as well as the attention of other officials of our government and its military services, along with the still-hidden Israeli report. Dean Rusk, secretary of state at the time, says that he has "no current recollection" of seeing the Salans report. He adds, however, that he "was never satisfied with the Israeli purported explanation of the USS *Liberty* affair."

The cover-up of the Salans report and other aspects of the episode soon had agonizing implications for United States security.

If the Navy had been candid about the *Liberty* episode even within its own ranks, the nation might have been spared the subsequent humiliation of an ordeal that began five months later when North Korean forces killed a U.S. sailor and captured the USS *Pueblo* and its entire crew. The agony ended when the crew was released after experiencing a year of captivity under brutal conditions.

Pueblo commander Lloyd M. Bucher later concluded that if he

had been armed with facts of the disaster in the Mediterranean, he might have prevented the *Pueblo* episode.

In the late summer of 1967, still ashore but preparing to take command of the ill-fated ship, Bucher learned of the *Liberty*'s misfortune. Headed for hostile waters near North Korea, he believed his mission would profit from the experience and asked for details. Bucher recalls how his request was brushed aside: "I asked my superiors about the disaster and was told it was all just a big mistake, that there was nothing we could learn from it." When he later read the Ennes book, Bucher discovered that the *Liberty* crew had encountered many of the same problems his ship faced just before its capture. Both ships had inadequate means for destroying secret documents and equipment, and, in a crisis, even the ship itself. Both had serious shortcomings in control procedures. Bucher blames "incompetency at the top" and "lack of response to desperate calls for assistance during the attack." He speaks bitterly of the *Pueblo*'s ordeal:

We had a man killed and 14 wounded. Then a year of pretty damned severe brutality which could have been prevented had I been told what happened to the *Liberty*. It's only because that damned incident was covered up as thoroughly as it was.

The cover-up of the attack on the *Liberty* had other, more personal consequences. On recommendation of the Navy Department, William L. McGonagle, captain of the *Liberty*, was approved by President Johnson for the nation's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. According to Ennes, the captain "defied bullets, shrapnel and napalm" during the attack and, despite injuries, stayed on the bridge throughout the night. Under his leadership, the 82 crewmen who had survived death and injury had kept the ship afloat despite a 40-foot hole in the side and managed to bring the crippled vessel to safe harbor.

McGonagle was an authentic hero, but he was not to get the award with the customary style, honor, ceremony and publicity. It would not be presented personally by the president, nor would the event be at the White House. The Navy Department got instructions to arrange the ceremony elsewhere. The president would not take part. It was up to the Navy to find a suitable place. Admiral Thomas L. Moorer, who had become chief of naval operations shortly before the order arrived, was upset. It was the only Congressional Medal in his experience not presented at the White House. He protested to the Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, but the order stood. From the two houses of the legislature for which the medal is named came not a voice of protest.

The admiral would have been even more upset had he known at the time that the White House delayed approving the medal until it was cleared by Israel. Ennes quoted a naval officer as saying: "The government is pretty jumpy about Israel. The State Department even asked the Israeli ambassador if his government had any objection to McGonagle's getting the medal. 'Certainly not,' Israeli said." The text of the accompanying citation gave no offense: it did not mention Israel.

The secretary of the Navy presented the medal in a small, quiet ceremony at the Navy Yard in Washington. Admiral Moore said later he was not surprised at the extraordinary arrangement. "They had been trying to hush it up all the way through," Moore added. "The way they did things I'm surprised they didn't just hand it to him under the 14th Street Bridge."

Even tombstone inscriptions at the Arlington National Cemetery perpetuated the cover-up. As with McGonagle's citation, Israel was not mentioned. For fifteen years the marker over the graves of six *Liberty* crewmen read simply, "died in the Eastern Mediterranean." No mention of the ship, the circumstances, or Israel. Visitors might conclude they died of natural causes. Finally, survivors of the ship banded together into the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association and launched a protest that produced a modest improvement. The cover-up was lifted ever so slightly in 1982 when the cemetery marker was changed to read, "Killed USS *Liberty*." The dedication event at gravesite was as quiet as the McGonagle ceremony years before. The only civilian official of the U.S. government attending, Senator Larry Pressler, promised further investigation of the *Liberty* episode but two years later had done nothing.

The national cover-up even dictated the phrasing of letters of condolence to the survivors of those killed in the assault. In such circumstances, next of kin normally receive a letter from the president setting forth the facts of the tragedy and expressing profound feelings over the hardship, sacrifice and bravery involved in the death. In fact, letters by the hundreds were then being sent to next of kin as the toll in Vietnam mounted.

To senior White House officials, however, death by Israeli fire was different from death at the hands of the Vietcong. A few days after the assault on the *Liberty*, the senior official in charge of President Johnson's liaison with the Jewish community, Harry McPherson, received this message from White House aide James Cross:

Thirty-one [sic] Navy personnel were killed aboard the USS *Liberty* as the result of the accidental [sic] attack by Israeli forces. The attached condolence letters, which have been prepared using basic formats approved for Vietnam war casualties, strike me as inappropriate in this case.

Due to the very sensitive nature of the whole Arab-Israeli situation and the

circumstances under which these people died. I would ask that you review these drafts and provide me with nine or ten different responses which will adequately deal with this special situation.

The "special situation" led McPherson to agree that many of the usual paragraphs of condolence were "inappropriate." He suggested phrases that de-emphasized combat, ignored the Israeli role and even the sacrifice involved.

Responding to the "very sensitive nature" of relations with Israel, the president's staff set aside time-honored traditions in recognizing those killed in combat. McPherson suggested that the letters express the president's gratitude for the "contribution to the cause of peace" made by the victims and state that Johnson had tried to avert the Israeli-Arab war.

While Washington engaged in this strange program of coverup, *Liberty* crewmen could remember with satisfaction a moment of personal pride, however brief. On the afternoon of June 10, 1967, as the battered ship and its crew prepared to part company with the USS *America* for their journey to Malta and the court of inquiry, carrier Captain Donald Engen ordered a memorial service for those who had died during the assault. Held on the deck of the *America* where more than 2,000 sailors were gathered, the service was an emotional moment. Afterwards, as the ships parted, Engen called for three cheers for the *Liberty* crew. Petty Officer Jeffery Carpenter, weakened from loss of blood, occupied a stretcher on the *Liberty's* main deck. Crewman Stan White lifted one end of the stretcher so Carpenter could see as well as hear the tribute being paid by the carrier. "Such cheers!" Engen told me. "Boy, you could hear the cheers echo back and forth across the water. It was a very moving thing."

It was the only "moving thing" that would be officially bestowed in tribute to the heroic crew.

"This Is Pure Murder"

Books have perpetuated myths about the *Liberty*. Yitzhak Rabin, military commander of Israeli forces at the time, declared in his memoirs published in 1979 that the *Liberty* was mistaken for an Egyptian ship: "I must admit I had mixed feelings about the news [that it was actually a U.S. ship]—profound regret at having attacked our friends and a tremendous sense of relief [that the ship was not Soviet]." He wrote that Israel, while compensating victims of the assault, refused to pay for the damage to the ship "since we did not consider ourselves responsible for the train of errors."

Lyndon Johnson's own memoirs, *Vantage Point*, continued the fiction that the ship had been "attacked in error." Although his signa-

ture had appeared on letters of condolence to 34 next of kin, his memoirs reported the death toll at only ten. He cited 100 wounded; the actual count was 171. He added, "This heartbreaking episode grieved the Israelis deeply, as it did us."

Johnson wrote of the message he had sent on the hotline to Moscow in which he assured the Soviets that carrier aircraft were on their way to the scene and that "investigation was the sole purpose of these flights." He did not pretend that protection and rescue of the ship and its crew were among his objectives, nor did he record that the carrier aircraft were never permitted to proceed to the *Liberty* even for "investigation." The commander-in-chief devoted only sixteen lines to one of the worst peacetime naval disasters in history.

Moshe Dayan, identified in a CIA report as the officer who personally ordered the attack, made no mention of the *Liberty* in his lengthy autobiography. According to the CIA document, "Dayan had issued the order over the protests of another Israeli general who said, 'This is pure murder.'"

The cover-up also dogged Ennes in the marketing of his book. Despite high praise in reviews, book orders routinely got "lost," wholesale listings disappeared mysteriously, and the Israeli lobby launched a far-flung campaign to discredit the text. The naval base in San Diego returned a supply of books when a chaplain filed a complaint. Military writer George Wilson told Ennes that when the *Washington Post* printed a review, "It seemed that every phone in the building had someone calling to complain about our mention of the book."

The *Atlanta Journal* called Ennes's *Assault on the Liberty* a "disturbing story of Navy bungling, government cover-up and Israeli duplicity that is well worth reading." The *Columbus Dispatch* called it "an inquest of cover-up in the area of international political intrigue." Journalist Seymour Hersh praised it as "an insider's book by an honest participant," and the prestigious Naval Institute at Annapolis called it "probably the most important naval book of the year."

Israel took swift measures to warn U.S. readers to ignore the reviews. The Israeli Foreign Office charged, "Ennes allows his very evident rancor and subjectivity to override objective analysis," and that his "conclusions fly in the face of logic and military facts." These charges, Ennes later said, were "adopted by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith for distribution to Israeli supporters throughout the United States." A caller to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was told that the book was "a put-up job, all lies and financed by the National Association of Arab Americans." Ennes said the "emotional rhetoric" caused "serious damage to sales and a marked reluctance of media executives to allow discussion of this story."

As the result of radio talk shows and lecture platforms on which Ennes appeared, he heard from people "all over the country" who had been frustrated in efforts to buy his book. Several retail book stores seeking to order the book from the publisher, Random House, were given false information—they were told the book did not exist, or that it had not been published, or that it was out of print, or that it was withdrawn to avoid a law suit.

Talk show host Ray Taliaferro caused a stir one Sunday night in 1980 when he announced over San Francisco radio station KGO that he would interview Ennes the following Sunday. Over 500 protest letters poured into the station, but the program went on as scheduled. Public response was overwhelming, as listener calls continued to stream in for a full hour after the two-hour show with Ennes had ended. Two phone calls arrived threatening Taliaferro's life—one on a supposedly private line.

At the invitation of Paul Backus, editor of the *Journal of Electronic Defense*, Ennes wrote a guest editorial in 1981 on the implications of the *Liberty* incident, stating that friendly nations sometimes feel compelled to take hostile actions. In the case of the *Liberty*, he added,

Because the friendly nation . . . is the nation of Israel, and because the nation of Israel is widely, passionately and expensively supported in the United States, and perhaps also because a proper inquiry would reveal a humiliating failure of command, control and communication, an adequate investigation . . . has yet to be politically palatable.

Backus was stunned when the owners of the magazine, an organization of military and defense-related executives known as the Association of Old Crows, ordered him not to publish the Ennes editorial. Association spokesman Gus Slayton wrote to Backus that the article was "excellent" but said "it would not be appropriate to publish it now in view of the heightened tension in the Middle East." Backus, a retired Navy officer, resigned: "I want nothing more to do with organizations which would further suppress the information." The Ennes piece was later given prominent play in a rival magazine, *Defense Electronics*, which later found it a popular reprint at \$3 per copy.

As Ennes lectured at universities in the midwest and west in 1981 and 1982, he encountered protests in different form. Although most reaction was highly favorable, hecklers called him a liar and an anti-Semite and protested to administrators against his appearance on campus. Posters announcing his lectures were routinely ripped down. Wording identical with that used by the Israeli Foreign Office and B'nai B'rith in attacks on the book appeared in flyers distributed by local "Jewish Student Unions" as Ennes spoke to college audiences.

Criticism of the Ennes book seemed to be coordinated on a national—even international—scale. After National Public Radio read the full text of the book over its book-reading network, alert local Anti-Defamation League spokesmen demanded and received the opportunity for a 10-minute rebuttal at the end of the series. The rebuttal in Seattle was almost identical with a document attacking the book issued by the Israeli Foreign Office in Jerusalem. Both rebuttals matched verbatim a letter criticizing Ennes that had appeared in the Jacksonville (Florida) *Times-Union*.

Ennes's misfortunes took an ironic turn in June 1982 when ABC's *Nightline* cancelled the broadcast of a segment he had prepared on the 15-year reunion of the *Liberty* crew. The show was pre-empted by crisis coverage of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, which had begun the day before. In early 1983, *Nightline* rescheduled the segment, but once again Israel intruded; this time an interview with its new U.S. ambassador, Moshe Arens, took the allotted time. Meanwhile, the edited tape and 15 reels of unedited film had disappeared from the studio library. (Ennes's book may have cost the former captain of the ill-fated *Pueblo* an appearance on ABC's "Good Morning America" television show in 1980. Bucher had been invited to New York for a post-captivity interview. Suddenly the interview was withdrawn. A studio official told Bucher only that he had heard there were problems "upstairs," but then he asked Bucher, "Did you have a book review published recently in the *Washington Post*?" He had indeed, a review which heaped praise on the Ennes book).

Later in 1983, the Jewish War Veterans organization protested when the Veterans of Foreign Wars quoted Ennes to support its call for "proper honors" for those killed on the *Liberty* and again when James R. Currieo, national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, referred to the "murderous Israeli attack." Currieo excited Jewish wrath even more when he published in the VFW magazine a letter to President Reagan inviting the White House to send a representative to the cemetery to help honor the men who died. There was no reply.

Four years after publication of *Assault on the Liberty*, Ennes is still receiving a steady flow of mail and telephone calls about the episode. Elected by his shipmates as their official historian, he became editor of *The USS Liberty Newsletter*. Meanwhile, not wishing to be fettered to an endless struggle of conscience, he is writing another book on an unrelated subject and trying to leave the *Liberty* matter behind. He finds it cannot be left behind. The book continues to generate a swirl of controversy that will not go away.

Another retired officer, Admiral Thomas L. Moorer, applauds Ennes's activities and still wants an investigation. He scoffs at the mis-

taken identity theory, and says he hopes Congress will investigate and if it does not, he favors reopening the Navy's court of inquiry. He adds, "I would like to see it done, but I doubt seriously that it will be allowed."

Asked why the Johnson administration ordered the cover-up, Moorer is blunt: "The clampdown was not actually for security reasons but for domestic political reasons. I don't think there is any question about it. What other reasons could there have been? President Johnson was worried about the reaction of Jewish voters."

Moorer says the attack was "absolutely deliberate" and adds, "The American people would be goddam mad if they knew what goes on."

James M. Ennes, Jr. Research Papers

CHAPTER FIVE: PENETRATING THE DEFENSES
AT DEFENSE AND STATE

- 139 "The leaks to": This chapter is based upon interviews with 17 present and former officials from the Department of Defense, the Department of State and the White House. Where considerations of career security permit, these sources have been identified.
- 141 Thomas Planka, an: Thomas Planka, interview, November 17, 1983.
- 141 Richard Helms, director: Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem*.
- 142 Les Janka, a: Les Janka, interview, August 16, 1983.
- 142 Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's: Zbigniew Brzezinski, interview, October 31, 1983.
- 146 "Our officers cannot": Israel is the only country where the U.S. permits such limitations.
- 147 On one occasion: Wilbur Crane Eveland, correspondence with the author, January 23, 1984.
- 148 Young recalls: Andrew Young, interview, May 10, 1983.
- 148 Young resigned as: See chapter two.
- 148 This denial: *Newsweek*, September 3, 1979.
- 152 The perpetrator was: *Washington Post*, March 2, 1977.
- 153 A few days: *Washington Post*, February 18, 1977.
- 153 When he read: James G. Abourezk, interview, August 1, 1984.
- 153 Abourezk tried unsuccessfully: Legislation was introduced in 1984 to provide Israel with open U.S. financing for its foreign aid activities. See chapter two.
- 154 The episode caused: Ambassador John C. West, interview, April 18, 1983; also see *New York Times*, April 2, 1980.
- 155 West recalls: *New York Times*, April 20, 1980.
- 155 If so, the: In the wake of the AWACS vote, the United States agreed to boost the level of aid to Israel by \$300 million per year for a period of four years.
- 156 Before leaving his: *Washington Post*, January 24, 1981.
- 156 L. Dean Brown: L. Dean Brown, interview, January 1984.
- 158 Harold Saunders, a: Harold Saunders, interview, May 19, 1983.
- 159 Seelye pinpoints a: Talcott Seelye, interview, May 14, 1983.
- 159 Bryen was publicly: *Defense Week*, July 27, 1981; *Focus*, February 15, 1982; *New Statesman*, May 6, 1983.
- 160 During the controversy: *Washington Post*, April 6, 1978.
- 160 He later left: *Jewish Week* (Washington, DC), July 17-23, 1983.
- 160 Indeed a Justice: Memorandum from John H. Davitt, Chief of the Internal Security Section, Criminal Division, to Philip B. Heymann, Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division.
- 160 An FBI summary: *In These Times*, April 27-May 3, 1983; *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1982.
- 161 Admiral Thomas Moorer: Admiral Thomas Moorer, interview, August 24, 1983.
- 163 During a visit: *DeLand Sun News* (DeLand, Fla.), August 11, 1983; also see *USA Today*, August 12, 1983.
- 163 The rifles in: *Washington Post*, August 10, 1983.
- 164 Les Janka: Janka, interview, August 16, 1983.

CHAPTER SIX: THE ASSAULT ON "ASSAULT"

- 165 The episode: Adm. Thomas L. Moorer, interview, August 24, 1983.
- 166 *The Liberty*: See James M. Ennes Jr., *Assault on the Liberty*.
- 166 Israeli Chief of Staff: *New York Times*, June 8, 1967.
- 166 At 6 A.M.: *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, June 1978.
- 167 Admiral Donald Engen: Adm. Donald Engen, interview, August 29, 1983.
- 167 The planes: See Ennes, op. cit.
- 168 President Johnson accepted: *New York Times*, June 10, 1967.
- 168 Smith Hempstone, foreign: *Washington Star*, June 16, 1967.
- 168 The Pentagon staved: *U.S. News and World Report*, June 26, 1967; *Defense Electronics*, October 1981.
- 169 The court: *New York Times*, June 18, 1967.
- 169 Testimony completed, Admiral: Admiral Isaac Kidd, interview, October 7, 1983.
- 169 When finally released: Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), news release, June 28, 1967.
- 169 The censored summary: Ennes, *Assault on the Liberty*.
- 169 The report did: *New York Times*, June 29, 1967; also see *Washington Post*, June 30, 1967.

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- 169 The New York Times: *New York Times*, July 1, 1967.
169 The Washington Star: *Washington Star*, June 30, 1967.
169 In early July: *New York Times*, July 7, 1967.
170 Lieutenant James M. Ennes, interview, April 30, 1983.
170 Ennes discovered "shallowness": Ennes, *Assault on the Liberty*.
170 Ennes learned that: *Ibid.*, see also: *OPC Bulletin*, February 15, 1982.
171 The embassy message: *Ibid.*
171 Ennes believes this: See *National Review*, September 5, 1967.
171 Another request for: Ennes, interview, April 30, 1983.
171 It paralleled the: *Defense Electronics*, October 1981.
172 *Pueblo* Commander Lloyd: Cmdr. Lloyd N. Bucher, interview, April 30, 1983.
173 Bucher recalls how: *Ibid.*
173 Admiral Thomas L. Moorer: Moorer, interview, August 24, 1983.
174 Ennes quoted as: Ennes, *Assault on the Liberty*, also see *Pacific Northwest*, September 1982.
174 Admiral Moorer said: *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 1962.
174 Even tombstone inscriptions: *USS Liberty Newsletter*, December 1982.
174 A few days: White House memorandum from James U. Cross to Harry McPherson, June 20, 1967.
175 Responding to the: White House memorandum from Harry McPherson to James U. Cross.
175 While Washington engaged: Engen, August 29, 1983.
175 Yitzhak Rabin, military: Yitzhak Rabin, *Rabin Memoirs*.
175 Lyndon Johnson's own: President Lyndon Johnson, *Vantage Point*.
175 Although his signature: These underlined numbers reflect estimates which appeared in some newspapers before the full casualty count was known. See *New York Times*, June 9, 1967; *Washington Post*, June 9, 1967.
176 Moshe Dayan, identified: Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life*.
176 The cover-up: *Washington Post*, July 18, 1982; Ennes, interview, August 10, 1983.
176 The Atlanta Journal: Quotations taken from the dust jacket of Ennes, *Assault on the Liberty*.
176 Journalist Seymour Hersh: Letter from Seymour Hersh to Robert Loomis of Random House, 1979.
176 A caller: Ennes, interview, April 30, 1983.
177 As the result: *Middle East Perspective*, June 1981.
177 Talk show host: Ennes, interview, April 30, 1983.
177 At the invitation: *Ibid.*
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178 Ennes's book may: Bucher, interview, April 30, 1983.
178 Later in 1983: *Jewish Veterans* (magazine), April/May/June, 1983.
178 Another retired officer: Moorer, interview, August 24, 1983.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CHALLENGES TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

- 180 Coordinator Jonathan Kessler: Information on this and subsequent pages about AIPAC's Political Leadership Development Program is largely drawn from public remarks by Jonathan Kessler made at an AIPAC workshop in Washington, June 12, 1983, and literature distributed at the workshop, also see *AIPAC College Guide: Exposing the Anti-Israel Campaign on Campus, Near East Report*, August 10, 1984.
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183 The Harvard Jewish: George Bisharat, former Harvard law student who helped organize the event, interview, June 21, 1983.
183 When this failed: *Harvard Law Record*, May 7, 1982.
183 Several members of: *Harvard Law Record*, April 30, 1982.
183 According to the: *Harvard Law Record*, May 6, 1983.
184 Noam Chomsky, world: Noam Chomsky, letter to the author, July 10, 1983.
185 When the monthly: James Schamus, interview, January 25, letter to the author, January 29, 1984.
185 The campus Jewish: *Daily Californian* (University of California at Berkeley), April 15, 1982.
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185 While he was: James Schamus, letter to the author, January 29, 1984.
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James M. Lynch, Jr. Research Papers

Taking

*America's Secret Relations
with a Militant Israel*

Sides

STEPHEN GREEN

WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY, INC.

New York 1984

"Remember the Liberty. . . ."

NOW, YEARS LATER, it is obvious that the ship should never have been sent there in the first place. Even at the time, which was May and June, 1967, there were many people involved in the ship's mission who were very concerned for her safety.

The ship was the U.S.S. *Liberty*. Her naval designation was AGTR-5—the fifth ship in a series undertaking "Auxiliary General Technical Research." The *Liberty* was in fact a World War II victory ship refitted by the National Security Agency for use as a signals intelligence (SIGINT) "platform"—a floating listening post.

The official Pentagon description of the *Liberty's* mission stated that it was to conduct

. . . technical research operations in support of U.S. Navy electronic research projects which include electromagnetic propagation studies and advanced communications systems such as moon relay and satellite communications.¹

And the classified, in-house Pentagon mission statement or "cover statement," which has never been previously published, was the following:

To provide shipborne COMINT [communications intelligence] and ELINT [electronic intelligence] platforms to intercept and exploit foreign electromagnetic radiations in those areas of the world where suitable shore based intercept stations do not exist.

In less elliptical terms, the *Liberty* could intercept virtually any form of wireless communication, including short- and long-distance military and diplomatic traffic, telemetry data, rocket guidance, and satellite control, among others. The ship could decode and process these messages, and then relay them back to the NSA at Fort Meade, Maryland, via shortwave radio or through a very special communication system called TRSSCOM, using a 10,000-watt microwave signal bounced off the surface of the moon.² It was, then, a very advanced spy ship.

On May 23, 1967, the day after Gamal Abdel Nasser announced his decision to bar Israeli ships from the Gulf of Aqaba, the NSA ordered the *Liberty* to proceed as quickly as possible from the Gulf of Benin off the coast of West Africa, to Rota, Spain, and thence to the eastern Mediterranean. One senior NSA official later recalled that from the moment the ship was ordered into what was fast becoming a war zone, he intended it to stay well away from the coastlines of Syria, Israel, and Egypt. But somehow these intentions were never transformed into orders. In fact, *Liberty's* "operations area" was to be just outside Egyptian territorial waters off the northern coast of the Sinai, and about midway between Tel Aviv and Cairo. The ship was ordered to execute a dogleg pattern at slow speed in what would obviously be (to anyone watching her) a surveillance

When full-scale war finally did break out, on the morning of June 5, the *Liberty* was about halfway between Spain and Israel, steaming straight for the conflict. The officers and crew of the ship, who for days had questioned the wisdom of sending a virtually unarmed spy ship into an area of high tensions and sporadic fighting, now assumed that senior Defense Department officials would reconsider the ship's assignment. But it did not happen. So on the evening of June 5, the *Liberty* radioed Admiral William Martin, Commander of the Sixth Fleet (COM-SIXTHFLT), requesting a destroyer escort to accompany the ship into the war zone.³ In a separate message, Captain William McGonagle pointedly reminded Admiral Martin that "self defense capability limited to four .50 caliber machine guns and small arms."⁴

On June 6 Martin responded, denying the request because the *Liberty* was, he said, a clearly marked United States ship in international waters, was not a participant in the conflict, and

therefore was "not a reasonable subject for attack by any nation."⁵ Martin would later tell a JCS fact-finding team set up to investigate the performance of the Defense Department communications network in the affair, that he had expected on June 5 when the war broke out that "higher authority" would have modified the *Liberty's* orders "in the interest of her safety."⁶

And the next day, more worry. Even though the *Liberty* had technically been under Sixth Fleet command since its passage through the Strait of Gibraltar, on the afternoon of June 6 the ship received a message from CINCUSNAVEUR (Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe) in London formally transferring command to Admiral Martin of the Sixth Fleet, to facilitate "any possible requirement for protection during Mideast hostilities." In turn Martin, who had just denied the ship an armed escort, shot a gratuitous message off to the *Liberty* warning it to maintain a "high state of vigilance" against attack.⁷ Like many other messages sent to the *Liberty* in the days that followed, this one was misrouted and never reached the ship.

From Washington to London to the Mediterranean, the various command echelons of the U.S. Navy were busy warning each other about the *Liberty's* vulnerability. But through June 6 and into June 7, the ship continued, alone and virtually unarmed, toward a war zone in which naval and air battles were being fought with planes and rockets and real guns. Captain McConagle, the ultimate link in the chain of command, refused to content himself with the sending of messages during these hours. He declared a "Modified Condition of Readiness Three" on the ship, in which the forward gun mounts were manned continuously. Repeated General Quarters and other drills were conducted.

By late afternoon on June 7, the Department of Defense was beginning to have second thoughts about sending the world's most sophisticated spy ship to stalk the shores of Egypt and Israel. At 5:04 P.M. Eastern daylight time—just after 11 P.M. ship time—the National Security Agency contacted the JCS Joint Reconnaissance Center (JRC) to ask that the word be passed through the various levels of command (in Europe and on the flagship of the Sixth Fleet) to change the *Liberty's* planned area of operations to "Op Area 2," farther from the eastern Mediterranean coastline.⁸ About an hour and a half later, at 6:30 P.M. EDT, the JRC responded with a message to USCINCEUR

(Commander in Chief, U.S. Armed Forces, Europe), asking that the *Liberty* be notified that its assigned operating area was "for guidance only and may be varied as local conditions dictate." The *Liberty* was to be instructed, however, that it was to stay 20 nautical miles from the coast of Egypt, and 15 nautical miles from Israel.⁷ (Previous instructions had set the minimum distances at 12.5 and 6.5 miles, respectively.)

It was a fairly routine change of orders prompted, according to the JCS fact-finding team, by a question raised by the Chief of Naval Operations concerning the prudence of sending the *Liberty* to a position so close to the area of hostilities. This message was assigned a "priority" precedence, as was usually the case in changes of operational orders under "normal" circumstances. Finally, worry had crystallized into resolve and the Navy was taking steps to move the *Liberty* out of harm's way.⁸ But this effort was now overtaken by circumstances.

THE WARNING

Sometime in the late afternoon or early evening of June 7, probably just after the routine "move" order was given, the NSA learned from an intelligence report emanating from the Office of the U.S. Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv, that Israel was planning to attack the *Liberty* if her course was not changed.⁹ The NSA reacted quickly, initiating through the JCS Joint Reconnaissance Center an extraordinary effort to warn and reposition the *Liberty*. The NSA and or the Chief of Naval Operations contacted Captains Merriwell Vineyard and Sam Rorex, Jr., at JCS-JRC, who in turn ordered Major Breedlove in their office to phone U.S. Naval Headquarters in Europe to get the ship moved. This time, the *Liberty* was to stay 100 nautical miles away from the coasts of Israel, Syria, and Egypt.¹⁰

In several respects this action was unusual. First, the order followed by only 1 hour and 20 minutes a previous order to reposition the ship. Second, it employed voice communications to

⁷ The JCS-JRC released this message to the Army Communications Center at the Pentagon at 6:30 P.M. But it was not actually sent on to USCINCLUR until 8:55 the next morning!

⁸ Further details about this report, and about testimony on it subsequently presented to the Defense Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations are provided later in this chapter.

initiate an action, contrary to the normal procedures requiring a written (i.e., telexed) message-order. Third, the phoned order was passed from Captains Vineyard and Rorex (both of whom were in the Navy) straight to the Navy headquarters in Europe, and not—initially, at least—to the office of USCINCEUR.

Forty minutes later, at 8:30 p.m. EDT, the JCS-JRC followed up by phone with USCINCEUR to find out if action had been taken on the previous oral "order." And 40 minutes after this call, the JCS telexed to USCINCEUR to confirm the oral order.¹¹ This message was assigned an "immediate" precedence, and like the earlier "priority" move order was copied directly to *Liberty* and to the Commander of the Sixth Fleet. And at ten minutes past midnight EDT, Naval Headquarters in Europe repeated the JCS-JRC pattern of actions: it phoned the Commander of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean to pass along the order to move the ship, and followed that with a proper, written message to him.¹²

But by now some five hours and five minutes had elapsed since Major Breedlove had first picked up the phone to call the U.S. Navy in Europe and get that ship moved. Why? The JCS fact-finding team later attributed the delay to a large volume of high-precedence traffic, related to a NATO communications exercise to relay numerous press extracts as part of the Foreign Broadcast Intercept System (FBIS) of the CIA, and to transmission of many messages related to a press conference held on the morning of June 8 by Secretary of Defense McNamara.¹³ The *Liberty's* genuine emergency simply got lost in a bureaucratic jumble of essentially routine messages.

From there on, things got worse. The Sixth Fleet Commander was sent the formal move order at 12:55 a.m. EDT, or 6:55 a.m. his time (and *Liberty's* time) on the morning of June 8.¹⁴ It then required 4 hours and 22 minutes for a message-order to be sent on from the Sixth Fleet flagship U.S.S. *Little Rock* to the U.S.S. *Liberty*.¹⁵ Why? The Committee on Appropriations of the U.S. House of Representatives later determined that the routing clerk on the *Little Rock* had misplaced the information sheet indicating which naval communications station was to be used to relay messages to the U.S.S. *Liberty*, so he had simply sent the ship's move order to a relay station that *Liberty* was not monitoring at the time.¹⁶

Even more difficult to understand is the fact that whatever

had happened to the action copies of all of these messages, the *Liberty* had been sent information copies of most of them, any one of which would have told her of the urgent need to move the ship. She received none of these, either. Four years later, the House Armed Services Committee summed up the situation this way:

In implementing [the decision to move the *Liberty*] a series of five messages from JCS and U.S. commanders in the European Command were directed to *U.S.S. Liberty* and other addressees. None of those messages had reached *Liberty* by 1200 Z hours on June 8th, 13½ hours after the first message was released for transmission. The circumstances surrounding the misrouting, loss and delays of those messages constitute one of the most incredible failures of communications in the history of the Department of Defense.¹⁷

THE REASON FOR CONCERN

As spectacularly inept as they were, the efforts of the Defense Department to move the *Liberty* were truly extraordinary. Beginning around 7 to 8 P.M. EDT on June 7, procedures were just thrown to the wind. Orders were duplicated. Voice communications were used where telexes were required. Orders were transmitted on a watch-to-watch basis, sometimes without verification from the proper authority. All of which leads to one obvious question: why, one might wonder, did the NSA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff react with such a sense of urgency to a report of a planned attack on a U.S. ship in international waters by a supposed ally? Surely the report was incorrect. In a general sense, the answer to that question is that American intelligence and military officials were collectively aware of the policies and events that have been the subject of the first nine chapters of this book.

But there were other, more immediate reasons why an attack by the IDF upon the *U.S.S. Liberty* on June 7 and 8, 1967, was entirely plausible. The White House, Defense and State departments, and U.S. intelligence community were fully aware of these factors, and reacted accordingly. It had to do with an "understanding" that the Johnson administration had with the gov-

ernment of Israel—about the scope of the war and about territorial expansion.

One fundamental tenet of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, to which every administration had been committed since the signing of the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, was that of the territorial integrity of all of the states of the region. Eisenhower's insistence after the Suez War that Israel physically quit the Sinai in return for international guarantees of right of passage through the Strait of Tiran was an example of the depth of this commitment. Ike's stance had been immensely unpopular at home, involving five months of bitter wrangling with David Ben Gurion, but he had held his ground and, in March of 1957, the IDF had withdrawn from Egyptian territory.

In late May, 1967, with tensions mounting dangerously in the Middle East, President Johnson addressed the nation and the world in a conscious effort to clearly state American policy on the multifaceted Arab-Israeli dispute. In the Fish Room at the White House he spoke for nine minutes, reading a speech that for weeks afterward was referred to by White House staffers as a "basic" policy statement. Johnson was particularly emphatic that evening on the matter of territorial integrity:

To the leaders of all the nations of the Near East, I wish to say what three American Presidents have said before me—that the United States is firmly committed to the support of the political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations in that area.

In actual fact, as subsequent events were to demonstrate, the Johnson administration was committed to nothing of the sort. But in the last days of May and the first days of June, 1967, there certainly *appeared* to be a clear policy on this matter. There is reason to believe that the government of Israel, at least, took the President at his word. Within hours after the devastating Israeli air attacks commenced on June 5, Foreign Minister Abba Eban asked to see U.S. Ambassador Barbour in Tel Aviv. He previewed a letter that Prime Minister Eshkol was preparing to send President Johnson rationalizing Israel's attack upon its neighbors in terms of Article 51 of the UN Charter (the "inherent right of self-defense"), but most specifically reassuring

Johnson on the matter of territorial integrity. Ambassador Barbour elaborated:

Letter will add that [government of Israel] has no, repeat no, intention taking advantage of situation to enlarge its territory, that hopes peace can be restored within present boundaries, that it also hopes conflict can be localized and in this regard asks our help in restraining any Soviet initiative.¹⁸

As the IDF demolished from the air unit after unit of the armies of Egypt and Jordan in the first two days of fighting, however, some of Israel's resolve to restore peace "within present boundaries" began to wane. On June 7, Secretary of State Rusk informed a meeting of the National Security Council that

At the beginning it seemed that Israel was not seeking territorial acquisition, but Ambassador Barbour feels they will want Sharm el-Sheikh and straightened-out borders.¹⁹

But Israel wanted and intended to take a good deal more than that. Later on that same day, June 7, the administration received a hint, in the traditional way, of the rapidly expanding horizons of Israel's territorial ambitions. David Brody, Director of the Anti-Defamation League of the B'Nai B'Rith, came to the White House to speak with Larry Levinson and Ben Wattenberg of the President's staff. The Jewish community of America, he said, was concerned that the administration not force Israel to "lose the peace" after it had won the war, as had been the case with Eisenhower after the Suez War. Brody suggested that in future public statements on the war, the President ought to stress the "peace, justice and equity theme," and should specifically *not* mention "territorial integrity." In a memo to the President, Levinson and Wattenberg allowed that this was good advice:

It would neutralize the "neutrality" statement and could lead to a great domestic political bonus—and not only from Jews. Generally speaking, it would seem that the Mid-East crisis can turn around a lot of anti-Vietnam, anti-Johnson

feeling, particularly if you use it as an opportunity to your advantage.²⁰

There is no evidence in the memorandum that Levinson and Wattenberg queried why the Anti-Defamation League might be interested in the question of the territorial integrity of the states of the Middle East.

At about the time Brody, Levinson, and Wattenberg were meeting, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan formally accepted the cease-fire that had been proposed the day before by the UN Security Council. But the Israelis continued to fight on all fronts, consolidating their military positions in Jerusalem and on the West Bank. Another sign.

On the previous day, June 6, U.S. Ambassador to Jordan Findley Burns, Jr., had telexed the Secretary of State that only isolated elements of the Jordanian Army were still fighting. The Jordanian Air Force had been destroyed by Israel in the sudden air attacks in the early morning hours of June 5. The Syrians were doing virtually nothing to assist the Jordanians, who were carrying on with hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Jerusalem and in several West Bank areas, particularly Jenin. Ambassador Burns added:

IDF Air Force yesterday and again today hit many civilian targets on West Bank where there absolutely no military emplacements.²¹

The following day, June 7, Ambassador Burns reported that Radio Amman had been announcing the government of Jordan's acceptance of the UN cease-fire for several hours, in the face of continued IDF military action. Burns "respectfully" urged President Johnson to telephone Prime Minister Eshkol to bring a cease-fire into effect "soonest," and added:

I recognize IDF goal may well be total destruction of Jordanian Army. I consider that JAA destruction, if achieved, would have disastrous effect on this regime and on area stability as a whole. I am gravely concerned about resultant effects on public order and on safety large American community still in Kingdom.²²

This telegram was logged into the White House communication center at 3:11 P.M. on June 7.

Later that afternoon, the Jordanian Permanent Delegate to the UN, Muhammad el-Farra, speaking before the UN Security Council, accused Israel of preventing a UN cease-fire by continuing the fighting "in order to seize more territory." * In Jerusalem, even as the fighting still progressed, Israeli Defense Minister Dayan told reporters that the IDF would never again leave Jerusalem: "We have returned to this, most sacred of our shrines, never to part from it again." A few days later Dayan declared that Jerusalem had been "reunited" under Israeli control. This generated howls of protest, even from the Israeli Minister of Interior and from Teddy Kollek, the Mayor of Jewish Jerusalem. † But Moshe Dayan would not be denied. The IDF was on a roll.

On June 7 and 8, rumors began to circulate that King Hussein had abdicated in the face of the continuing IDF onslaught, and had flown to Rome. Ambassador Burns in Amman was not alone in viewing these developments with concern—*The New York Times* quoted "informed British diplomatic sources" who were puzzled and worried at the IDF drive for total victory. If Hussein was driven from power and his Army destroyed, they said, he would doubtless be replaced by more xenophobic and pro-Nasser elements in Jordan. The British failed to see what the Israelis could hope to gain, in the long run, from such a development:

It would be very short-sighted by the Israelis to risk that kind of political change in Jordan for a few more miles of territory.²³

But in Jordan and in the Sinai, "a few more miles of territory" was exactly what the IDF had in mind.

As the fighting continued in Jordan into the eighth of June, Israel's diplomatic position in the Security Council debates be-

* UN Secretary-General U Thant had reported to the Security Council earlier that morning that he had personally forwarded to the government of Israel a message from Jordanian Foreign Minister Ahmad Toukan accepting the terms of the cease-fire. Shortly thereafter, he said, the headquarters of the Israeli-Jordanian Mixed Armistice Commission had been seized by the IDF. (*The New York Times*, June 8, 1967, 17:7.)

† Dayan gives this version of his de facto annexation of Jerusalem in his autobiography. (*My Life*, Chapter 22.)

came increasingly difficult to sustain. On June 7, Foreign Minister Eban had explained before the UN body that while Jordan had accepted the cease-fire, the United Arab Republic had not, and he said, "as the Security Council no doubt knows," Jordan and UAR had a unified command. Eban added somewhat defensively, "This is not simply a question of theory."²⁴

On the afternoon of June 8, this argument was voided when the UAR also accepted the UN cease-fire. But Dayan and the IDF's objectives had not been achieved in the West Bank, as the Jordanian Army continued to resist, fighting house by house, building by building. Combat was particularly heavy in the area south of Damiya Bridge, and the IDF even carried out heavy bombing raids at Mafrag, far from the front lines. When UN Truce Supervisor Odd Bull transmitted a Jordanian complaint about the fighting and bombing on June 8 to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, he was informed—at least with respect to the bombing—that the IDF had found it necessary "because Iraqi troops and planes were in the Mafrag area."²⁵

And the IDF had other unfinished business on the Golan Heights, in Syria. Since the outbreak of the war on June 5, Syrian artillery and Israeli planes and artillery had engaged in sporadic exchanges of fire, but neither side had moved troops across the border. On June 8, however, with the scale of the fighting greatly reduced on other fronts where cease fires were in effect, the IDF prepared to launch an offensive to capture the Golan area. Until this time, Dayan had opposed such an attack because, according to Gideon Raphael, "he feared that it would create serious international complications."²⁶ He was correct. At about 3:30 P.M. local time on June 8, U.S. Consul General Evan Wilson in Jerusalem informed Secretary of State Rusk by "flash"^{*} telegram that Israel had that morning, according to General Bull, the UNTSO Supervisor, launched an "intensive air and artillery bombardment" of Syrian positions that Wilson assumed was an "apparent prelude to large scale attack."²⁷

Dean Rusk was furious, and one hour later shot the following telegram (also with "flash" precedence) to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Barbour:

UNTSO report ref tel [in the referenced telegram] deeply disturbing. You should urgently approach [the Israeli For-

^{*}"Flash is the highest precedence designation for State or Defense Department mes-

eign Ministry) at highest level to express deep concern this new indication military action by [government of Israel]. If reported bombardment correct, we would assume it prelude to military action against Syrian positions on Syrian soil. Such a development, following on heels Israeli acceptance [Security Council] cease-fire resolution would cast doubts on Israeli intentions and create gravest problems for [U.S. government] representatives in Arab countries. You should stress we must at all costs have complete cessation Israeli military action except in cases where clearly some replying fire is necessary in self-defense.²⁸

Ambassador Barbour, no doubt feeling that his side was being unfairly singled out for criticism by the Secretary, responded that Syrian shelling from the heights had been "continuous and incessant," and reminded the Secretary that the Syrians, as of 9:45 P.M. local time, had not accepted the UN cease-fire.

Later that night the Syrians, who were doubtless aware of the troops and planes being massed for the attack, did accept the cease-fire, which under UN supervision went into effect at 5:20 A.M. local time on June 9. Dayan, who had postponed the attack to allow for the redeployment of elements of his Army from the Egyptian and Jordanian fronts, ordered the invasion of Syria to proceed at 11:30 A.M. local time on June 9. In New York at the UN, the attack generated a barrage of charges by the Arab states and the Soviet Bloc countries that in Syria, as in Jordan and Egypt, Israel was flagrantly violating the cease-fire. Nikolai Federenko of the Soviet Union went further, charging that Israel, with the tacit assent of the United States, was actually using the UN cease-fire to enable it to deal more efficiently with the Arab countries it had attacked, one by one, stabilizing one front with a cease-fire and then moving its forces to the next.

Exasperated at the charges and countercharges, and unable to effectively supervise the cease-fire in effect in the various war zones with the meager personnel available to UNTSO and to the various UN mixed armistice commissions, Secretary-General U Thant called on June 10 for the reactivation of the UN Observer Corps, which had patrolled the armistice lines in the Middle East after the 1948 war.

a very complete picture of the progress of the war and the countries that might be violating one or another UN cease-fire, for unlike the UN, the NSA did not have to depend upon field observers to get its information. Using ground-based intercept stations as far away from the action as Scotland and as near as Ethiopia and Iran, the NSA could listen in on the many forms of wireless communication that accompany military operations. Supplementing these efforts, Navy EC-121 and EA-3B planes flew regularly out of Athens, in June, 1967, crisscrossing the eastern Mediterranean. This information could be cross-referenced with satellite photographic intelligence to give the Defense Department a good idea of what all parties and observers—but most particularly the Soviet Navy and military aid missions in the region—were doing.

But the *pièce de résistance* of this network at the beginning of the 1967 war was the seagoing electronic intelligence "platform" called the U.S.S. *Liberty*. In the six years prior to the war, the Navy had commissioned seven ELINT vessels, of which the *Liberty*, along with the U.S.S. *Belmont*, was the latest, the largest, and the most advanced.

A COURSE CHANGE LEFT

It was just after dinner on the evening of June 7, 1967. William McGonagle sat down to write out his Captain's Night Orders. Outside, the sea was relatively calm, the skies clear. The *Liberty* was steaming due south on a line between the western coast of Cyprus and Port Said, Egypt, and had reached a point about 30 miles from the Egyptian coast. The page was a mimeographed form filled out each evening by the captain for the guidance of the night-duty deck officers. Opposite "Nature and type of operation:" McGonagle wrote, "Steaming independently from Rota, Spain to operations area in accordance with CINCUSNAVEUR movement order, 767." Then, opposite "Course:" and "Speed:" he wrote, "180 degrees," and "10 knots." Finally he filled in "Instructions," writing, "At 072039 Bravo [local time] change course to 090; at 080300 Bravo, change course to 123 degrees."²⁹

Without realizing it, McGonagle may at that moment have sealed the fate of his ship and forever changed the lives of his

officers and crew. After completing the form, he retired. At the bridge, the officer of the deck was Lieutenant Malcolm Watson. And precisely at 8:39 P.M. local time, as instructed, Watson ordered, "come left to course 090." The *Liberty*, still steaming at ten knots, hove left to a course due east, more or less parallel to the coastline. As the skies darkened, the lights from Port Said appeared in the distance off the starboard side.

At the IDF Central Coastal Command in Tel Aviv, aerial reconnaissance reported the change in the *Liberty's* course, which was duly noted on the control table. The ship was represented by a green symbol, indicating a neutral craft. Strictly speaking, that was true. But the ship's markings, GTR-5, ten feet high on both sides of her bow, identified her in *June's Fighting Ships* as a signals intelligence ship. The *Liberty* was now steaming on a course toward a point on the Israeli coast midway between Tel Aviv and the naval base at Ashdod.

The IDF command did not have to consult *June's Fighting Ships* to learn the eavesdropping capabilities of the *Liberty*. Modim—Israeli military intelligence—had close working relationships with the CIA and the U.S. Defense Department. The Israelis knew well that close in, the *Liberty* could intercept tactical communications, such as:

- Messages to and from the brigade and division headquarters of IDF units still fighting in Jerusalem and the West Bank, in violation of a UN cease-fire that had just gone into effect.
- Movement orders for units that, on the evening-morning of June 7-8, were being rushed from the Sinai and Jordanian fronts to the northern Galilee border with Syria, in preparation for an invasion that would widen the war and enrage Israel's European and American allies.
- Side-looking radar emissions, and radio communications in a peculiar idiomatic English, between specially equipped night-flying RF-4C's and the "abandoned" French airbase in the Negev not far from Dimona.

It was dark now around the *Liberty* as she steamed on due east, engines thumping. Most of the crew had turned in. On the ship's forecastle, seamen still manned the forward gun tubs, peering into the night. "Modified Condition of Readiness 3." Lieutenant Watson moved to and fro on the brightly lit bridge.

At about 10:00 P.M., the ship's "research department" detected jets—identified as Israeli by *Liberty's* sophisticated radar-sensing equipment—circling the ship in the night distance.

Strangely, fire-control radar was being directed at the ship. The planes were homing their rockets in on the *Liberty*. A small group gathered in the communications center and, playfully, employed the ship's electronic countermeasure (ECM), or "spoof," equipment to distort her radar image and send it back to the planes, making the ship appear a fraction of its size one time, several times its size the next.* For form's sake, the communications technicians filled out a contact report, but it was never sent on to NSA Headquarters by the officers in the research center. First Class Petty Officer Charles Rowley remembers that no one took the contact very seriously. The planes, after all, were Israeli, and they were only playing games.

But they were not playing games. At about the time this small group gathered around the *Liberty's* radar screen, the Office of the U.S. Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv sent a startling message back to U.S. Army Communications Center in Washington by code telegram: the IDF was planning to attack the *Liberty* if the ship continued to move closer to the Israeli coast! This "bomb" arrived at the NSA either just before or just after the NSA Director dispatched message 2104Z† to the JCS requesting that the *Liberty* be moved west "to satisfy technical requirements."³⁰ At the time (11:40 P.M. ship time), it will be recalled, the ship was steaming east, toward Tel Aviv and Ashdod. Had the JCS been able (and they were not) to relay the message to the *Liberty* as requested by the NSA, the ship would have had to turn 180 degrees and proceed due west into the coastal waters of Alexandria, Egypt's largest naval port. The idea, clearly, was just to get it away from Israel.

It was at this point (2230Z) that the JCS Joint Reconnaissance Center initiated the two transatlantic telephone calls and two messages, "immediate" precedence messages, all within the space of two and a half hours, in a frantic effort to move the ship away from coastal areas. Technical requirements indeed.

*The *Liberty's* ECM equipment was of the latest, most sophisticated type, designated AN/SSR-20, and was operated off the 5-foot dish on the ship's forecastle.

†Z denotes Greenwich mean time, i.e., two hours earlier than *Liberty* (or Israeli) local time in its position on June 7 and 8, 1967. This is the third time zone mentioned in the chapter and this may be somewhat confusing to the reader. In the interest of accuracy, however, the author has decided to indicate the zones.

But all messages and all copies of messages to the *Liberty* from the JRC, CINCUSNAVEUR, USCINCEUR, and even COMSIXTHFLT, only a few hundred miles from the *Liberty*, were misrouted or delayed in the hopelessly convoluted channels and procedures of the Defense Department's Worldwide Communications system.

Dawn on the morning of June 8 brought another beautiful, clear day in the eastern Mediterranean, with light breezes and a calm sea. The aerial reconnaissance of the ship began at 6:00 A.M. local time.* A lumbering Israeli Nord 2501 Noratlas circled the ship slowly, while on the bridge Ensign John Scott studied the plane with binoculars. At 7:20 A.M., Lieutenant James Ennes replaced Scott as Officer of the Deck. A new flag, measuring five by eight feet, was ordered for the ship's tripod mainmast, as the high-speed trip from Rota had badly sooted the old one. Every person on the bridge—for that matter, every person on the ship—was well aware that the *Liberty* was in a war zone and was being examined very, very carefully.

At 9:00 A.M. the *Liberty*'s operating orders required her to make a sharp right-hand turn, reduce speed to five knots, and double back in a westerly direction, roughly parallel to the Egyptian coast north of El Arish. As Ennes ordered the turn, the *Liberty* was 25 miles from Gaza and less than 30 miles from the nearest point on the Israeli coast. And as the turn was being made, another plane—this time a jet aircraft—reconnoitered the ship at a distance. And again at 10:00 A.M., two rocket-armed, delta-winged jets circled the ship three times, this time close enough for officers on the bridge to see the pilots in the cockpits with binoculars. Curiously, the jets did not seem to have any markings.

By now the sun was high and off-duty crew members began to accumulate on the forward decks on blankets and lawn chairs. Sunbathing was the order of the day. Thus it was that a great many crew members saw the Noratlas flying boxcar return, circle the ship, and then pass directly over the *Liberty* at a "very

*The account of the intense aerial reconnaissance during the hours from 6:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. is taken mainly from Jim Ennes's book, *Assault on the Liberty*, pp. 50-60. Ennes was Officer of the Deck on the ship during this entire period and personally witnessed each overflight and later verified his recollections in interviews with several other crewmen. Seaman George Wilson, who was looking out on the bridge and forecabin during this watch, verified Ennes's account of the reconnaissance in a telephone interview with the author.

low level, probably not more than 200 feet."³¹ The plane was clearly marked with the Star of David. Crewmen on the deck and the pilots in the cockpit could see the features on each other's faces. Lieutenant Commander Dave Lewis was on deck at the time, and remembers that crew members and pilots waved at each other. *Liberty* crewmen were used to such close inspections. Because of the huge antennae, including the 32-foot dish for the TRSSCOM system, the ship was frequently an object of curiosity for passing ships and planes.

From this point on until about 12:45 P.M. local time, the same Israeli Noratlas returned every 30 to 40 minutes to examine the ship. Lookout George Wilson, who was on the bridge at the time with Lieutenant Ennes, remembers several "very low level" passes by the Noratlas in addition to the one just described, which occurred at 10:30 A.M. local time. The ship's flag stood out in an eight-knot relative breeze. The sky was clear. The *Liberty* was moseying along at five knots. The letters GTR-5 were clearly visible on both sides of the bow, painted in white letters ten feet high, and on both sides of the stern, in letters three feet high. The Israelis had obviously identified the ship several times over. What else did they want?

At 1:10 P.M., with the noon meal completed, the *Liberty* conducted a series of drills that took a total of about 40 minutes to complete, including fire, damage control, and gas attack. Afterward, Captain McGonagle addressed the ship's officers and crew, complimenting them on the job done in the drills, but cautioning them about the ship's proximity to the war that was in progress amid smoke and fire on the clearly visible shoreline. By way of reassurance, he reminded the men that the repeated overflights by "friendly" forces at least assured that the *Liberty* had been identified and, he seemed to imply, there could be no mistaken attacks.

FRIENDLY FIRE

The off-duty crew was looking forward to a resumption of sunbathing after the business of the drills when three planes appeared on the radar. This time, there was no circling. At high speed, the delta-winged Mirages came straight for the ship, hardly giving those on the bridge a chance to reach for their

binoculars. The first rockets took out one of the forward gun tubs and toppled several of the ship's antennae.

Over the next 20 to 25 minutes, the *Liberty* was attacked continuously from the air. The three Mirages were soon joined by several Mystère fighters, which were slower and more efficient for strafing and for the dropping of napalm.* Before it was finished the *Liberty* had some 821 holes in her sides and decks, including over 100 rocket holes six to eight inches wide.

Two aspects of the air attack are particularly interesting. First, the planes that carried it out were unmarked. The *Liberty's* radioed early call for help to COMSIXTHFLT, sent minutes after the commencement of the air attack, referred to the attacking forces as "unidentified jet aircraft." Not until armed helicopters appeared on the scene, some 1 hour and 15 minutes later, did those on the bridge—or anywhere else on the ship—know for sure the identity of the attacking forces. In spite of scores of strafing runs by the planes, no one on the bridge or deck at the time remembers markings on the planes. Nor were any reported in messages at the time; nor was any testimony regarding markings on the attacking planes given to the naval court of inquiry. At the inquiry, Captain McGonagle did suddenly remember seeing an Israeli flag flown on one of the motor torpedo boats that later appeared, but his own messages during or after the attack itself contain no hint of an identification. COMSIXTHFLT's fourth situation report, message 081447Z, was the following:

1. Following from *Liberty* (no DTG):

Quote: We are unable to identify the aircraft or surface vessels. Believe to be Israeli helicopters that circled the ship under attack. Positive identification not made. Will have to be made from ship's photographs.

In sum, the *Liberty* was attacked by forces that were trying to disguise their identity. Why disguised? The answer to that is perhaps best provided by asking other questions. If the *Liberty* had gone down with all hands before sending the above message,

*The ship's doctor, Richard Kiepfer, has confirmed to the author that napalm was used, and that he treated numerous napalm burns. Those who were topside during the air attack remember that "several" canisters were dropped. Ensign David Lucas managed to collect a sample of unburned jelly and took it with him to the naval court of inquiry subsequently held on the attack.

i.e., before the helicopters arrived, who would have known for sure whom the attackers were? Would the Israeli government have acknowledged and apologized, as they subsequently did do? Might not all concerned, including the Johnson administration, have found it much easier to blame the attack on the Egyptians?

A second interesting aspect of the attack is that participating planes and/or shore-based units in the operation were jamming the *Liberty's* radios throughout. Chief Radioman Wayne Smith recalls that five of the *Liberty's* six shore circuits were being jammed, and that whoever was doing it "went searching" for the last circuit. It was on this last circuit that Smith got a message out to the Sixth Fleet Commander. He also frantically tried to reach what he thought were the nearest friendly forces . . . the Israeli naval base at Ashdod.³²

About 30 minutes after the air attack began, the planes suddenly disappeared . . . just as the ship's radar sighted three motor torpedo boats approaching at high speed. Again, there was no hesitation in the attack, though one of the boats did signal something as it sped toward the *Liberty*. Altogether, the Israeli MTB's fired five torpedoes at the ship, one of which struck amidships, accounting for 25 of the 34 men eventually killed in the attack.

After the torpedo hit, with the ship now listing 9 degrees, the motor torpedo boats began circling the ship slowly, firing at the bridge and at any activity they could see on deck. The boats trained their 40-millimeter cannon on the ship's waterline in an apparent effort to explode her boilers.* Petty Officer Charles Rowley, one of the ship's communications technicians, had been wounded and moved to the ward room for treatment. He distinctly remembers the incessant firing from the motor torpedo boats for a "long time" after the torpedo struck, for the armor-piercing shells were passing through the ward room itself as he lay exposed on a table waiting for treatment, until someone mercifully pushed him off the tabletop onto the floor.

Finally, when an order to "Prepare to abandon ship!" came over the ship's loudspeaker system, and lifeboats were lowered

* A description of the firing by the MTB's after the torpedo explosion is contained in Ennes, op. cit., pp. 91-96. The author has interviewed several *Liberty* survivors who vividly remember the incessant machine-gun fire of the MTB's, as they were belowdecks at this time and were awaiting a second torpedo hit.

into the water, the motor torpedo boats moved in closer and shot the lifeboats out of the water with their cannon. Several *Liberty* crewmen witnessed this, and Petty Officer Rowley also noticed the concentration of Israeli machine-gun fire on the lifeboats stored on deck. After the attack he carefully photographed the shredded boats, thinking that one day the pictures would help tell a story. "They didn't want *anyone* to live," he maintains. And then it was over; the motor torpedo boats suddenly wheeled and departed in the same high-speed V formation in which they had first appeared.

It was 3:05 P.M. local time.* The *Liberty* had been under constant attack for over an hour. She had no engines, no rudder, no power, and no lights. Nine of the officers and crew were known dead. Another 25 were missing and presumed dead, submerged in the now-flooded compartments that had taken the torpedo explosion. One hundred seventy-one of the officers and crew were wounded. Not all of these men were incapacitated, however, and they, together with the 90 men on the ship who were not dead, missing, or wounded, set about collecting bodies, dressing wounds, fighting fires, controlling flooding, buttressing walls and bulkheads, stringing lights and hand-operated phone sets, and repairing engines.

Something else had happened at 3:05 P.M. ship time, just before the Israeli MTB's departed. COMSIXTHFLT had sent the following message via plain-language radio:

Your flash traffic received. Sending aircraft to cover you. Surface units are on the way. Keep [situation reports] coming.†

Was the MTB withdrawal pure coincidence? Perhaps. But there would be others.

There now began a period of intense, armed reconnaissance of the *Liberty*. Even before the motor torpedo boats had receded from view, a large Israeli SA-321 Super Frelon helicopter appeared and began to slowly circle the ship. And then another.

*The time of the termination of the attack is verified in CINCUSNAVEUR message 151003Z, June, 1967, a chronology of the events surrounding the attack on the *Liberty* prepared for the Secretary of the Navy. This message was declassified on March 19, 1982.

†This message, COMSIXTHFLT 081305Z, was not received by the *Liberty*, as she temporarily had no electricity and was off the air at the time. (See Ennet, op. cit., p. 218.)

The cargo bay doors were open, and *Liberty* crewmen could see that the helos were crammed with armed troops in full battle gear. A mounted machine gun pointed from each of the cargo bays. Large blue Stars of David marked each helicopter. The *Liberty's* general announcing system blared, "Stand by to repel boarders." "They've come to finish us off," yelled one hysterical, but logical, sailor.³³

But the helicopters only passed close by the *Liberty's* decks, and then they too receded into the distance.

For the next hour, as the officers and crew of the ship tried desperately to get her under way again, there were repeated visitors. At 3:36 p.m. local time, the MTB's returned, and later came two unidentified delta-winged jets, causing panic among the crew, who were expecting a resumption of the air attacks.³⁴ Understandably, some were also beginning to wonder when or whether they might begin to see U.S. planes or ships responding to the *Liberty's* many calls for assistance.

At 4:14 p.m. local time, quite unknown to the *Liberty*, the Office of the U.S. Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv informed the White House that the U.S. Naval Attaché had been called to the Foreign Liaison Office of the IDF to receive a report that Israeli aircraft and MTB's had "erroneously attacked U.S. ship at 08/1200Z." It was "maybe Navy ship." * The Israelis, said the Defense Attaché, "send abject apologies and request info of other U.S. ships near war zone coasts."³⁵

There is no indication in the message exactly when the Naval Attaché had been called to the Foreign Liaison Office—probably a very few minutes before the dispatch of this message at 4:14 p.m., local time. At 3:16 p.m., however, Carrier Task Force 60 had sent a message to the carriers *America* and *Saratoga*, ordering them to launch eight aircraft to assist the *Liberty* and to "destroy or drive off any attackers."³⁶ At 3:20 p.m. COM-SIXTHFLT had informed the Commander of U.S. Armed

* What was truly unusual about this, the first official acknowledgment by the government of Israel of responsibility for the attack, was that after a full morning and afternoon of aerial reconnaissance, some of it at very close distance, scores of strafing runs by warplanes, almost two hours of close-in "work" by MTB's, and visits at spitting distance by two helicopters, the IDF still claimed to be uncertain that the *Liberty* was a Navy ship. Speaking to a reunion of *Liberty* survivors 15 years later in Washington, D.C., Admiral Thomas Moorer, former JCS Chairman, stated that he had "never been willing to accept the Israeli explanation that it was a case of mistaken identity." He could not accept that Israeli pilots "don't know how to identify ships . . . and therefore there must have been some other motive which [he was] confident some day will be made public." (Reunion speech at Hotel Washington in Washington, D.C., on June 5, 1982.)

Forces in Europe that aircraft were being deployed.³⁷ And at 3:39 P.M. local time (also Israeli time), COMSIXTHFLT had informed the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington of the actions being taken.³⁸ Estimated flight time from the Sixth Fleet to the *Liberty* by A-4's and A-1's, the types of aircraft that were launched by the *America* and *Saratoga*, was approximately 30 minutes.

QUESTIONS OF PRIORITIES

If the Defense Department experienced delays in communicating a warning to the *Liberty* once the plans for the attack were known, such delays were not experienced after the attack had occurred. The first rocket that struck the *Liberty* fused the senior levels of the Defense Department in a matter of minutes into a determination that no U.S. aircraft would be thrust into an adversary role with the IDF, whatever the implication for the struggling U.S.S. *Liberty*. And suddenly, there were no delays, no communications snafus. The system worked perfectly, as a closer look at the rescue-launch sequence will reveal.

The first attempt to assist the *Liberty* was a reflexive one. Captain Joseph Tully on the bridge of the U.S.S. *Saratoga* was informed of the attack within eight minutes of the first strafing run. Radioman Smith, using the one unjammed shore circuit, reached the *Saratoga's* communications center almost before the first plane had completed the first pass. At the time, 2:00 P.M., the *Saratoga* was conducting an exercise and had four A-1's launch-ready on its decks. Navigator Max Morris on the *Saratoga* received the *Liberty's* first urgent calls for help and discussed them with Tully on the bridge, who immediately ordered the *Saratoga* to head into the wind, and launched the A-1's. Thus, less than 15 minutes after Israel attacked the *Liberty*, armed U.S. planes were in the air, headed toward the scene.

As the planes winged off to the southeast, Captain Tully informed Sixth Fleet Commander Admiral Martin of the *Liberty's* predicament and Tully's response, over the fleet's Primary Tactical Maneuvering Circuit radio network. Martin's immediate reaction was to use that same circuit to order both the *Saratoga* and the *America*, the other carrier in Carrier Task Force 60, to launch planes to protect the *Liberty*. The *America*, however,

was not at the same state of alert or readiness (vis-à-vis armed planes, suited pilots, and steam to the catapults) and was unable to ready planes in time for launch before the whole affair was canceled. Within minutes of the *Saratoga's* launch, Rear Admiral Lawrence R. Geis, Commander of Carrier Task Force 60, issued an order to recall the planes, and minutes after that, the planes were back on the *Saratoga's* decks. Thus ended the one rescue effort that might have provided timely assistance to the *Liberty*.

For the next hour and a half, while planes and MTB's savaged the *Liberty*, the Defense Department (and presumably the White House) discussed a second rescue effort. Finally a decision was taken and a launch made (from both the *Saratoga* and the *America* this time) just minutes before the formal admission and apology was received from the government of Israel in Tel Aviv. And again a recall order was issued, and again the planes responded within minutes. By this time, the *Liberty* was floating dead in the water, trying to repair her vital systems, and awaiting the coup de grâce that, mercifully, never came.

Night would fall and another day would dawn before the *Liberty* would see its first help from the Sixth Fleet. Sixteen hours passed in which the *Liberty* saw no U.S. plane or ship, and was not even checked at a distance with a flyby. The Russians offered help, though. At midnight on June 8, a Soviet guided-missile destroyer drew alongside the *Liberty* and sent a message by flashing light:

- Do you need help?
- No, thank you.
- I will stand by in case you need me.³⁹

If the Defense Department's actions to recall the rescue planes were fast and efficient, they were nothing compared to the speed with which officials in Washington, and particularly in Congress, began to "explain" the attack on the U.S.S. *Liberty* to the American people. The message from the U.S. Defense Attaché's Office in Tel Aviv stating that the government of Israel had reported an "erroneous" attack on a U.S. ship ("maybe Navy ship") was sent to Washington at 10:14 A.M. EDT. Naturally, there were no casualty figures available at this time, for no U.S. forces had yet reached the ship, and the *Liberty* still con-

sidered herself to be under attack. (The feinted attacks by the motor torpedo boats continued until approximately 11:15 A.M. EDT.)⁴⁰ The *Liberty* was just too busy trying to stay alive to begin to assess and report, until almost noon Washington time.

The first report on casualties from the ship itself was relayed back to Washington in COMSIXTHFLT situation report 8, contained in COMSIXTHFLT message 081621Z, i.e., at 12:21 A.M. Washington time. The report said, among other things:

Casualties (approximate): four dead, three severely wounded, 50 wounded.

Obviously this was a first, rough estimate of casualties and a gross underestimate at that.

The Defense Department's Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Philip Goulding, issued the first official word on the attack to the American people in press release 542-67, which, after stating that the Israeli government had "informed" the United States that the attack had been made in error, and had apologized, went on to estimate casualties at 4 dead and 53 wounded. The Defense Department has informed the author that this release was made at 11:50 A.M. EDT, but that seems unlikely, in view of the fact that COMSIXTHFLT situation report 8 was not received in Washington until 12:21 A.M. EDT.

The House of Representatives convened at noon on June 8. After a speaker or two addressed the subject of saline water, Representative Roman Pucinski from Illinois asked the consent of the House to speak for one minute. He said:

Mr. Speaker, it was with heavy heart that we learned a little while ago of the tragic mistake which occurred in the Mediterranean when an Israeli ship mistakenly attacked an American ship and killed four boys and injured and wounded 53 others.

These are the tragic consequences of armed conflict; such mistakes happen frequently in Vietnam.

It would be my hope that this tragic mistake will not obscure the traditional friendship we in the United States have with the people of Israel. The Israeli Government already has apologized.

Pucinski went on to add a few hopes that hostilities would cease. When *The Congressional Record* printed the proceeding of that day, Pucinski's speech was appropriately entitled "Tragic Mistake."

At about the same time that Pucinski spoke, 12:30 p.m., Senator Jacob Javits was committing a similar act on the floor of the Senate. The first five paragraphs of Javits's "remarks" on that day contained five separate references to the accidental nature of the attack. He even explained how such a mistake could occur:

Mr. President, I must say that it is a great tribute to the valor of the troops of Israel that this morning I have heard Senator after Senator say that while they were terribly dismayed and saddened by this accident, they understood how it could take place under the terrible stress which the forces of Israel have been under in these last few weeks.⁴²

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FOREWARNING

About a week after the attack on the ship, Secretary of State Rusk attended a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg. Rusk was genuinely disturbed at the events surrounding the *Liberty* affair, and spoke candidly, though privately, to NATO Secretary-General Manlio Giovanni Brosio and to several others in attendance. After Rusk's departure from Europe, U.S. NATO Ambassador Harlan Cleveland cabled to Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow:

Quite apart from Newsweek Periscope item, Secretary's comments to Brosio and several foreign ministers at Luxembourg about Israeli foreknowledge that *Liberty* was a U.S. ship piqued a great deal of curiosity among NATO delegations. Would appreciate guidance as to how much of this curiosity I can satisfy, and when.⁴³

The *Newsweek* "Periscope" item to which Cleveland referred had appeared on the newsstands about three to four days previously, and included the following passage:

Although Israel's apologies were officially accepted, some high Washington officials believe the Israelis knew the *Liberty's* capabilities and suspect that the attack might not have been accidental. One top-level theory holds that someone in the Israeli armed forces ordered the *Liberty* sunk because he suspected it had taken down messages showing that Israel started the fighting.⁴⁴

In all likelihood, it was not messages already taken down by the *Liberty*, but rather messages that might in the future be intercepted, which on June 8, 1967, posed an unacceptable risk to the IDF high command. Otherwise, the item was strikingly close to the truth.

In retrospect, one wonders why more American journalists did not pursue the question of what had really happened to the U.S.S. *Liberty*. To be sure, it would not have been easy for an investigative journalist of the time to pry the matter open. Secretary of Defense McNamara informed the media on June 14, 1967, that "Until the Court [of inquiry] has had an opportunity to obtain the full facts, the Department of Defense will have no further comment."⁴⁵ For the *Liberty* officers and crew, this meant that nothing, but nothing, was to be said to reporters about the affair. Rear Admiral Isaac Kidd, who was appointed to preside over the court of inquiry, elaborated somewhat upon this gag order a few days later, instructing *Liberty* crewmen to

Refer all questions to the commanding officer or executive officer or to Admiral Kidd. Answer no questions. If somehow you are backed into a corner, then you may say that it was an accident and that Israel has apologized. You may say nothing else.⁴⁶

A skeptic might have seen in this some prior indication as to how the court of inquiry would find, on the question of the intentional nature of the attack. The court's final report was completed on June 18, and was classified "Top Secret." A 28-page unclassified summary of the proceedings was released by the Defense Department ten days later. The summary indicated that the court had had

insufficient information before it to make a judgment on the reasons for the decision by Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats to attack.

And later in the text:

In as much as this was not an international investigation, no evidence was presented on whether any of these aircraft had identified *Liberty* or whether they had passed any information on *Liberty* on to their own higher headquarters.

The summary was also careful to explain that the fact of the appointment of the court did not mean that anyone in the Defense Department was at fault:

Convening of such an inquiry is a normal procedure, commonly employed after any serious accident or incident resulting in substantial loss of life or damage to a ship. The fact of its convening does not, of itself, indicate an assumption by the Navy that anyone in the Navy is at fault.⁴⁷

There was another branch of the U.S. government, however, that was little interested in the international implications of the affair, or in "covering ass" within the Defense Department. The Defense Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations was charged with responsibility for defense budget allocations, including those for the department's Worldwide Communications network. Certain aspects of the *Liberty* affair seemed to the subcommittee, in the days after the attack, to have implications for the effectiveness of that communications network.

Within the Defense Subcommittee as it was constituted in the 90th Congress, a group of five members constituted the intelligence working group, dealing more or less informally with appropriations pertaining to defense intelligence matters, including communications.* Over time, the working group and its staff had developed a procedure for dealing with intelligence-related

*These five members were George H. Mahon, Texas, Chairman; Robert L. F. Sikes, Florida; Jamie L. Whitten, Mississippi; Frank T. Bow, Ohio; and Glenard P. Lipscomb, California. In later years, the informal intelligence working group would evolve into a formal standing subcommittee within the Committee on Appropriations.

incidents that had systemic and/or appropriations implications for defense intelligence—they would quickly take testimony, as soon as possible after the event, and before the administration, the Pentagon, and others were able to develop a position with respect to that incident.

And so it was with the incident involving the U.S.S. *Liberty*. A very few days after the attack, even before the naval court of inquiry had completed its report, the intelligence working group met and took testimony on, among other things, what events or information had led the NSA and JCS to move with such urgency on June 7 to try to reposition the *Liberty*, why these efforts were unsuccessful, and what improvements in the Defense Department communications system would be necessary to ensure that in the future the system would not break down as it clearly had this time.

Representative Robert L. F. Sikes was particularly interested in the *Liberty* matter, as it seemed to him to be a perfect example of the potential human cost of Defense Department communications dysfunctions. Sikes recalls that a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency testified to the working group that the frantic efforts by the NSA and JCS to move the ship on the evening of June 7 were prompted by an intelligence report from the Office of the U.S. Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv. The report indicated that the IDF planned to attack the *Liberty* if she continued to operate in Israeli coastal waters.⁴⁸

On the basis of this and other testimony given to the working group, the full House Appropriations Committee on August 14, 1967, asked its Surveys and Investigations Staff to "examine the effectiveness of the DOD worldwide communications system." The staff then produced a two-volume study entitled "A Report to the Committee on Appropriations—U.S. House of Representatives on the Effectiveness of the Worldwide Communications Systems and Networks of the Department of Defense." This document is still classified "Top Secret," but according to Representative Sikes and other committee sources, it includes the CIA testimony described above.⁴⁹

"THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THESE PEOPLE DIED . . ."

When American servicemen are killed in combat, certain amenities are observed by the United States government. Over the years, these amenities have assumed the importance of traditions. Families are informed in a certain way. The President sends a letter of condolence. Those dead who performed meritoriously in combat are honored in ceremonies that have become part of the ritual of warfare.

Like the *Liberty* survivors who had witnessed a deliberate, determined, total attack on their ship by a presumed ally, the *Liberty* dead posed certain problems for their government, in the wake of the Six-Day War. White House aide James Cross, writing to senior White House aide Harry McPherson, described those problems:

31 [sic] Navy personnel were killed aboard the *U.S.S. Liberty* as the result of the accidental attack by Israeli forces. The attached condolence letters, which have been prepared using basic formats approved for Vietnam war casualties, strike me as inappropriate in this case. Due to the very sensitive nature of the whole Arab-Israeli situation and the circumstances under which these people died, I would ask that you review these drafts and provide me with nine to ten different responses which will adequately deal with this special situation.⁵⁰

McPherson responded to Cross a few days later, agreeing that many of the paragraphs in the Vietnam letters were "inappropriate for those who died on the *U.S.S. Liberty*." He suggested certain thoughts that would be more fitting for the sacrifices made by the men of the *Liberty*, thoughts that did not unduly emphasize the combat, the adversary, or the sacrifice itself. He suggested that the President draw attention to the "contribution to the cause of peace" made by the *Liberty* dead and to the "hope that from the ashes of war in the Middle East may arise a new opportunity for peace." The President should add, McPherson said, that "We sought to avert that war."⁵¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff knew about the planned attack by Israel on the U.S.S. *Liberty* before it occurred and presumably informed the White House. When the early reports of the attack arrived, those who had known of the plan had a choice: either take retaliatory action against Israel, or become an accessory after the fact to the attack by promoting the fiction that it was somehow an accident.

The men of the *Liberty* never stood a chance, but they made the best of a bad situation. They were virtually unarmed, and had been denied the protection they had requested from their own government. Their attackers, when they came, were disguised and tried to jam their communications, to prevent calls for help from reaching the Sixth Fleet. Somehow, through cannon fire, rockets, napalm, and torpedoes, the *Liberty* stayed afloat and did get a message through. An abortive air assistance effort was mounted as a purely reflexive action by naval line officers who were not aware that the ship was being attacked by an ally, and would not have cared had they known. The air assistance was canceled and a cover story for the attack later propagated by politicians who dishonored the *Liberty* dead and wounded, and by senior U.S. military officers who dishonored the uniforms they wore.

These are the circumstances under which 34 men of the U.S.S. *Liberty* died.

No attempt is made in this chapter to recount or to reconcile the many official inquiries, studies, and reports that have been done on the *Liberty* Affair, though they have been used and occasionally cited in the chapter's preparation.

In the United States, in addition to the naval court of inquiry transcript, which is now declassified and available, there has been a major study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and several detailed chronologies and compilations of official messages related to the attack. Both the NSA and the CIA have completed and released studies, large portions of which have had to be excised to protect the intelligence mission and capabilities of the ship, and to preserve good relations between the United States and Israel. The thrust of the American studies has been to explain why no assistance was sent to the ship during and just after the attack. Ultimately, of course, there can be no explanation, no justification.

Two major Israeli studies of the *Liberty* Affair are avail-

after the attack and transmitted to the Department of State in August, 1967, and a more detailed study by the IDF History Department completed in 1982, which, at least as of this writing, is "the official version of the State of Israel."* The Israeli studies are inconsistent, one with the other, in several respects, and they tend to dwell on such absurd propositions as the "fact" that the *Liberty* flew no flag and had no identifying markings. Like the American courts and agencies, the Israeli officials concerned have been faced with the task of explaining the unexplainable, and these studies must be seen in this tolerant, if not understanding light.

All of the official versions of the *Liberty* Affair, with the probable exception of the unreleased portions of the reports of the two U.S. intelligence agencies, have for political reasons had to proceed from the pleasant fictional premise that the attack was an accident. Now, foreknowledge of the planned attack, by both the U.S. and (obviously) the Israeli governments, is established by this book, thanks to recently declassified State Department documents and to candor from Congressmen and congressional staffers who took testimony in executive session on the *Liberty* Affair within days after the attack. One would hope that both governments will henceforth cease their dissembling about flags and wind speed and such irrelevancies, and will be willing and able to focus upon the matter of individual and collective responsibility for this unspeakably squalid operation.

There are unresolved obligations here, to the families and friends of the *Liberty* dead as well as to the surviving officers and crew. Both are debtors: the "friendly" government that attacked the ship, and the other government that abandoned it.

*The Israeli "preliminary inquiry" has not been formally released by the State Department, though it is unclear to the author whether it was ever actually classified. It has, however, been mistakenly sent to at least one researcher, and through him, made available to the author.

on June 25, 1963, is quoted in full in "Outlines for an Israeli Foreign Policy," *New Outlook Magazine*, September, 1963, pp. 14-19.

15. Simha Eitaphan in "Wonderful Logic—All Wrong," *New Outlook Magazine*, September, 1963, p. 26.

16. "Confidential" Department of State telegram 325 from U.S. Consulate, Jerusalem, to Secretary of State, dated May 14, 1965, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 4, Cables 2/65 to 11/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

17. "Secret" State Department circular telegram from Secretary of State to, *inter alia*, U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv, dated March 18, 1965, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 4, Cables 2/65 to 11/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

18. "Confidential" Department of State telegram 325.

19. "Secret" Department of State telegram 29 from U.S. Consulate, Jerusalem, to Secretary of State, dated July 21, 1964, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 2, Cables 4/64 to 8/64, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. See Appendix, Document 12.

20. "Secret" White House memorandum for McGeorge Bundy from William H. Brubeck, dated May 9, 1963, @ Carrolton Press Declassified Documents Reference System, 1979/193B.

21. "Secret" memorandum for the President from Acting Secretary of State George Ball, subject: "Visit of Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol," undated, in Carrolton Press Declassified Documents Reference System, 1979/193D.

22. "Secret" Department of State memorandum of conversation by H. Earle Russell, Jr., dated May 19, 1965, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 4, Memos and Miscellaneous 2/65 to 11/65, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

23. "Secret" memorandum for the President from Robert W. Komer, dated January 18, 1966, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 5, Memos 12/65 to 9/66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

24. "Unclassified" State Department telegram 3419 from U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv, to Secretary of State, dated April 28, 1967, NSF Country File—Israel, Volume 6, Memos 12/66 to 7/67, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

25. Memorandum for the President from Walt Rostow, dated May 25, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12—June 19, 1967, Volume 2, tabs 31-42, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

26. "Secret" memorandum for the President from Secretary of State Dean Rusk, dated May 26, 1967, NSF Country File—Israel, Container 142, Volume 12, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

27. *Ibid.*

28. "Secret" letter from President Lyndon B. Johnson to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, dated June 3, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12—June 19, 1967, Volume 3, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

29. Lyndon B. Johnson in *The Vantage Point* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 293.

30. "Secret" note to the President from Walt Rostow, dated June 3, 1967 (2:50 P.M.), National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12—June 19, 1967, Volume 3, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

31. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Project, interview number 1 with Richard Helms, recorded April 4, 1969.

32. Michael Bar Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 114-115.

33. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Project, interview number 3 with Nicholas Katzenbach, recorded December 11, 1968.

34. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Project, interview number 1 with Harry McPherson, recorded December 5, 1968.

35. "Top Secret" note and attached table from Harold Saunders to Lois Nivens, dated May 23, 1967. Also note from Marvin Watson to the President, dated June 5, 1967. Both are in National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12–June 19, 1967, Volume 1, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

36. The figures on Egyptian plane losses are from Winston and Randolph Churchill, *The Six Day War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 85.

37. *The New York Times*, June 7, 1967, 1:1.

38. "Secret" long-distance Xerox from Walt Rostow to both Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, dated June 4, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12–June 19, 1967, Volume 3, tabs. 96–110, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

39. "Secret" note to the President from Walt Rostow, dated June 5, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12–June 19, 1967, Volume 4, Tabs. 111–127, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

40. "Confidential" note to the President from Walt Rostow, dated June 6, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12–June 19, 1967, Volume 4, Tabs. 111–127, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. See Appendix, Document 13.

41. "Secret" memorandum to the President from Walt Rostow, dated June 7, 1967, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, May 12–June 19, 1967, Volume 4, Tabs. 128–150, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

42. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 9

1. Quoted in Phil G. Goulding, *Confirm or Deny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 93. At the time of the *Liberty* Affair, Goulding was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

2. James Bamford, *The Puzzle Palace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 219.

3. James M. Ennes, Jr., in *Assault on the Liberty* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 38.

4. U.S.S. *Liberty* message 062036Z, June, 1967, included under tab 34 in "Top Secret Report of the JCS Fact Finding Team, USS Liberty Incident, 8 June 1967," declassified in May, 1982, in response to an FOIA request by the author. The copy of the report obtained by the author is undated, but was delivered to the Joint Chiefs by fact-finding team leader Major General Joseph R. Russ in late June, 1967.

5. Ennes, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39.

6. "Report of the JCS Fact Finding Team," p. 14.

7. *Ibid.*, Tab. 36, COMSIXTHFLT message 062349Z, June, 1967.

8. *Ibid.*, Tab. 41, NSA message DTG 072104Z, June, 1967.

9. Ibid., Tab. 42, JCS message 072230Z, June, 1967.
10. Ibid., Tab. 43, JCS telecom 072350Z, June, 1967.
11. Ibid., Tab. 45, JCS message 070110Z, June, 1967.
12. Ibid., Tab. 47, USNAVEUR telecom 080410Z, June, 1967.
13. Ibid., pp. 26, 27, 42.
14. Ibid., Tab. 48, CINCUSNAVEUR message 080455Z, June, 1967.
15. Ibid., Tab. 53, COMSIXTHFLT message 080917Z, June, 1967.
16. "Department of Defense Appropriations for 1969, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Part 4, Operations and Maintenance," April 8, 1968, p. 396.
17. "Review of Department of Defense Worldwide Communications, Phase I: Report of the Armed Services Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services," May 10, 1971, p. 6.
18. "Secret" State Department telegram 3928 from U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv, to Secretary of State, dated June 5, 1967, declassified at the request of the author on December 13, 1982, under the federal Freedom of Information Act. See Appendix, Document 14.
19. Memorandum for the record, subject: "NSC Meeting, Wednesday, June 7, 1967," dated January 7, 1969, document 55, National Security File, NSC History—Middle East Crisis, Volume 2, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
20. "Confidential" memorandum for the President from Larry Levinson and Ben Wattenberg, dated June 7, 1967, White House Central Files (CO126 ND19, CO1-6), Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
21. "Secret" State Department telegram 4098 A from American Embassy, Amman, to Secretary of State, dated June 6, 1967, in NSF Country File, Middle East Crisis, Vol. 4, Box 107, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
22. "Secret" State Department telegram 4125 from American Embassy, Amman, to Secretary of State, dated June 7, 1967, in NSF Country File, Middle East Crisis, Vol. 4, Box 107, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
23. *The New York Times*, June 8, 1967, 12.1.
24. *The New York Times*, June 8, 1967, 18.4.
25. *The New York Times*, June 9, 1967, 16:1.
26. Raphael, op. cit., p. 162.
27. "Confidential" State Department telegram 1053 from American Consulate, Jerusalem, to Secretary of State, dated June 8, 1967, in NSF Country File, Middle East Crisis, Vol. 4, Box 107, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
28. "Secret" State Department telegram 209182 from Secretary of State to American Embassy, Tel Aviv, dated June 8, 1967, in NSF Country File, Middle East Crisis, Vol. 4, Box 107, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. See Appendix, Document 15.
29. The author obtained a copy of the Captain's Night Orders for the *Liberty*, for June 7-8, 1967, from James M. Ennes, Jr., author of *Assault on the Liberty*.
30. Taken from a chronology prepared by CINCUSNAVEUR, in naval message 132105Z, June, 1967, from CINCUSNAVEUR to USCINCEUR, declassified and released on November 24, 1982, by the Naval Security Group, Department of the Navy, in response to a federal Freedom of Information Act request. The chronology indicates that the NSA message wanted *Liberty* to proceed west "to satisfy technical requirements." It is hard to imagine how moving 180 degrees away from all of the fighting then ongoing would have achieved this.
31. Ennes, op. cit., p. 55.

32. Chief Radioman Wayne Smith's testimony on the jamming appears in the official record of the naval court of inquiry. The jamming during the attack was established as a "finding of fact" by the court. Other details were obtained in a personal telephone interview with Mr. Smith.

33. This scene is described in Ennes, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

34. From chronology in CINCUSNAVEUR 151003Z, June, 1967.

35. "Report of the JCS Fact Finding Team," Tab 65, USDAO message 081414Z, June, 1967.

36. *Ibid.*, Tab 59, CTF 60 message 081316Z, June, 1967.

37. COMSIXTHFLT message 081320Z, June, 1967.

38. "Report of the JCS Fact Finding Team," Tab. 61, COMSIXTHFLT message 081339Z, June, 1967.

39. The foregoing account of help never quite sent the *Liberty* is taken from Ennes's *Assault on the Liberty*, pp. 98-116, and from Ennes's more recent article on the subject in the *U.S.S. Liberty Newsletter*, Volume 1, No. 1, August, 1981, pp. 5-6.

40. From chronology in CINCUSNAVEUR 151003Z.

41. *Congressional Record—House*, June 7, 1967, p. 15131.

42. *Congressional Record—Senate*, June 8, 1967, p. 15261.

43. "Secret" State Department telegram 20317 from American Embassy, Paris, to Secretary of State, dated June 17, 1967, National Security File, Middle East Crisis, "Liberty File," Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, declassified February 16, 1983, in response to a request from the author. See Appendix, Document 16.

44. *Newsweek*, June 19, 1967.

45. Goulding, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

46. Ennes, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

47. LADD news release 594-67, dated June 28, 1967, p. 1.

48. Based upon telephone interviews with Representative Robert L. F. Sikes. The information provided by Representative Sikes has been corroborated by other committee sources who do not wish to be identified.

49. This report is cited in a study by the Central Security Service of the National Security Agency entitled, "United States (Excised) — Attack on (Excised) the U.S.S. Liberty (Excised)." Portions of the title are still classified, along with much of the study itself. But the NSA segregated and released portions of the study in early 1983.

50. Memorandum for Harry McPherson from James U. Cross, dated June 20, 1967, document 40c, Office Files of Harry McPherson, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

51. Memorandum for Jim Cross from Harry C. McPherson, Jr., dated June 26, 1967, document 40, Office Files of Harry McPherson, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

CHAPTER 10

1. Press statement by the President on the Near East situation, delivered in the Fish Room, the White House, 6:10 p.m. EDT May 23, 1967.

2. "Secret" memorandum of conversation dated October 24, 1967, National Security File—Israel, Volume 12 (1965-1968), Box 142, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. See Appendix, Document 17.

3. "Secret" State Department telegram from Secretary of State to U.S.

**WARRIORS
FOR
JERUSALEM**

*The Six Days That
Changed the Middle East*

DONALD NEFF

LINDEN PRESS/SIMON & SCHUSTER
New York 1984

XVIII

JUNE 8:
U.S.S. *LIBERTY*
ATTACKED

King Hussein normally reflected the stoic dignity and impeccable dress traditional of his Sandhurst training, usually managing to make even army fatigues look like a dress uniform. But on Thursday when he appeared before about fifty foreign and Jordanian correspondents at the army headquarters in Amman, he was unshaven, haggard, emotional and near tears.

"Our losses were tremendous," he explained. "But we are proud of the fact we fought honorably. We are proud of our men and of the fact that, despite all odds, we were able to stand like men, not only in the front line but also at home. The battle was waged against us almost exclusively from the air with overwhelming strength and continual, sustained air attacks on every single unit of our armed forces, day and night, right until last night when the cease-fire took effect."

The young monarch valiantly tried to put as good a face on his humiliating loss as possible. He said his haggardness resulted from lack of sleep, not a lack of morale. "Needless to say we have been continuously awake since the hostilities started. Do not attribute what you see to any other factor. . . . Our morale is high."

But he was a beaten, dispirited man. He had not slept for three days, existing on adrenalin and endless cups of tea and countless cigarettes. He was filled with a sense of shame and despair, burdened by his enormous losses in men and materiel and especially by a sense of failure, his personal failure to defend the holy places, Jerusalem with its holy mosques and Hebron with its

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enerated Cave of Machpelah, the burial place of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, worshiped by Jews and Moslems alike. In an emotional radio address to his subjects that day, Hussein's deep voice nearly broke as he spoke of his and the nation's disaster.

"What is done is done," he said stoically. But he added: "My heart breaks when I think of the loss of all our fallen soldiers. They were dearer to me than my own self."

Then no doubt thinking of his assassinated grandfather and his grandfather's father, Hussein ibn Ali, the grand sharif and emir of Mecca, hereditary custodian of the Moslem holy places, who in 1925 lost his Arabian domain to the House of Saud (thus *Saudi Arabia*), Hussein spoke of the misfortune that had plagued his family.

"My brothers, I seem to belong to a family which, according to the will of Allah, must suffer and make sacrifices for its country without end. Our calamity is greater than anyone could have imagined."

Indeed, in men alone, his losses were staggering. His forces had fought more tenaciously than any other, and the toll in casualties was, as Hussein said, heartbreaking. Estimated Jordanian losses were at first put at 6,094 dead and missing. But many of those reported missing were West Bankers who had simply returned to their homes or became refugees when the fighting stopped. A later, more accurate, estimate was that 696 had been killed in less than three days of fighting.

Israeli casualties were about 550 killed and 2,400 wounded, a higher casualty toll than on any other front, a testament to the ferocity of the West Bank fighting.

There were other casualties too, in their way even more heartbreaking than the dead because they were destined to perpetuate their own misery through later generations. They were the new wave of refugees, mainly women and children and old people, innocent, helpless and bereft of home and hope. An estimated twenty to thirty thousand of the newly dispossessed had already fled across the Jordan to the East Bank by Thursday.

They were only the beginning of a human flood tide of destitution and despair. Many of them had been made refugees by the 1948 war. Now, nineteen years later, they were homeless again.

Economically, Hussein's losses matched the dimensions of the human tragedy. As much as 50 percent of his country's best agricultural land and its main religious and tourist attractions had been lost with the fall of the West Bank. Resentment and anger were high among the two million Jordanians. They felt cheated, humiliated and deserted. They suspected U.S. and British

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collusion with Israel, incompetence in the government, weakness in Hussein. They were embittered and frustrated, and their seething passions threatened to explode against the king.

With the atmosphere so charged, Jordanian officials warned Americans and Britons to stay off the streets in downtown Amman. Wherever Americans and Britons went they drew angry looks from Arabs. In addition to newsmen, there were three hundred U.S. civilians in Jordan and a concerted effort was now made to evacuate them before the fury of the mob exploded. Washington arranged for the mass evacuation to take place the next day. Meanwhile, U.S. diplomats were sleeping in the embassy and other Americans were staying in their homes or hotels to secure their safety. Suddenly, "neutrality" had become a precious word for the frightened and imperiled Americans in Jordan.

There were other Americans that Thursday morning experiencing unease, if not yet fright. They were the crew of the U.S.S. *Liberty*, which was conducting its leisurely five-knot patrol along the Egyptian coast still unaware that the ship had been ordered away from the area of hostilities. Shortly after the minaret in the Sinai town of El Arish came into view at 9:30 A.M., a lookout shouted: "Aeroplane passing astern, sir!"

A single jet flew past on the starboard side too far away for its markings to be discerned. It made only one pass and disappeared.

The appearance of an unknown airplane in a war zone was worrisome, but this morning it was not unduly so to the men of the *Liberty*. After all, the new U.S. flag was flying from the tripod-shaped foremast standing nearly one hundred feet tall. A light nine-to-twelve-knot breeze ruffled the ensign, making it clearly visible. The sea was calm, the sky so clear that lookouts could see the curvature of the earth. The ship's identification letters, AGTR 5, were painted in white on both sides of the bow and the stern. On the stern also was the *Liberty's* name. Beyond these easily identifiable features, the *Liberty's* unique profile was like almost no other in the world. Its many antennas and distinctive microwave moon-bounce communication dish told even a nonprofessional that this was no ordinary ship.

It was generally agreed among the crew that the only possible threat to the American ship would come from Egypt or the Soviet squadron operating in the eastern Mediterranean. But Egypt's air force was already destroyed and the Soviet Union had shown no inclination to get involved. That left only the Israelis, and they were America's best friend in the region, so the dangers seemed minimal.

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That was a comforting thought to many in the crew. As one of the civilian electronics experts aboard concluded, the jet "must be Israeli because what else is flying out here at this point in the war and also it's coming from the direction of Israel and it's going back to Israel, so it was obvious it was Israeli. I didn't think much of it. They were just out there checking us out. That's what I'd do too."

Obviously the gunners at the four machine-gun mounts shared that relaxed view. They continued to lounge about and chat with shipmates. Off-duty men were lying around the deck in swimsuits on blankets and lounge chairs, soaking up a Mediterranean sun. They were not bothered by the unidentified jet either.

Shortly before 10 A.M., the bridge lookouts reported jet fighters approaching from astern. The gunners were still lounging about. Lieutenant Ennes ordered them to be alert. Unidentified aircraft were in the area, he warned. Then off to starboard, high in the azure sky, two sleek jets with the distinctive delta wings of French-built Mirage III fighter-bombers flew in tight formation paralleling the *Liberty's* course to starboard. They flew past the ship, turned and flew back down the port side. They circled the ship three times, keeping a prudent distance.

Ennes glanced at the flag atop the tall mast. It was standing straight out in the light breeze, its colors crisp in the morning light. Through binoculars he could see clusters of rockets hanging under the Mirages' wings and the outlines of the pilots in their cockpits. But he could discern no markings, perhaps because of the planes' position. Still, he was not overly worried. "... if I could see the pilots in their cockpits," he figured, "the pilots could certainly see our flag and no doubt our ship's name and number."

Like Ennes, the crew remained relaxed. Sailors continued sunbathing. The sea continued calm, the sky cloudlessly bright, the breeze cooling. The Stars and Stripes fluttered in the gentle wind.

At about 10:30 A.M., the flying boxcar returned. It was a French-built Nord 2501 Noratlas transport that Israel had converted to a SIGINT ferret and reconnaissance snooper equipped with lens openings for photo coverage. Like the Mirages, it approached from astern, flew past to starboard, banked and flew back to port. It was a lazy pattern, becoming no more threatening than the gentle white bow wave that washed alongside the ship. In fact, the close scrutiny was leading to a certain sense of security.

"Well, they certainly know who we are by now, don't they?" commented Commander McGonagle to Ennes on the bridge. He added reassuringly: "It's good that they are checking us out this carefully. This way there won't be any mistakes."

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Suddenly, the lumbering plane banked sharply and headed directly toward the ship, skimming the waves at around two hundred feet. It roared over the *Liberty* so close that the portholes for its reconnaissance cameras were clearly visible. On its wings were Israel's insignia, the Star of David.

In Cairo that Thursday, the Stars and Stripes was hauled down from the U.S. Embassy flagpole and replaced with the yellow-and-red Spanish flag. Spain had agreed to act on behalf of American interests while diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt remained severed.

Reporter Eric Pace had wandered onto the embassy grounds while Marine guard Sergeant Gary Applegate was raising the Spanish flag. "There was much joking and exclaiming of 'Si, señor' and the like among the embassy staff," Pace reported, "but Sergeant Applegate, a real Marine, was glum. 'I'd much rather see Old Glory up there,' he said."

The embassy's few remaining officers also took part in the banter. Ambassador Dick Nolte was overseeing the destruction of sensitive papers and codes, preparing for evacuation. Political officer Richard Parker, glancing at the Spanish flag, turned to Nolte and said: "I guess this really does end the Spanish-American war."

Despite the light tone, the moments of humor were few and strained. The situation for Americans was perilous. The awful truth—that some great national disaster was taking place—was finally sinking in on the Egyptian masses. Although Cairo Radio continued broadcasting reports of various victories, they all were taking place in the Sinai, on Egyptian territory. When Egypt's thirty-one million people finally realized the dimensions of their humiliation, which they already believed was being visited on them with the aid of America and Britain, they could turn into an angry mob. It had happened before, as many people remembered vividly. Fifteen years earlier, Cairenes had gone berserk against British occupation and turned downtown Cairo into an inferno of destruction of British property. Seventeen Europeans were killed in the January 26, 1952, rampage that became known as Black Saturday. It could happen again.

This fear lay behind a flurry of messages exchanged between the embassy and the State Department throughout the day.

"Almost total defeat UAR armed forces is beginning to sink in on populace, as are reports of demonstrations against U.S. installations throughout the area," cabled Nolte. "We think there is danger situation here may deteriorate rapidly and that even if UARG [United Arab Republic Government]

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willing protect us it may be unable to do so. We therefore want option evacuate all Americans official and unofficial from Cairo."

There were by now only four hundred U.S. citizens, mainly businessmen and reporters, and seventy-five officials left in Cairo. Washington quickly gave its approval for Nolte to order an evacuation at his discretion. The State Department cable added: "Since situation suggests possible danger European community as whole, suggest you consult friendly embassies (French, Italian) with idea arranging joint diplomatic action prevent major attacks on westerners." But Washington's reading was wrong. It was specifically Americans, and to a lesser extent the British, who were the targets of Egyptian anger.

There was much to fuel that anger, though most Egyptians did not yet know it. In the Sinai, the 100,000-man Egyptian Army had been decimated. Israeli reporter Amos Elon that day drove through the Mitla Pass, the strategic defile leading from central Sinai to the Suez Canal. He arrived a few hours after its capture and found a "shocking valley of death, littered with corpses and hundreds of burning tanks and trucks in the now familiar cloud of smoke and the disgusting sweet smell of burning human flesh."

The retreating Egyptians, Elon reported, "had left behind them in the desert an immense array of equipment—some of it destroyed, but much of it abandoned, unused. . . . No one has yet counted the captured equipment. But it already appeared that more than half the Egyptian armor had been captured or hit. Still lying in the desert were Russian-made T-34, T-54 and T-55 tanks, some brand-new and without a scratch, straight from the factory: amphibious tanks, cannon of all sorts, some with their barrels still protected against the dust by airtight plastic covers. Large parts of Sinai looked like enormous junkyards."

But still Egypt refused to agree to a cease-fire. To an urgent request from Moscow that Nasser bow to the U.N. Security Council, the Egyptian president had replied: ". . . how could we terminate our military operations when enemy forces continued to launch ground and air attacks against us? . . . We were determined to continue the fight until Israeli withdrawal was achieved, and we expected the serious and instant support of the Soviet Union in this venture."

An official of the Foreign Ministry was more candid when he told one of Nolte's officers that Egypt could not accept a cease-fire because the repercussions would be too serious. "What would we tell the people?" he asked.

Throughout that Thursday, Cairo Radio announced to the accompaniment of martial music that the day's fighting would be decisive. It too ap-

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parently was still unaware of the horrific dimensions of Egypt's losses, or perhaps it was under orders to ignore them.

The fact was that there were no more major battles to be fought. Egypt's army was smashed and scattered, many of its bravest soldiers dead and thousands of others wandering the scorching sands, waterless and in a daze. Egypt's defeat was total.

Though the bodies of fallen Arabs still littered the streets of Jerusalem ("It's a little grim," Brigadier General Chaim Herzog admitted to Washington *Post* reporter Bernard D. Nossiter, "but now we are finding them by smell"), jubilation reigned in Israel. Ambassador Wally Barbour reported to Washington that "emotional reaction to unexpected windfall of access to Jewish holy places has been unequaled since 1948 proclamation of independence."

Israelis were already referring to the "liberation" of the Old City, though that was not the way Arabs who had been living there for many centuries saw it. Barbour reported the visits by Israel's leaders to the Wailing Wall and inaccurately observed: "in their several remarks Israeli leaders made clear their intention retain access Jewish shrines Old City. . . ." Israeli leaders were making clear more than that. They had already said they planned to retain all of Jerusalem, but Barbour apparently did not report that.

The Hebrew press was filled with stories about the joy Israelis were experiencing, especially the ecstasy over the capture of the Old City. *Davar*, the Labor Party's semi-official daily, rhapsodized: "The people has returned to its capital and the capital has returned to its people. They will not be separated again."

Huaretz, an influential daily, demanded that the armed forces now turn their attention to Syria. "Finish the job," prodded *Huaretz*: "Everything started with Syria. The time has come to add up and settle accounts."

The victorious generals needed no prodding. The U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem advised by flash cable that U.N. observers reported that Israelis at 10 A.M. local time Thursday "have just launched intensive air and artillery bombardment of Syrian positions opposite central demilitarized zone as apparent prelude to large-scale attack in effort to seize heights overlooking border kibbutzim."

Secretary of State Rusk immediately replied by flash cable that the report was "deeply disturbing. You should urgently approach foreign office at highest level to express deep concern this new indication military action by

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GOI. If reported bombardment correct, we should assume it prelude to military action against Syrian positions on Syrian soil. Such a development, following on heels Israeli acceptance of Security Council cease-fire resolution would cast doubts on Israeli intentions and create gravest problem for USG representatives in Arab countries.

"You should stress we must at all costs have complete cessation Israeli military action except in cases where clearly some replying fire is necessary in self-defense."

This strongly worded cable no doubt contributed to Israel's decision to delay its attack by one day -and at the same time perhaps also to increase its interest in the eavesdropping activities of the U.S.S. *Liberty*. If the ship could listen in on Israeli military communications, as it could, then the United States could discover Israel's plan to attack Syria. Foreknowledge of the attack might bring an ultimatum from the United States, an ultimatum that could not be ignored because Israel desperately still needed Washington's support both in the United Nations and to fend off any threats from the Soviet Union. Without the United States, the Soviet Union might directly intervene if Israel took on its last, comparatively unscathed client, Syria.

But as with the launching of the war itself, there was no question about not attacking Syria. It was merely a question of timing. The mood in the country was not only one of jubilation but also of revenge. Israelis blamed Syria as much as Egypt for the current crisis, and farmers in the north who had experienced Syrian bombardments from the Golan Heights over the years were crying for blood. A delegation of the farmers visited Northern Commander Major General David ("Dado") Elazar and later Prime Minister Eshkol to press their demands for an attack on Syria. Elazar needed no encouragement. As Ezer Weizman later wrote, "Never was Dado so tire-some in demanding that he be allowed to attack Syria. He continually bombarded General Staff with phone calls."

Elazar was preaching to the converted. The senior officers were already in favor of more conquest, Weizman recalled. "With almost our whole air force available, and the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian air forces practically eliminated, our strength was enormous. . . . For years we have awaited such an opportunity for settling accounts with our most bitter foes."

Ambassador Barbour, closely identifying with Israel's aims, advised Washington in response to Rusk's cable that "I would point out that Syrian shelling of kibbutzim and settlements in Israel below the Syrian heights has been continuous and incessant up to the present time with enormous dam-

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age; some kibbutzim, etc., have been completely leveled above ground, and with continuous threat to populations . . . after nineteen years under Syrian guns.

"In circumstances I would not repeat not be surprised if reported Israeli attack does take place or has already done so."

In fact, Barbour was reflecting the Israeli line, not reality. The Syrians had made no major move throughout the war and the front had been the quietest of all. With Israel enjoying total air superiority, the Syrians were reduced to firing artillery attacks against Israeli troop concentrations and against fortified kibbutzim, as Dayan later admitted.

Despite the mood for revenge, Israel for the moment held off any major attack. Perhaps a combination of Rusk's toughly worded cable, fear of the Russians and possibly concern about how much the *Liberty* was learning about Israel's plans combined to make Israel reconsider for the moment.

At 1:10 P.M. (7:10 A.M. in Washington) aboard the *Liberty*, Skipper McGonagle held a general quarters drill. A news report had mentioned use of poison gas in the Sinai fighting, which was false, and the skipper took the occasion to train the crew in chemical-attack procedures. The drill was soon over and the crew returned to its patrol routine, the sunbathers back to their deck chairs and towels.

"It's good that we have sunbathers on deck," McGonagle said to Ennes. "It helps to show that we're peaceful."

Over the ship's loudspeaker system, McGonagle reminded the men that they were in a war zone and the next call to arms could be a genuine one. He mentioned a huge cloud of smoke off to the left that threatened to obscure El Arish as evidence of the heavy fighting still going on. But, he added, local forces knew the *Liberty* was in the area since there had been repeated aerial reconnaissances.

McGonagle had barely ended his comments at 2 P.M. when radar reported three airplanes approaching the ship. Ennes was the first to see one of the planes, a delta-winged Mirage that was flying to starboard about five to six miles away. While he, McGonagle and the rest of the men on the bridge stared at the jet, expecting it to settle in to what had become a familiar reconnaissance pattern, a second plane swooped in from port and fired rockets directly at the bridge.

Pandemonium erupted. A terrible heat and noise shot through the ship. Rocket fragments and 30mm bullets punched through the heavy deck plating, through the thin skin of the bulkheads, through the flesh of the stunned

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crewmembers. Ennes was hit in the first attack, his left leg broken above the knee and two dozen rocket fragments buried in his body.

The planes attacked again and again. They hit the *Liberty* with everything they had: rockets and 30mm armor-piercing shells. The pilothouse quickly became a charnel, blood flowing so thickly over the metal floor that men slipped and fell in it. The wounded and the dying were scattered about, helplessly adding to the red slush.

Then came more planes, *Mysteres* with rockets, cannon and, most dreaded of all, napalm. The jets fired their rockets on their approach, and then as they swooped over the stricken ship, they released their silvery canisters of jellied gasoline that exploded into flames on contact, slopping along the decks and through the doors and the large holes gouged out by the rockets and cannon fire. The *Liberty* was now a floating hell of flames and screaming men. The wounded and the dead were everywhere.

Skipper McGonagle was wounded by shrapnel in the right leg and was suffering a loss of blood, but he remained on station, directing the frantic fire-fighting efforts against three major blazes topside.

There already were eight men dead. All the ship's antennas had been damaged or destroyed, which may have been the attackers' prime target in order to prevent *Liberty* from calling for help or transmitting the communications that it had intercepted during the morning.

Despite the loss of antennas, the crew was able to patch up its high-command radio-circuit antenna to send off flash messages. Crouching on the deck to get away from the heavy, acrid smoke enveloping the ship, Radiomen James Halman and Joseph Ward attempted to send off a voice message requesting assistance. But they discovered that all frequencies were being jammed. A loud buzz-saw sound drowned out their words. It was only in the brief seconds when the planes launched their rockets that the jamming stopped. Apparently the jamming came from the aircraft and could not be performed at the same time that the rockets were in the air. It was during one of these lulls that the radiomen finally got off their message: "Any station, this is Rockstar [*Liberty's* voice radio call sign]. We are under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and require immediate assistance."

The message was picked up by the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga*, which was sailing with the Sixth Fleet south of Crete about 450 miles west of the *Liberty*. It immediately relayed the message to all regional commands, including the commander of the Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral Martin, aboard his flagship, the guided-missile light cruiser U.S.S. *Little Rock*.

But the *Liberty's* ordeal was far from over.

The air attacks had no sooner ceased than the second blow of the well-

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coordinated attack hit the *Liberty*. At 2:24 P.M., nearly a half hour after the assault had begun, lookouts sighted three high-speed boats approaching the ship in torpedo-launch formation.

At this point Skipper McGonagle noticed that the American flag had been shot down during the air attacks and he ordered that the largest flag aboard, the eight-by-twelve-foot holiday ensign, be hoisted on the yardarm. The center boat flashed a signal light, but because of fire and smoke aboard the ship McGonagle could not read it. The *Liberty's* own signal light had been destroyed during the air attacks and the skipper attempted to signal with a hand-held Aldis lamp. But the boats kept coming in attack formation. McGonagle thought he saw an Israeli flag on one of the boats.

"Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side!" yelled the wounded McGonagle into the announcing system.

The boats, skimming across the waves at twenty-seven to thirty knots, closed in with their 20mm and 40mm machine guns blazing. One bullet smashed through the chart house and hit a young sailor in the neck, killing him instantly. Then a torpedo passed astern of the ship at about twenty-five yards at 2:34 P.M. A minute later there was a huge explosion.

A torpedo with a thousand-pound warhead had slammed into the *Liberty's* starboard side forward of the bridge and several feet under the waterline, tearing a thirty-nine-foot hole between frames 53 and 66. This was either extraordinary luck or extraordinary sharpshooting for that location was exactly where the ship's sophisticated SIGINT equipment was located. As the sea poured into the lower decks, trapping men below, many of them the most skilled electronics technicians in the Navy, the ship tipped over into a dangerous list. Radiomen managed to get off another message on the high-command voice net reporting the new attack. It also was received by the *Saratoga* and was relayed to various commands.

It was not until 3:45 P.M., an hour and forty-five minutes after the start of the first air attack, that the Sixth Fleet finally got itself together to begin launching planes from the carriers *America* and *Saratoga* with orders to "use force including destruction as necessary to control the situation." Because some of the planes were slow, propeller-driven Skyraiders, the estimated time of arrival at the *Liberty* was not until 5:15 P.M. Admiral Martin's earlier promise to provide air protection within ten minutes had been an empty one.

On the *Liberty*, the force of the torpedo had knocked out power and steering control, and the ship was now listing nine degrees to starboard and dead in the water. McGonagle was on the bridge surrounded by the dead and dying. His navigator and quartermaster were dead, his executive officer

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was dying, and his officer of the deck and junior officer of the deck were badly wounded. Blood from McGonagle's leg wound was filling his right shoe. Water was flooding the lower decks through the gap caused by the torpedo, the steam engines powering the propeller had stopped and small fires were raging seemingly everywhere. It appeared the ship had to be abandoned.

The three torpedo boats reduced their speed and drifted lazily around the ship, then sped up and began firing their machine guns at the waterline, apparently waiting for the *Liberty* to sink. When yells of "Prepare to abandon ship!" rang out and the *Liberty* rubber life rafts were lowered into the water, one of the Israeli boats shot two of them, deflating them; the third was hauled aboard as a war trophy.

Apparently tired of waiting for the *Liberty* to slip under the waves, the torpedo boats finally retired toward Israel at 3:05 P.M. They soon were replaced by two large troop-carrying helicopters that circled the ship several times and then departed without any effort at communicating with or boarding the stricken ship. The Star of David was clearly visible on both helicopters.

Miraculously, the crew was getting damage under control and it no longer appeared that the *Liberty* was about to sink. With great exertion, the flooding had been stopped and fires extinguished. The mess decks had been converted into a casualty collection station. The dead and missing now numbered more than thirty with well over one hundred wounded, many of them gravely.

At about the same time that the torpedo boats departed, about 3 P.M. *Liberty* time, the U.S. naval attaché in Tel Aviv, Commander Ernest Carl Castle, was called to the Defense Ministry and told that Israeli sea and air forces had attacked an American ship. By mistake, it was claimed. By this time, of course, the increased radio traffic of the Sixth Fleet as it prepared to launch the rescue effort would have alerted Israel that the fleet was aware *Liberty* had been attacked and a potential clash with U.S. forces was in the making. It was now in Israel's interests to get out the word as soon as possible that there had been an "accident" and avoid a direct confrontation.

It worked. Commander Castle flashed the Israeli admission to the White House, the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and others. On the basis of his message, the planes from the Sixth Fleet were recalled and two destroyers and a fleet tug were sent to help the *Liberty*.

An effort to keep the incident quiet began almost immediately. Wally Barbour cabled from Tel Aviv that since the *Liberty* was American, "its proximity to scene conflict could feed Arab suspicions of U.S.-Israeli collu-

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sion." It was a bizarre line of reasoning after all the carnage of U.S. sailors, but it contributed to the consensus that formed almost immediately within the Administration to play down the incident.

In Washington, President Johnson's morning was highlighted again -- for the fourth straight morning -- with a message from Premier Kosygin sent on the hot line at 9:48 o'clock. While the Russians were pressuring Egypt to stop fighting, they were also, with increased insistence, pushing the United States to get Israel to halt its attacks against Egypt and Syria. Kosygin complained that despite an agreement reached the previous day to achieve a cease-fire in place, the United States still had not managed to get Israel's cooperation. Johnson replied that "although we are trying, we doubt that the United States alone can effectively persuade both sides to cease fire. I instructed Ambassador Goldberg last night to present a resolution today. This resolution calls on all parties in the strongest terms to cease fire immediately.

"I am glad to have had your message and have instructed our ambassador in New York to maintain close contact with the ambassador of the Soviet Union and trust you will want to do likewise."

A minute after Kosygin's message, at 9:49 A.M., Walt Rostow telephoned Johnson about the attack on the *Liberty* and followed that with a quick note: "We have a flash report from the Joint Reconnaissance Center indicating the U.S. elint (electronics intelligence) ship, the LIBERTY, has been torpedoed in the Mediterranean. . . . Reconnaissance aircraft are out from the 6th Fleet. We have no knowledge of the submarine or surface vessel which committed this act."

While the hot line was still activated, Johnson sent an immediate report to Kosygin -- perhaps partly to smoke out whether the Russians were responsible, intentionally or unintentionally -- to explain the unusual Fleet activity in the area: "You should know that I have just received a report that a US ship off the Egyptian coast has been torpedoed. I have ordered aircraft from carriers in the Mediterranean and other US ships to proceed immediately to the scene to protect the ship, investigate the circumstances of the attack, and rescue survivors."

At 11:17 A.M., he sent a fuller report to the Soviets over the hot line. "We have just learned that U.S.S. *Liberty*, an auxiliary ship, has apparently been torpedoed by Israeli forces in error off Port Said. We have instructed our carrier *Saratoga*, now in the Mediterranean, to dispatch aircraft to the scene to investigate. We wish you to know that investigation is the sole purpose of

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this flight of aircraft, and hope that you will take appropriate steps to see that proper parties are informed."

While the Kremlin now knew about the Israeli attack on the *Liberty*, the American people did not. From the very beginning, the Johnson Administration gave every evidence of a determination to play down the attack.

At his regular daily press conference starting at 11:18 A.M., an hour and a half after Washington had learned of the assault and had informed Moscow of it, George Christian gave no hint to the press that it had occurred. The reporters sensed something was going on but they did not know what. They had been made suspicious a short time earlier by Dean Rusk's sudden departure from Capitol Hill where he was testifying before a congressional committee, but the wily Christian eluded all their snares.

"George," asked a reporter at the start of the press conference, "is Secretary Rusk in the building?"

"Yes."

"Seeing the President?"

"Yes."

"Senator Wayne Morse told reporters he was called away from the Hill for an 'emergency meeting.' I am quoting a reporter on the Hill. Is that true?"

"Secretary Rusk is here," said Christian.

"Can you say anything more?"

"No," said Christian. "I cannot."

Then he was directly asked if he was "aware of any emergency."

"I am not going to comment on it," said Christian.

Later in the seventeen-minute conference, the reporters came back to the question of why Rusk had hurried to the White House, but Christian would not budge.

Finally one reporter inquired: "Can we look for any new developments here today?"

"There is always a possibility," said the press secretary, who was sitting on one of the hottest stories of the war.

In fact, while Christian was holding his press conference, the President was meeting with his top advisers: Rusk, Bundy, McNamara, Walt Rostow, U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn E. Thompson, Jr., on home leave, and political adviser Clark Clifford, who had been instrumental in persuading President Harry S. Truman to make the United States the first country to recognize Israel in 1948. Although there was reported skepticism that the attack was totally accidental, the inclination of the officials was to

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accept Israel's version since none of them could see why the Israelis would risk losing U.S. support by such a dangerous action. It may have been the result of a local trigger-happy commander, they agreed, though there was no evidence of that either. But even if that were the case, that did not amount to a hostile act ordered by the top echelons of the government.

Beyond the lack of evidence, the President and his advisers were aware that they needed all the influence they could bring to bear on Israel right now to get it to stop fighting. A direct, emotional confrontation at this time would only lessen Washington's ability to achieve a cease-fire. In the end, Clark Clifford was detailed to investigate the attack and everyone else was ordered to keep mum until his report was completed.*

Thus that afternoon, Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance telephoned the commander in chief of the Navy, European command, to order that no news releases be made by any of the *Liberty's* survivors or any naval source. All comments to the press would come from Washington.

If Johnson or any of his advisers needed any reminder of how sensitive politically the Israel-United States relationship was they had only to peek out of the White House that afternoon. There the pro-Israel rally that Mathilde Krim had been worried about was taking place with twenty to thirty thousand enthusiastic supporters of Israel jammed into Lafayette Park. What had been a rally to elicit support for Israel had turned into a euphoric victory celebration with the waving of Israeli flags and placards reading "End Arab Aggression" and "God Is on Our Side." Two senators, leading U.S. rabbis and others addressed the enthusiastic crowd for nearly two hours.

Across Pennsylvania Avenue, about two hundred Arab Americans marched on the White House sidewalk, separated from the pro-Israel rally by a cordon of police and tightly parked buses. They were considerably more subdued and carried placards saying "We want our land" and "Johnson, hands off the Middle East."

Under Secretary of State Nick Katzenbach appeared at a White House gate and talked separately for a couple of minutes with leaders of both groups. The Arab American leader, M. T. Mehdi, secretary-general of the Action Committee on American-Arab Relations, told Katzenbach that he thought U.S. policy was dominated by Zionists. He also said that the United

* Clifford's report concluded there was no evidence of a deliberate attack and that became the official attitude of the Administration.

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States should make clear that it supports the territorial integrity of all the nations in the Middle East — not just that of Israel.

Afterward, Mehdi was exultant about the exchange. "This is a very significant day in the lives of Arabs in this country," he said. "It has given the American Arabs the same opportunity to influence policy in the Middle East that the American Zionists have had."

Despite the crises brewing around him, Johnson that Thursday was hosting the official visit to Washington of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. Johnson was scheduled to entertain the African leader at a White House luncheon and one of his speech writers had written a brief toast for the President to deliver. But when he read it over shortly before lunch, he did not understand a sentence reading "Gibbon called independence 'the first of earthly blessings.'"

Hurriedly, Johnson took the opportunity of a bathroom visit by Banda to call one of his secretaries to ask how to pronounce "Gibbon" and "also find out who he is." A speech writer soon explained that it rhymed with ribbon and had "come from *The Rise and Fall [sic] of the Roman Empire*."

In the afternoon, Kesygin used the hot line again to inform Johnson that his 11:17 A.M. message had been passed on to Nasser. Johnson replied warmly later that day: "I deeply appreciate your transmitting the message to President Nasser. We lost 10 men, 16 critically wounded, and 65 wounded, as a result of Israeli attack, for which they have apologized. Respectfully, Lyndon B. Johnson."*

In Cairo, the full extent of Egypt's disastrous defeat was finally making itself known to Gamal Abdel Nasser. Despite the risks of an open revolt, he realized he soon had to accept a cease-fire. But first he had to explain to a powerful supporter the facts of life in the Middle East. Like Israel, Nasser had been in touch throughout the crisis with his friends, including Communists: China.

Now, as the demands for a cease-fire grew louder, Chairman Mao Tse-tung strongly advised him against accepting one. When Nasser replied that he had lost his army the Chinese leader responded with a suggestion. He urged Nasser to break up his army into independent brigades that could lose

* These were preliminary casualty figures, nowhere near the real totals. But, oddly, Johnson in his memoirs repeats the number ten for those killed, although at the time he wrote (1971), the true figure, thirty-four, had long been known.

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themselves among the civilian population. They then could continue the battle in a guerrilla war of national liberation. Mao explained:

Nasser wrote Mao: "[The Sinai] is a desert and we cannot conduct a people's liberation war in Sinai because there are no people there. There are no more than thirty thousand people in the whole of Sinai. The whole area is arid and you can see for thirty and forty miles. The independent brigades would stand no chance."

Not even his divisions had stood a chance. Egypt officially reported its casualties at ten thousand soldiers and fifteen hundred officers with an estimated half of them killed or wounded in battle and many of the rest dying in the desert. About five thousand soldiers and five hundred officers, nearly half of them wounded, fell into Israeli captivity. Other Egyptian losses included about seven hundred tanks, six hundred of which had been destroyed or damaged and the rest captured, four hundred field guns and ten thousand vehicles of various types. In all, Egyptian losses amounted to 80 percent of its military equipment in the brief war. Nasser later reported:

Israeli losses were about three hundred killed and one thousand wounded and sixty-one tanks destroyed in the Sinai.

Israel had spectacularly proved the overwhelming might of air superiority. With the Arab air forces destroyed, Israeli planes had been free to roam the skies unmolested, blasting any Arab ground forces that tried to move. Those that tried to stay put and hide were then grist for Israel's mobile ground forces that mopped them up at will.

At 5 P.M. Washington time, Nasser telephoned Foreign Minister Riad. "In a voice choking with grief and bitterness he told me that the collapse of the armed forces had been total, far beyond anything he had imagined and that we were no longer capable of continuing the fight," Riad later wrote. Nasser instructed Riad to have Egypt's U.N. ambassador inform the Security Council that Egypt accepted the cease-fire.

The war for Egypt was over.

Eight hours later Syria followed suit. But Israel was not about to let the country that had been taunting it for so long get off that easily.

The survivors aboard the *Liberty* somehow managed to stop up with rags and other plugs the worst of the 621 gaping shellfire holes riddling the ship, while also tending to the wounded and dying, and keeping the stricken ship afloat. Two thirds of its crew were casualties, the death toll eventually reaching 34 with 171 wounded; a quarter of the ship was flooded and its

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sophisticated electronics equipment, the reason for its existence, was destroyed.

Air and sea surveillance by Israeli craft had continued. At one point the torpedo boats had returned and asked: "Do you need any help?" Commander McGonagle, enraged, gave his new quartermaster a suitable earthy American answer to signal back. The boats withdrew to a safe distance and soon departed.

Around 6:35 P.M., as dusk gathered over the waters of the Mediterranean, another Israeli helicopter arrived at the *Liberty* and hovered near the mangled, combat-scarred bridge. The helicopter signaled that it wanted to land. McGonagle, in no mood for foreign visitors, gave them the finger. Frustrated, someone in the helicopter finally dropped a brown paper bag weighted with two oranges and enclosing the calling card of naval attaché Commander Ernest Carl Castle with a note on the back: "Have you casualties?" Since three bodies still had not been removed from the fore-castle, the answer must have been obvious. But McGonagle spent some time trying to signal with the Aldis loop that, yes, there were casualties. The helicopter finally had to depart with the gathering of dusk.

Only by extraordinary devotion by the crew and with luck had *Liberty* remained afloat. But its usefulness was finished. Israel was now free without fear of U.S. eavesdropping to pursue its final objective in the war, the capture of the Golan Heights.

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The Puzzle Palace

*A Report on America's
Most Secret Agency*

James Bamford

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON

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James M. Ennes, Jr. Research Papers

built at the Riverside Yard in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1944 and spent most of her life as a coastal transport with the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS), hauling troops one place and paper clips another.

Picked to be the sister ship of the *Valdez* was the U.S.N.S. *Sergeant Joseph E. Muller* (I-AG 171), almost a twin, which pushed supplies around the Far East until she retired in December 1956 after a few chilly months of Arctic resupply work.*

They were slow, unglamorous, seagoing delivery trucks, but they were also ideal as electronic snoopers. Because they were run by the MSTS instead of the Navy, they could be home-ported far from a U.S. naval base. And because they were civilian-manned, they would be able to spend more time conducting operations and less time making liberty calls. Also, the slow speed was ideal for copying the maximum amount of traffic without the ship's appearing to be deliberately loitering.

Following commissioning and sea trials, the *Valdez* was sent off to Africa and home-ported at Capetown. From the South African port, the ship could easily cruise up and down either the east or west coast. Although the fact that she was a spy ship was almost an open secret, most of the African nations swallowed the cover story — that her mission was to cover Soviet missile testing. In fact, she did spend a small amount of time in the South Atlantic off Namibia, monitoring the landing of Russian missiles fired from Kapustin Yar. But her principal mission was to keep a close ear on the newly emerging nations of postcolonial Africa and on the internal struggles of the colonies that remained.

As the *Valdez* crawled up and down Africa, sometimes so slowly that someone once suggested painting a wave on her bow to give the impression that she was moving, the *Muller*, home-ported in Port Everglades, Florida, directed her antennas toward Fidel Castro's Cuba.

Shortly after the NSA began laying plans for its eavesdropping flotilla, the Navy became interested in the program, and a heated battle for control soon erupted. The resulting compromise eliminated much of NSA's autonomy and produced the second generation of spy ships. The ships to come after the *Valdez* and the *Muller* would no longer be civilian-manned or operated by the MSTS. Instead, the Navy would man and run the ships, and the Naval Security Group

* There was, apparently, a third such ship, the U.S.N.S. *Lieutenant James E. Robinson* (I-AG 170), in operation at least during 1963-1964. However, little information about her is available (Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, OPNAV Notice 5030, "Reclassification of Certain Naval Ships," October 30, 1968.)

would conduct the intercept operations. This meant that the Navy would be able to conduct some of its own targeting, but only on a not-to-interfere basis. Whereas the NSA was interested in national and strategic targets, such as diplomatic and political intelligence, the Navy was interested in foreign naval communications.

On July 8, 1961, the first of the second-generation spy ships was commissioned. Named the U.S.S. *Oxford* (AGTR 1 — for Auxiliary General Technical Research), the vintage World War II Liberty ship at 441 feet was more than a hundred feet longer than her two predecessors. She was also faster, which gave her the advantage of being able to get someplace in a hurry but the disadvantage of creating suspicion by cruising well below her maximum speed.

Throughout 1961 and 1962 the *Oxford* patrolled the eastern coast of South America and would occasionally relieve the *Muller* on her Cuban watch. In October, one of the two ships picked up the first indications that the Soviet Union was in the process of installing offensive missiles in Cuba. Armed with this tip, the CIA sent a U-2 aircraft high over the island and returned with the proof.

In 1963 two more of the second-generation seaborne listening posts were commissioned. These were the U.S.S. *Georgetown* (AGTR 2) and the U.S.S. *Jamestown* (AGTR 3).

Manned by a crew of 18 officers and 260 enlisted men, the *Georgetown* took over South American monitoring operations and relieved the *Oxford*, which set sail for the coast of Vietnam. In 1964, following a six-week assignment off Cuba relieving the *Muller*, she picked her way down the coasts of Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina before returning to her home port of Norfolk.

On January 5, 1965, the *Georgetown* steamed through the Panama Canal and down the Pacific coast of South America, where she spent about three months eavesdropping off the coast of Chile. The second half of the year was spent on the Atlantic side of the continent.

In 1966 the SIGINT ship concentrated her eavesdropping operations in the southwest Caribbean and along the Pacific coast of Latin America. During her now annual *Muller* relief operations, the *Georgetown* managed to pluck from the sea three fleeing Cubans on an inner-tube raft twelve miles north of Havana, a common activity of the *Muller*.

As the *Georgetown* concentrated on the Caribbean and Latin America, her sister ship, the U.S.S. *Jamestown*, assisted the *Valdez* in patrolling Africa. Passing through the Strait of Gibraltar on her first operational cruise in April 1964, she monitored North African communications as she slowly traversed the Mediterranean Sea and then collected

Middle East signals as she transited the Suez Canal and cruised down the Red Sea to the British Protectorate of Aden (now South Yemen). Following a brief port call, she continued around the Horn of Africa, down to Cape Town, and then up the West African coast, circumnavigating the continent. The 31,011-mile journey ended on August 17, when the ship steamed back into Norfolk.

Two and a half months later, on November 2, she again headed back across the Atlantic for SIGINT operations along the western and southern African coasts, making port calls in Cape Town and at Dakar in Senegal (now Senegambia). In the spring of 1965 the *Jimmy E.*, as she was affectionately known by her crew, was reassigned to the Pacific coast of South America, and in October she headed to the Far East to aid the *Oxford* in monitoring the rapidly expanding war in Southeast Asia.

The final two ships of the second-generation sea-based platforms were commissioned in late 1964. Unlike the previous three, however, the U.S.S. *Belmont* (AGTR 4) and the U.S.S. *Liberty* (AGTR 5) were reconverted Victory hulls and were about fourteen feet longer and slightly more powerful than the *Oxford*, *Georgetown*, and *Jamestown*.

After several shakedown cruises in the Caribbean, the *Belmont* departed for Africa on April 26, 1965, to replace the *Jamestown*. Two days later, however, partway across the Atlantic, the ship received an emergency order to reverse course and proceed to an area just off Santo Domingo and begin monitoring operations. On April 28, presumably to protect American citizens caught in the middle of a sudden rebellion, President Lyndon Johnson dispatched 405 Marines to the Dominican Republic. The *Belmont* arrived two days later, and the following day was ordered to La Romana to evacuate 250 Americans. After some confusion, however, the *Belmont* returned to its operations area without the evacuees. By May 5, the United States had placed 22,289 troops on the island with a new purpose: "to help prevent another Communist state in this hemisphere."

The *Belmont* remained on station off Santo Domingo, monitoring internal and international Dominican communications until July 13, when she returned to her home port, Norfolk. She spent much of the remainder of 1965 and a large portion of 1966 picking up signals off Chile and Peru, and made a brief cruise down the coast of Venezuela in the fall.

At exactly 4:43 on the afternoon of October 17, 1966, while cruising a few miles off the Peruvian coast north of Callao, the *Belmont* began to suffer severe vibrations; they lasted about twenty seconds. The ship was immediately stopped and the crew was sent to general quar-

ters. The enemy, however, turned out to be Mother Nature: the *Belmont* became one of the few ships in history (if not the only one) to find itself 155 fathoms above the epicenter of an earthquake. Although the *Belmont* was not damaged, the city of Callao and the surrounding area suffered heavy destruction.

On February 1, 1967, the *Belmont* steamed out of Norfolk on a long journey that took her down the east coast of South America, through the Straits of Magellan, where she encountered fifteen- to twenty-foot waves, and then slowly past Chile, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, collecting miles of intercepted communications. Finally, on June 9, more than four months and 17,154 miles later, the tired ship pulled into Pier 4 at Norfolk.

Five weeks before the *Belmont* arrived back in home port, her sister ship, the *Liberty*, had sailed out of the same port on its fourth deployment along the West African coast. On May 22 she pulled in to the Ivory Coast capital of Abidjan for what was to be a four-day port call.

But as the spring of 1967 was turning into summer, the focus of G Group's attention rapidly began shifting from Africa to another area of the world. "I do not wish to be alarmist," United Nations Secretary General U Thant cautioned the Security Council on May 19. "But I cannot avoid the warning to the Council that in my view the current situation in the Near East is more disturbing, indeed, I may say more menacing than at any time since the fall of 1956."

The day before, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had ordered the UN peacekeeping force to leave Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Israel refused to allow the force to relocate on its side of the frontier. On May 20, Israeli tanks were reported on the Sinai frontier, and the following day Egypt ordered mobilization of 100,000 army reserves. On the 22nd, Nasser announced the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba and the Israelis followed up the next day by declaring the blockade "an act of aggression against Israel."

Anticipating the possibility of such a crisis, G Group several months earlier had drawn up a contingency plan. It would position the *Liberty* in the area of "LOLO" (longitude 0, latitude 0) in the Gulf of Guinea, concentrating on targets in that area, but actually positioning her far enough north so that she could make a quick dash for the Middle East should the need arise.

But G Group also had to do something about the *Valdez*. After more than four years of patrolling the tropical waters off the east coast of Africa, her bottom had become so encrusted with sea life that her top speed was down to between three and five knots, thus

requiring her to be brought back to Norfolk, where she could be beached and scraped. It was decided to take maximum advantage of the situation and bring the *Valdez* home through the Suez Canal, mapping and charting the radio spectrum as she crawled past the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean. "Now, frankly," recalled Raven, "we didn't think at that point that it was highly desirable to have a ship right in the Middle East; it would be too explosive a situation. But the *Valdez* obviously coming home with a foul bottom and advertising that she was coming home with a foul bottom and pulling no bones about it and being a civilian ship could get away with it."

It took her about six weeks to come up through the canal and limp down the North African coast — past Israel, Egypt, and Libya. But as she got about halfway between Greece and Italy, on May 23, Washington pushed the panic button. Following the announcement of the Egyptian blockade and the buildup of troops on both sides of the border, NSA decided it was time to send the *Liberty* up to the Mediterranean. As was the standard procedure, the request was submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Joint Reconnaissance Center, which would make the final decision and initiate the order. At 8:20 p.m. (EDT) the Pentagon dispatched a flash (highest precedence) message to the *Liberty*, instructing her to get underway immediately for Rota, Spain, where she was to take on supplies and await further orders.

The message was received on the *Liberty* about three and a half hours later, at 3:45^{*} on the morning of the 24th, and by 7:00 a.m. she was steaming east and then north at full speed (seventeen knots).

At NSA, G Group began rounding up all available Arabic linguists and packing them off to back-up listening posts in Greece, Turkey, and other stations around the Mediterranean. "By God," said Raven, "if you could speak Arabic and you were in NSA, you were on a plane."

The need for Arabic linguists was especially critical on the *Liberty*, which, because of her West African targets, carried only French linguists. So six Arabic linguists — three enlisted Marines and three NSA civilians — were flown to Rota to rendezvous with the *Liberty*. Also scheduled to rendezvous in Rota was the *Valdez*, which contained all the critical information on Middle East traffic: "who was communicating on what links — teletype, telephone, microwave, you name it," according to Raven.

* Unless otherwise indicated, all times quoted are U.S.S. *Liberty* time.

On the morning of June 1, the *Liberty* pulled into Rota and took on 380,000 gallons of fuel and a supply of food and dry goods. Already waiting for the ship were the linguists and the teams of SIGINT data from the *Valdez*, which had headed back to Norfolk.

According to the original NSA plan, the *Liberty* was scheduled to depart that same day and steam for the eastern end of the island of Crete, where she would remain "parked." As a result of a hearability study conducted by the *Valdez*, it was determined that, because of what amounted to a "duct" in the air, that particular location off Crete was ideal for eavesdropping on the entire Middle East. "You can sit in Crete and watch the Cairo television shows," said Raven. "If you're over flat water, basically calm water, the communications are wonderful."

Within hours of her arrival at Rota, the *Liberty* had loaded all her fuel, supplies, linguists, and intercept data — but now there was a problem with the ship's unique but troublesome TRSSCOMM system. Short for Technical Research Ship Special Communications (and pronounced triss-comm), the system consisted of a sixteen-foot, dish-shaped antenna mounted on a movable platform and capable of bouncing a 10,000-watt microwave signal off a particular spot on the moon and down either to the receiving station at Cheltenham, Maryland, or to one of the other Navy SIGINT ships. The TRSSCOMM had the advantage of being able to transmit large quantities of intelligence information very rapidly without giving away the ship's location to hostile direction-finding equipment or interfering with incoming signals. But its major disadvantage was that it seldom worked properly.

The problem was with the complex hydraulic systems needed to keep the antenna pointed directly at the moon despite the bucking and rolling of the ship. Activated by an elaborate system of sensors and sophisticated computers, the various hydraulic mechanisms were never quite sufficient to twist and turn the massive dish. Purple fluid would gush from beneath gaskets, and the antenna would become useless. Another disadvantage was that, regardless of the hydraulic system, in order to communicate, both the ship and the receiving antenna had to have a clear view of the moon.

This time the problem was that the shipyard in Norfolk had mistakenly installed low-pressure fittings in the system where high-pressure fittings were called for. Throughout the night a crew on a nearby submarine repair ship put together some new fittings and managed to get the system working, but they warned that the repairs were only temporary.

The following morning the *Liberty* passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and steamed at top speed toward her operational area. Three days later, on June 5, she was passing the south coast of Sicily when Israel lashed out with air strikes against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, annihilating their air forces on the ground while pushing its tanks deep into the Sinai.

At 8:49 on the bright, sunny morning of June 8, the *Liberty* reached what was known as Point Alpha. According to the top secret operational order received when she arrived in Rota, the ship was to proceed not to Crete, but to a point thirteen nautical miles from the eastern coast of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula (Point Alpha), where she would change course to the southwest and begin a slow, five-knot patrol along a ninety-mile dogleg ending at Port Said (Point Charlie), retracing the tract until new orders were received. Because Egypt claimed a territorial sea of twelve miles and Israel only six miles, the *Liberty* was ordered not to approach closer than 12.5 and 6.5 miles to the respective shores.

Nearly ten hours before the *Liberty* arrived off the Sinai, an NSA analyst rushed into the office of G Group chief Raven and asked incredulously, "For God's sake, do you know where the *Liberty* is?" Raven, believing she was sitting off the east end of Crete as originally planned, had barely begun to answer when the analyst blurted out, "They've got her heading straight for the beach!"

"At this point," recalled Raven, "I ordered a major complaint to get the *Liberty* the hell out of there! As far as we [NSA] were concerned, there was nothing to be gained by having her in there that close, nothing she could do in there that she couldn't do where we wanted her . . . She could do everything that the national requirement called for [from the coast of Crete]."

But the Navy, apparently, had other ideas for the *Liberty*. "Somebody wanted to listen to some close tactical program," said Raven, "or communications or something which nobody in the world gave a damn about . . . We were listening for the higher echelons."

Reluctantly, the Navy agreed to pull the ship back. A message was sent from the JCS Joint Reconnaissance Center (JRC) at 6:30 P.M. (EDT) (12:30 A.M., June 8, *Liberty* time), ordering the ship not to approach Egypt closer than twenty miles and Israel closer than fifteen miles. An hour and twenty minutes later an official of the JRC telephoned the duty officer at the Command Center of the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe, directing that the ship proceed no closer to the coasts than 100 nautical miles. This oral order was followed up with a written message dispatched from Washington at

9:10 P.M. (3:10 A.M. *Liberty* time), more than five and a half hours before the *Liberty* reached Point Alpha.

Yet, in what a congressional committee later called "one of the most incredible failures of communications in the history of the Department of Defense," none of those warnings ever reached the *Liberty*. Thus, on reaching Point Alpha, the ship began her slow crawl along the Sinai toward Port Said and the mouth of the Suez Canal.

Throughout much of the morning the *Liberty* had been buzzed by low-flying Israeli reconnaissance aircraft. The boxy, French-built Nord 2501 Noratlas transports were normally used to move cargo and troops. Several, however, had been converted into SIGINT ferrets and were also fitted with lens openings for photo coverage. Resembling the American C-119 "flying boxcar" with its double tail, the aircraft would circle the ship several times and then return in the direction of Tel Aviv. On several other occasions, high-flying jet fighters circled briefly and then departed.

At 1:10 P.M. Commander William L. McGonagle, commanding officer of the *Liberty*, sounded General Quarters. "This is a drill! This is a drill! . . . All hands man your battle stations," he shouted into the ship's general announcing system. The drill, the third in four days, had been prompted by news reports of poison gas being used in the fighting on shore. Although the reports later proved erroneous, the drill offered Commander McGonagle an opportunity to reinforce the seriousness of the almost unseen war, now in its fourth day. Directing the crew's attention to a large fire and tall spirals of thick, black smoke coming from the shore about twenty miles west of El Arish, he insisted that everyone keep his eyes wide open and his mind alert.

By now the war had dissolved into a one-sided slaughter. From the earliest moments of its surprise attack, the Israeli Air Force had owned the skies over the Middle East. Within the first few hours, Israeli jets pounded twenty-five Arab airbases ranging from Damascus in Syria to an Egyptian field, loaded with bombers, far up the Nile at Luxor. In the Sinai, Israeli tanks and armored personnel carriers pushed toward the Suez along all three of the roads that crossed the desert. Then, using machine guns, mortar fire, tanks, and air power, the Israeli war machine overtook the Jordanian section of Jerusalem as well as the west bank of the Jordan River, and torpedo boats captured the key Red Sea port of Sharm El Sheikh. One Israeli general estimated that in the Sinai alone, Egyptian casualties ranged from 7,000 to 10,000 killed, compared with 275 of his own troops.

By Wednesday, June 7, nearly all resistance had been eliminated. Nevertheless, an essential element in the Israeli war plan was complete

secrecy about all details of the true extent of the Israeli penetration into Arab territory as well as the size and scope of its military victories. Vital to the Israeli strategy was the prevention, for as long as possible, of a cease-fire imposed by any of the superpowers. The longer it took to end the war, it was reasoned, the more territory Israel could capture — and Israel still had definite plans for Syria. Thus, "any instrument," wrote American naval historian Dr. Richard K. Smith in the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, "which sought to penetrate this smoke screen so carefully thrown around the normal 'fog of war' would have to be frustrated."

At 1:50, Commander McGonagle secured from General Quarters and checked the ship's position on the radar screen: she was still in international waters fourteen miles off the shoreline of the Sinai. At 2:00 lookouts reported a jet aircraft about five miles off the starboard quarter, cruising at about five thousand feet on a parallel track with the ship.

A moment later, like a bolt of lightning, more jets swooped in from astern, barely clearing the masthead, and the *Liberty* was converted into a seagoing inferno. Deafening explosions rocked the ship, and the bridge disappeared in an orange and black ball. Seconds later they were back — Israeli Mirage and Mystère fighter bombers. Flesh fused with iron as rockets were followed by napalm, which was followed by strafing.

Back they came, crisscrossing the ship almost every forty-five seconds. Designed to punch holes in the toughest tanks, the Israeli shells tore through the *Liberty's* steel plating like bullets through cardboard, exploding into jagged bits of shrapnel and butchering men deep in their living quarters. Then more napalm — silvery metallic canisters of jellied gasoline that turned the ship into a crematorium.

Then, as suddenly as it began, it was over. Scattered along the decks and on the ladders, eight men lay either dead or dying, including both the executive officer and the operations officer. More than a hundred more were wounded, many seriously. Commander McGonagle's right leg was torn wide open by shrapnel.

Gone was the radar and most of the radio equipment, along with the antennas, apparently one of the prime targets. Also destroyed was the critical gyro compass. Perforated by over a thousand holes, more than eight hundred large enough for a man's fist to go through, the bulkheads and decks took on a look of gray Swiss cheese.

In the moments after the attack, sailors lifted mutilated shipmates onto makeshift stretchers of pipe frame and chicken wire, damage control crews pushed through passageways of suffocating smoke and

blistering heat, and the chief petty officer's lounge was converted into a macabre sea of blood-soaked mattresses and shattered bodies.

At 2:24, minutes after the air attack, horror once again washed over the crew as three Israeli motor torpedo boats were sighted rapidly approaching the ship in attack formation. A signal flashed from the center boat but was obscured by the smoke. The air strikes had destroyed the *Liberty's* signaling lamps, making a return message impossible, in any event.

Suddenly the boats opened up with a barrage of fire from 20-mm and 40-mm guns. One armor-piercing bullet shammed through the ship's chart house and into the pilot house, coming to rest finally in the neck of a young helmsman, killing him instantly. Three other crewmen were slaughtered in this latest shower of hot lead.

Now the Israelis were ready for the kill. "Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side!" Commander McGonagle shouted into the announcing system. At 2:31 a torpedo passed off the stern, and a moment later a second struck the *Liberty* forward of her starboard side, immediately below the waterline — the precise location of the ship's SIGINT spaces.

BOOM!!! In an instant a forty-foot hole opened in the side of the ship, and twenty-five more Americans, mostly highly skilled technicians attached to the Naval Security Group, were either blown to bits or drowned as the black sea rushed in and flooded the compartment.

Now dead in the water, the *Liberty* began to list to starboard as the French-built, sixty-three-ton torpedo boats began to circle, firing at men attempting to extinguish fires. At 3:15, following a "prepare to abandon ship" order, one sailor located three of the last surviving rubber life rafts and, after securing them with heavy line, dropped them over the side in the event of a final order. Seeing this, the Israelis mercilessly opened fire, peppering two of the boats with holes and cutting the line on the third. When it drifted past their torpedo boat they pulled it aboard, apparently as a grotesque souvenir of their cold-blooded massacre.

A few minutes later, more than an hour after the attack began, the three forty-two-knot torpedo boats turned and raced in the direction of their base at Ashdod. Almost at the same moment, as if awaiting official orders to begin the final act of the bloody drama, two jet fighters once again appeared off the stern, and two large Israeli Hornet assault helicopters, loaded with armed troops, hovered on either side of the wounded ship. "Stand by to repel boarders!" came the shouted order over the *Liberty's* loud-speakers, but after several tense minutes

the four aircraft departed as mysteriously as they had arrived, leaving the *Liberty* to descend slowly into her watery grave.

But the *Liberty* was not yet ready to die. During the height of the assault, radiomen had patched together enough equipment and broken antennas to get a distress call off to the Sixth Fleet. Despite intense jamming by the Israelis, the transmissions reached their destination, and four "ready" F-4 Phantom jets of the U.S.S. *America*, cruising near Crete, catapulted into the air toward the *Liberty*, four hundred miles to the east. But as ready aircraft, the four apparently carried only nuclear weapons, and a short time later were recalled on orders of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.

Crew members of the *America*, as well as the carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga*, which was cruising nearby, then began the time-consuming process of off-loading the nuclear armament and switching to conventional bombs and rocket pods. Conversion completed, four F-4B Phantoms armed with Sparrow and Sidewinder missiles, along with four A-4 Skyhawks carrying Bullpup missiles tucked under their wings, scrambled off the deck of the *America* while four piston-driven Douglas A-1 Skyraider bombers with a fighter cover shot off from the *Saratoga*. Included in the pilots' orders was the authorization "to use force including destruction as necessary."

Shortly after the Sixth Fleet swung into a crisis mode, a fact that would have been readily apparent to any Israeli traffic analysts monitoring the sudden, sharp increase in U.S. fleet communications, the Israeli government launched a diplomatic offensive aimed at convincing Washington that the attack had been a mistake. At about 4:10 the Israelis informed the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv that its defense forces had "erroneously" fired on a U.S. ship off the Sinai, and sent its apologies. Four minutes later the information was flashed to Washington and the Sixth Fleet, which immediately recalled the fighters and bombers.

At 4:32, words of ultimate terror again rang through the *Liberty*. "Aircraft and torpedo boats approaching, starboard side. Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side." Panic immediately broke out in the makeshift hospital set up below the main deck. Men who were treating the injured, recalling the destruction of the earlier torpedo, clambered up the ladder, and those they were treating yanked loose IV tubes and reopened ugly wounds in a mad scramble not to be left to die. Seeing the pandemonium, Lloyd Painter, a junior officer who was himself injured, took command of the situation and managed to return the men and restore relative calm.

But the jets zoomed by overhead without incident, and the torpedo

boat 2041 *Tahmas* appeared to be attempting to communicate with its signal lamp. The message, however, made no sense, and finally the Israeli commander shouted over a bullhorn in English: "Do you need assistance?" Commander McGonagle, enraged, gave his quartermaster an appropriate response to relay back to the *Tahmas*, one the Israelis were not likely to find in their phrase book.

Another attempt to contact the *Liberty* was made at 0641, when an Israeli Sikorsky helicopter appeared overhead and dropped a message package to the deck. Inside was the card of Commander Ernest C. Castle, the U.S. naval attaché at the American embassy in Tel Aviv, with the note: "Have you casualties?" The answer could have been found by looking down at the rivers of blood crisscrossing the deck and the two bodies still lying in full view near machine-gun mount 51. An attempt was made to reply with the Aldis lamp, but the message was apparently not understood, and after about ten minutes the machine departed.

Despite a forty-foot hole in her twenty-two-year-old skin, a heavy list to starboard, most of her equipment destroyed, thirty-two of her crew dead and two thirds of the rest wounded, a dead executive officer, and a commanding officer whose life blood was overflowing his shoe, the *Liberty* was heroically brought back to life and slowly made her way toward safer waters.

Throughout the long night, propped up in a chair on the port wing of the bridge, Commander McGonagle continued to conn his ship, using the North Star ahead and the long wake behind for direction. Shortly after dawn, the *Liberty* rendezvoused with the American destroyers *Davis* and *Massie*, and, after eighteen continuous hours on the bridge, the weary skipper finally headed to what was left of his cabin.

Helicopters soon arrived and began lifting scores of wounded to the deck of the *America*, where the more seriously hurt were transported by plane to Athens and then to the naval hospital in Naples. Commander McGonagle, however, remained with the ship until she docked in Malta. After she spent five weeks in drydock for temporary repairs, he sailed her back across the Atlantic to Pier 17 at the Little Creek amphibious base near Norfolk, arriving on July 29.

On June 9, the day after the attack, the Israeli government presented its explanation of the incident to the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv. It claimed that the 10,380-ton, 455-foot *Liberty* had been mistaken for the thirty-eight-year-old Egyptian troop transport *El Quseir*, a 2640-ton, 275-foot coastal steamer designed to hold four hundred men and forty horses.

Yet before the attack, the *Liberty* had been under close Israeli surveillance for more than six hours. On four occasions, specially converted aircraft packed with SIGINT gear and photo equipment made low circles over the ship, sometimes coming as low as two hundred feet and barely skimming the masthead. On two other occasions, jet fighters flew over the ship and circled several times.

Given the extent of that surveillance, it would seem utterly inconceivable that the Israelis could have confused the *Liberty* for the *El Quseir*. The superstructure of American SIGINT ships, bristling with antennas and a large microwave moon-bounce dish, was totally unlike anything in the Egyptian Navy, or almost any other navy in the world, for that matter. Also unmistakable were the giant "GTR 5" identification symbols painted on her bow and the sides of her stern, each in white accentuated by black shadowing. Only ten days before the attack, the nearly ten-foot numeral "5" on the *Liberty's* bows had received a fresh coat of white paint. Also, the *Liberty* wore her name on her stern in English, not in the Arabic script of the Egyptian naval vessels. Likewise, it was not Arabic communications that the Israelis skillfully managed to jam, but English.

And then there was the flag. Five feet tall and eight feet across, the standard size 9 ensign was flapping gently in nine-to-twelve-knot winds during most of the morning, plainly visible atop the huge tripod-shaped foremast that towered nearly a hundred feet above the flying bridge. Yet despite the fact that the flag was continually checked each time there was an overflight, the Israelis limply claimed that the ship was not flying a flag when sighted. This became true only after the Israeli Air Force shot it down. And then in its place, at least five minutes before the torpedo boat took aim, the huge seven-by-thirteen-foot holiday ensign was raised.

Israel, boasting one of the most successful intelligence services in the world, the Mossad, could hardly have been unaware that the *Liberty* was an American SIGINT ship. It is even more unlikely that the Mossad, on the eve of war, did not know that the ancient *El Quseir* was, in fact, rusting alongside a pier in the port of Alexandria, 250 miles from where the *Liberty* was attacked, where she remained throughout the entire Six Day War.

"The Israeli government," former *Liberty* officer James M. Ennes, Jr., noted in his book, *Assault on the Liberty*, "must have been desperate for a scapegoat to have singled out *El Quseir*. The entire Egyptian Navy consists of a few converted Soviet and British destroyers, frigates, and submarines, some minesweepers, several boats, two yachts, and a single transport — *El Quseir* . . . No one could pretend that *Liberty*

was mistaken for a destroyer, a submarine, or the former royal yacht, so she would simply have to be mistaken for the *El Queen*, which was, after all, the only scapegoat around."

Dr. Richard Smith agreed. "Indeed," he wrote in his analysis of the attack on the *Liberty*, "it is likely that the Israelis just picked out the Egyptian ship which most resembled the *Liberty*, even though this was a remarkable exercise in imagination."

If, as the overwhelming evidence seems to indicate, the Israeli explanation was manufactured and the attack was both premeditated and deliberate, what could have been the reason for such a ruthless assassination? One possibility is that the *Liberty* was attacked precisely because of what she was: a floating eavesdropping factory that was penetrating Israel's smoke screen and capturing on magnetic tape the telltale battle whispers of a lopsided war.

Far more threatening to Israel than a tub full of foot soldiers and a herd of horses were the *Liberty's* sleeve monopoles and parabolic reflectors, her YAGIs and log periodics, the strange antennas and the men with their bulging earphones. Did senior Israeli officials fear that captured signals would indicate that the war was not started by Egyptian land and air forces moving against Israel, as Israel had originally claimed, but by a belligerent Israel itself?

It may have been just a coincidence that the final thrust of the war, the invasion of Syria, originally scheduled to take place on Thursday, June 8, was suddenly postponed as the *Liberty* steamed into the eastern Mediterranean. Or that the often faulty TRSSCOMM had just begun transmitting to Washington a few moments before the initial air strike against the ship. Or that the first targets attacked, after the four token .50-caliber machine-gun mounts were wiped out, were the antennas — cutting TRSSCOMM communications in mid-sentence. Or that the torpedo happened to hit precisely between frames 53 and 66, the number two hold, which contained the SIGINT spaces. Or that the postponed Syrian invasion finally took place less than twenty-four hours after the last shots were fired into the *Liberty*.

Or they may not all have been coincidences.

Nearly as bizarre as the attack itself was the reaction of the American government to the incident. A foreign nation had butchered American servicemen, sending thirty-four to their graves and more than a hundred others into hospitals and later, possibly, psychiatric wards. A virtually unarmed American naval ship in international waters was shot at, strafed with rockets, torpedoed, set on fire with napalm, then left to sink as crazed gunners shot up the life rafts. The foreign nation

then says, sorry about that, and offers an explanation so outrageous that it is insulting, and the American government accepts it, sweeps the whole affair under a rug, then classifies as top secret nearly all details concerning it.*

Curiously, among those details were several intelligence reports that directly contradicted the Israeli claims. According to a July 27, 1967, CIA report, a confidential informant, presumably within the Israeli government itself, stated that there was no question that the Israelis knew what the ship was prior to the attack and implied that the attack was no mistake:

He said that "you've got to remember that in this campaign there is neither time nor room for mistakes, which was intended as an obtuse reference that Israel's forces knew what flag the *Liberty* was flying and exactly what the vessel was doing off the coast. [The source] implied that the ship's identity was known at least six hours before the attack but that Israeli headquarters was not sure as to how many people might have access to the information the *Liberty* was intercepting. He also implied that there was no certainty or control as to where the information was going and again reiterated that Israeli forces did not make mistakes in their campaign. He was emphatic in stating to me that they knew what kind of ship U.S.S. *Liberty* was and what it was doing offshore.

Corroboration of this report appeared several months later when other confidential sources stated unequivocally that the attack was deliberate and had been ordered personally by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan:

* On April 28, 1969, almost two years after the attack, the Israeli government finally paid \$3,566,457 as compensation to the wounded crewmen of the *Liberty*. This was obtained, however, only after the men retained private counsel to negotiate with a team of top, Israeli-hired, Washington lawyers. A substantial portion of the claim, therefore, went to lawyers' fees. (Richard K. Smith, "The Violation of the *Liberty*," *United States Naval Proceedings* [June 1978], p. 70.)

Ten months earlier, the Israelis issued a check to the U.S. government for \$3,325,000 as settlement to the families of the thirty-four men killed during the attack. (Department of State press release, May 13, 1969.)

Finally, the U.S. government asked a token \$7,644,146 for Israel's destruction of the ship, even though \$20 million had been spent several years earlier to convert her into a SIGINT ship and another \$10 million had gone for the highly sophisticated hardware.

Despite the modest amount requested, the Israeli government refused to pay. By the winter of 1980, the interest on the original figure had reached \$10 million, and Israeli ambassador Ephraim Evron, following the American elections, suggested to outgoing Vice President Mondale that if the United States dropped the \$7.6 million down to \$6 million and eliminated the interest entirely, his country might be willing to pay the more-than-thirteen-year-old claim. President Jimmy Carter agreed, and in December accepted the \$6 million, absolving Israel of any further damages. (Bernard Gwertzman, "Israeli Payment to Close the Book on '67 Attack on U.S. Navy Vessel," *New York Times* [December 19, 1980], pp. A1, A4.)

[The sources] commented on the sinking [sic] of the U.S. Communications ship *Liberty*. They said that Davan personally ordered the attack on the ship and that one of his generals adamantly opposed the action and said, "This is pure murder." One of the admirals who was present also disapproved the action, and it was he who ordered it stopped and not Davan.

Whatever the truth may be, it is clear that the incident, a most violent act of terrorism committed against the United States government, deserves to be more fully explained by both governments.

Two years before the attack on the *Liberty*, in the spring of 1965, plans were underway for a third generation of spook ships. Although by now the United States already had seven in its eavesdropping fleet, these were all directed against strategic targets — inland governmental, commercial, and military communications — and were responsible almost exclusively to the NSA.

For years this situation had been a sore spot for the Navy, long used to sharing command with no one when it came to matters of the sea. Therefore, when the NSA began laying plans for the civilian ships *Fulder* and *Muller*, the Navy quickly fired off a salvo of protests and insisted that all future SIGINT ships be traditional naval vessels manned by naval crews.

But now the Navy had become little more than seagoing chauffeurs and hired hands for the NSA, permitted to go after its own targets only when doing so could not in any way interfere with the primary mission — monitoring NSA's targets. Thus, when it came to its own SIGINT operations, primarily against foreign naval signals, the Navy had to stick its analysts in awkward, antenna-covered mobile vans, place them aboard destroyers and destroyer escorts, and then pull the ships out of normal service to patrol slowly along distant coasts. It was a highly inefficient operation, combining the minimum collection capacity of a crowded steel box with the maximum costs of using a destroyer to cart it around.

The destroyers and escorts were also very provocative. Where few nations would notice an old, converted supply ship slowly cruising up and down a shoreline, they would have ample reason to be alarmed if it was an American warship. The destroyers *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were cruising on just such missions, known as "DeSoto patrols," in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964 when they were allegedly attacked by enemy torpedo boats, an incident that led to the first U.S. bombing of North Vietnam.

Among those most troubled by this situation was General Carter's nemesis, Dr. Eugene G. Fubini, then fifty-one, an assistant secretary of defense and also the deputy director of Defense Research and Engineering. As the Pentagon's electronic spy chief, he had been particularly concerned about the Soviet Union's extensive fleet of about forty SIGINT trawlers, which would not only loiter off such sensitive areas as Norfolk and Cape Kennedy, but frequently would tag along with American naval forces operating in the Mediterranean and Pacific.

"These trawlers were following our fleet," Fubini once recalled, "bothering us, listening to us, copying everything we said. They knew our tactics and the technical parameters of our equipment. They probably knew more about our equipment than we did. So I began to wonder: Why can't we take a leaf from their book? Why can't we do the same thing? If we could mingle with them, we'd know what they were up to."

Fubini's idea for an American version of the Russian spy fleet was readily acceptable to Admiral David L. McDonald, the chief of Naval Operations, who was well acquainted with the problem from his previous assignment as commander of the U. S. Sixth Fleet. On April 20, 1965, Fubini and McDonald sat down with Vice Admiral Rufus L. Taylor, director of Naval Intelligence, and Rear Admiral Frederic J. Hattinger II, assistant director for Collection for the Defense Intelligence Agency, and discussed the various ways to approach the problem.

Originally, Fubini's dream was on the grandest of scales. He envisioned the program broken down into three phases, the first two of which called for thirty reconverted "tuna boats," at a cost of about \$1 million each. The third phase would add forty more, these built from scratch. Once the dream passed through the sobering reality of the budget process, however, phase one and two had been slashed to three ships, and phase three was cut to a dozen, or fifteen at most. At the same time, the idea of using tuna boats was scrapped because they were considered too light for the heavy SIGINT equipment. Instead, AKIs (for Auxiliary Cargo Light), tiny tramp steamer, some smaller than many tugs, were substituted.

A few days after the meeting, a feasibility study was initiated, resulting, about six weeks later, in a two-phase recommendation. First, the Navy would start off with one ship operating in the Western Pacific, then add two more ships in the same area about a year later. If these two missions were successful, the Navy could then proceed to build a small flotilla of the ships for use in trouble spots around the world.

The plan quickly received the approval of Fubin's boss, Harold Brown, the director of Defense Research and Engineering, as well as Cyrus R. Vance, the deputy secretary of defense.

Chosen as the maiden vessel for the Navy's spy fleet was the U.S.S. *Banner*, a humble little craft that had spent most of her life bouncing from atoll to atoll in the Mariana Islands and was now on her way back to the United States to retire in mothballs. At 937 tons and 176 feet, the twenty-one-year-old ship was a dwarf compared with the 10,680 tons and 455 feet of the *Liberty*.

Throughout much of August and September, the *Banner* underwent modifications at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, transforming her into AGFR-1, for Auxiliary General Environmental Research, a euphemism for a third-generation seaborne listening post.* On October 1, a brief seven weeks after she entered the yard, the *Banner* steamed out of Bremerton directly to Yokosuka, Japan, arriving seventeen days later for the initiation of her first patrol.

Code-named Operation Checkmate, the *Banner's* mission called for a series of four- to six-week patrols in the Sea of Japan to "conduct tactical surveillance and intelligence collection against Soviet naval units and other targets of opportunity," according to her top secret orders, which continued:

C. Upon sailing for patrol station, *Banner* will check out of the movement report system, and will proceed to her assigned patrol areas in strict electronic silence. Silence will be maintained until *Banner* is detected and comes under surveillance by Soviet bloc forces, at which time *Banner* will break silence and submit periodic reports. When surveillance of *Banner* by Soviet bloc forces ceases, *Banner* will resume electronic silence.

D. Upon arrival in the assigned patrol areas, *Banner* will be authorized freedom of movement within her assigned patrol areas to monitor lucrative Soviet naval deployments or exercises.

The order also contained a number of restrictions, including the warning to the ship to "remain a minimum of one mile outside the Soviet bloc-claimed territorial waters, a total distance of thirteen miles."

After arriving at Yokosuka, the *Banner* departed almost immediately on her first patrol, a hazardous mission scheduled to take her within four miles of Siberia's Cape Povorotny Bay. For many years the Soviet

* The AGFR designation actually took effect on June 1, 1967. Prior to that she was designated AKL-44 (Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, OPNAV Notice 5090, "Reclassification of Naval Ships," May 8, 1967.)

- Manned by a crew. On January 5, 1965. In 1966 the SIGINT ship Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, OPNAV Report 5705-4, *U.S.S. Georgetown, Annual Revision of Ship's History*, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967. Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives.
- 215-216 As the *Georgetown* concentrated. Two and a half months later *U.S.S. Jamestown* (AGTR-3), letter with enclosure, "Submission of Ship's History, 1964," January 1, 1965. *U.S.S. Jamestown*, "Familygram," June 26, 1966, pp. 1-8. Both in Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives.
- 216 After several shakedown: *U.S.S. Belmont* (AGTR-4), letter with enclosure, "Submission of Annual Historical Report of Ship's Operations," 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives. *U.S.S. Belmont*, Cruise Book, 1966, Naval Historical Center, Naval Library.
- The *Belmont* remained on station. At exactly 4:43. On February 1, 1967. *Ibid*.
- 217 Five weeks before *U.S.S. Liberty* (AGTR-5), letter with enclosure, "Submission of Command History, 1967," March 11, 1968.
- "I do not wish to be" Robert J. Donovan and the staff of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Israel's Fight for Survival* (New York: New American Library, 1967), p. 71.
- "an act of aggression" *Ibid*, p. 158.
- Anticipating the possibility. Raven interview.
- But G Group also had to. "Now, frankly". It took her about. *Ibid*.
- 218-219 At 8:20 P.M., On the morning of June 1. Department of the Navy, Office of the Judge Advocate General, *Court of Inquiry Report on the U.S.S. Liberty*, June 18, 1967, Summary of Proceedings and Transcript of Testimony.
- At NSA, G Group began, "By God". The need for Arabic. According to the original. Raven interview.
- 219 "You can sit". *Ibid*.
- Within hours of her arrival. The problem was. This time the problem: James M. Ennes, Jr., *Assault on the Liberty* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 21-22, p. 21 note 1.
- 220 At 8:49. *Court of Inquiry Report*.
- "For God's sake", "At this point". Raven interview.
- But the Navy. *Ibid*.
- Reluctantly, the Navy. *Court of Inquiry Report*.
- 221 "one of the most". U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Armed Services Investigating Subcommittee, *Review of Department of Defense Worldwide Communications, Phase I, Report*, 92nd Cong. 1st Sess., May 10, 1971.
- Throughout much of the morning: *Court of Inquiry Report*.
- One Israeli general Donovan, p. 124.
- 222 "any instrument". Dr. Richard K. Smith, "The Violation of the *Liberty*," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* (June 1978), pp. 63-70.
- At 1:50, Commander McGonagle. All details of the attack from *Court of Inquiry Report*.

James M. Ennes, Jr. Research Papers