

ASSAULT ON THE USS LIBERTY: DELIBERATE ACTION OR TRAGIC ACCIDENT?

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ASSAULT ON THE USS LIBERTY: DELIBERATE ACTION OR TRAGIC ACCIDENT?

The USS Liberty was an unarmed electronic intelligence gathering vessel operating in international waters off the Sinai Peninsula on 25 May 1967. It was attacked by Egyptian forces but received no aid from American aircraft. This paper will explore the conditions at the time, what happened, what the Liberty's command staff was ordered to do, and other facts together from both sides and historians of the war. It will also attempt to provide a perspective on the incident from the Liberty. While personal testimony from those directly involved is included, it is not intended to be a definitive account of what happened. The author is not a military officer and is not a member of the military. The author is not a member of the military.

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The USS *Liberty* was an unarmed electronic intelligence gathering naval vessel patrolling in international waters off the Sinai Peninsula in 1967. It was abruptly attacked by Israel but received no aid from American aircraft in the area. This paper will explore geopolitical conditions at the time, what happened, what the American and Israeli official response was, and bring other facts together from both interviews with surviving crew and memoirs of senior government officials to attempt to develop a complete picture of events related to the USS *Liberty*. While personal testimony from those directly involved in the incident indicates Tel Aviv may have deliberately targeted the American ship, the question of whether the attack was intentional or the result of a "perfect storm" of command and control failures on both sides, remains unresolved.

ASSAULT ON THE USS LIBERTY: DELIBERATE ACTION OR TRAGIC ACCIDENT?

I know nothing about [the USS Liberty]. I don't want to say I didn't at the time, but today I have no knowledge of it.

—Robert McNamara

Forty years have passed since that clear summer day on 8 June 1967 when Israel attacked the USS *Liberty* with aircraft and torpedo boats, killing 34 young American men and wounding 171. Was the USS *Liberty* attacked intentionally? Tragic accidents have happened to every military force in the history of modern warfare, however, many reasonable people have not been able to accept nor fully understand Israel's attack as such an accident. Based upon the coordinated effort involving air, sea, and command and control, one must question if this attack was nothing less than intentional. Worse, the Israeli government's version of the attack disagrees with the eyewitness recollections of survivors. Key American leaders call the attack deliberate. More important, a key eyewitness participant from the Israeli side has told survivors that Israel knew they were attacking an American ship. This paper will cite the conditions of the time and explore US and Israeli official responses along with interviews of surviving crew members. This attack was most likely deliberate for reasons far too sensitive to be disclosed by the US and Israeli government and that the truth may never be known.

The Cold War Environment and the Middle East

The Cold War between the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) provided the backdrop and set the conditions in which the assault on the USS *Liberty* occurred. The US had developed and continued to maintain strong relations with Israel; the USSR had done the same with Arab nations who are the majority in the strategically important oil-rich Mid-East region. In the late 1960s, the US considered its relationship with Israel as part of a broader regional policy that supported the political independence and territorial integrity of all Middle Eastern states as critical to US national interests.¹ Only five years earlier, the US stood its ground against the USSR during the Cuban Missile Crisis, in which US reconnaissance imagery verified that a Soviet nuclear missile installation was being built in Cuba. This was, among other things, a violation of the Monroe Doctrine that had supplied a mandate for American Presidents to oppose European military encroachment in the Americas since the 1830s.

President John F. Kennedy upheld the principles of the Monroe Doctrine and forced the world to stop and take notice of this new development on the international stage by challenging the Soviet Union with US nuclear strike capability and naval power. Over the next 14 days the

confrontation went from hot to cold and back again, but in the end, the Soviet Union backed down. Soon, Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was removed from office by the Central Committee of the party and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, who pushed the USSR into a major warship construction program with the objective of gaining Soviet command of the seas and the capacity to project power capable of opposing that which was displayed by the US.

Over time, limited superpower naval confrontations followed. Large numbers of Soviet vessels - including the USSR fleet of intelligence collection ships - would shadow US warships and intentionally interfere with and collect intelligence on US operations, particularly in the Mediterranean. Often Soviet or US destroyers would steer on a collision course with their adversaries in a crazy game of "chicken." Ships bumped in many instances. This escalating and extremely dangerous game eventually led to the *1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement*. While both sides continued this insane game on a more limited basis, the agreement called for the following steps to avoid collision and control behavior at sea:

- Not interfering in the "formations" of the other party;
- Avoiding maneuvers in areas of heavy sea traffic;
- Requiring surveillance ships to maintain a safe distance from the object of investigation so as to avoid "embarrassing or endangering the ships under surveillance;"
- Using accepted international signals when ships maneuver near one another;
- Not simulating attacks at, launching objects toward, or illuminating the bridges of the other party's ships;
- Informing vessels when submarines are exercising near them; and
- Requiring aircraft commanders to use the greatest caution and prudence in approaching aircraft and ships of the other party and not permitting simulated attacks against aircraft or ships, performing aerobatics over ships, or dropping hazardous objects near them.²

For example, just prior to the attack on the USS *Liberty*, and while operating in the Mediterranean, the Commander of the US Sixth Fleet had to send a message to a Soviet missile frigate that was interfering with the fleet's freedom of maneuver by maintaining a less than safe distance:

Your actions for the past five days have interfered with our operations. By positioning your ship in the midst of our formation and shadowing our every move you are denying us the freedom of maneuver on the high seas that has been traditionally recognized by seafaring nations for centuries. In a few minutes the

task force will commence maneuvering at high speeds and various courses. Your present position will be dangerous to your ship, as well as the ship of this force. I request you clear our formation without delay and discontinue your interference and unsafe practices.³

The highly controversial and unpopular Vietnam conflict was ongoing at the time. In fact, on 2 June 1967 US Air Force fighter-bombers accidentally attacked the Soviet merchant ship *Turkestan* in Cam Pha Harbor in North Vietnam--just when Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin was set to arrive to deliver a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The hope was Kosygin and President Lyndon Johnson could come to some type of agreement for nuclear de-escalation while he was in the US.⁴ While in Leningrad, an American diplomat and his wife were spat on by an incited mob;⁵ President Johnson had a great desire to win Jewish American support for the Vietnam conflict and maintain the strategic relationship built by President Kennedy at all costs.⁶

The rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East is described at length in Michael B. Oren's book, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Full-scale war broke out on 5 June 1967 when Israel sent almost its entire fleet of 250 fighter-bomber aircraft to destroy Egypt's Air Force in less than two hours. Many Arab leaders charged the US with supplying the attack aircraft to Israel, even when they knew otherwise.⁷ Syria and Iraq signed a military pact to work together and Iraq followed with an agreement to place troops under Egyptian command.⁸ Prior to the attack, the Soviets distributed false reports of Israeli military forces deployed along the Syrian border – perhaps a Soviet move to improve or expand their position with Arab countries in the Middle East.⁹ Many years later, writing in *On Moscow's Orders*, Captain Nicolai Shashkov tells of his orders to be prepared to fire eight P-6 (SS-12) nuclear missiles at the shores of Israel if the Soviet high command determined that the US and Israel were attacking Syria – an ally and friend of the USSR. Captain Shashkov goes on to say:

I received an oral instruction from the Commander-in-Chief of the USSR Navy, Fleet Admiral Gorshkov to 'be ready to make a rocket strike on the coast of Israel.' Of course, this was only in the event of the Americans and Israelis launching a beachhead in friendly Syria. In fact, it was there near the shores of Syria; that was my main positioning area.¹⁰

Within the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), there were undercurrents of frictions as well. When the war broke out, Israel's Air Force had 65 state-of-the-art Mirage fighter jets, 35 Super Mystère, 35 Mystère Mark IV's, 50 Ouragans, 20 Vatour light bombers, 45 Fougas, and a cadre of well trained and operationally focused pilots. By contrast, the Israeli Navy had only three obsolete destroyers, nine motor torpedo boats [called MTB] (three of the nine deployed in the Red Sea), and other miscellaneous small craft. Israeli inter service rivalries were blatant and

unhealthy.¹¹ Aharon Yifrach, an officer in the Motor Torpedo Boats unit who felt the pressure to get the Israeli Navy into the fight, told us:

On the first night of the 1967 War, the Israel Navy inserted six naval commando teams [known in Israel as "frog men"] into various Arab ports...The Navy became concerned about their safety and sent MTB Division 914 to help extract them. [914 is same MTB unit that attacked the USS *Liberty*] They were withdrawn but in the milling around, one MTB collided with another, making a hole in its bow about the size of a dinner plate... The Air Force had destroyed all the Arab air forces and controlled the skies. The armor had conquered the Sinai and were dipping their feet in the Suez Canal. The paratroopers had captured the entire West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israeli troops were praying at the Western Wall. And the Navy – we had made a hole in one of our own boats. We were anxious to get into action.¹²

The Cold War, Soviet expansionism, Arab mobilization, deployment of Arab forces, the Jordanian-Egyptian Treaty, the closure of the Strait of Tiran, and Israeli inter service rivalries – are all major themes in a developing tragedy worthy of Shakespeare. By May of 1967 the script was written, the actors were on stage in the theater, and the conditions were set for a great disaster scene.

Timeline of Events Leading to the Attack on the USS Liberty (All Times Shown as Sinai Time Zone):

On 23 May 1967, the *Liberty*, a US National Security Agency (NSA) intelligence vessel, was ordered to take a position 13 miles off Port Said, Egypt. Such ships often sailed off various coasts to listen, record signal emissions, chart their sources' locations, and gather any data of political or military use in the Cold War. Frank Raven, an NSA civilian employee, did not support the deployment of the USS *Liberty* into a potential war zone. But his lone voice of dissension was overruled by the leadership and the order was sent to get underway.¹³ On 24 May 1967,



USS Liberty
455 feet in length, 10,680 tons displacement

Figure 1: USS Liberty

as the *Liberty* began steaming 3,000 nautical miles from the Ivory Coast to the Straits of Gibraltar, the Cairo newspapers reported that Egypt had mined the Straits of Tiran.¹⁴

On 27 May 1967, US Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., ordered US Sixth Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Martin, not to operate aircraft within 100 nautical miles of Egypt's coast. When the *Liberty* arrived in Rota, Spain, linguists trained in Arabic and Russian reported aboard. None assigned to the ship spoke Hebrew.¹⁵

On 31 May 1967, the USS *Liberty* arrived in Rota, Spain. There the vessel came under operational control of US Commander in Chief for Europe, General LL Lemnitzer, who passed operational control to his functional subordinate Commander in Chief US Naval Forces Europe (CINCUSNAVEUR).¹⁶ With orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff relayed by the Commander in Chief for Europe, USS *Liberty* was ordered to deploy on 2 June to operational area 3 (12.5 nautical miles to the UAR (Egypt) and 6.5 nautical miles to Israel). The USS *Liberty* departed Rota, Spain, on a course paralleling the North African coast.¹⁷

On 6 June 1967, Israel destroyed more than 150 Egyptian tanks in the Sinai and captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. Nasser broke diplomatic relations with the US and closed the Suez Canal. The UN Security Council voted unanimously for a cease-fire. Among the warring nations of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Israel, Jordan alone accepted it. Six Israeli demolition team divers were captured in Port Alexandria. Syria shelled a number of communities on Israel's northern border.¹⁸

Enroute to operational area 3, the USS *Liberty* conducted shipboard operational and technical training events in preparation for collection against its main collection objective -- the situation between Israel and UAR. The mission was further clarified by Commander in Chief US Naval Forces Europe to Commander Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral William L. Martin, on 3 June when Martin was told that the USS *Liberty's* mission was to conduct an "extended independent surveillance operation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Sixth Fleet might be called upon to provide logistics and other support."¹⁹

On 5 June 1967, war broke out and Israel attacked the United Arab Republic (UAR). Commander and Chief US Naval Forces Europe sent a message to the Commander Sixth Fleet to take note of some 20 Soviet warships and auxiliary vessels and an estimated eight or nine Soviet submarines moving into the Eastern Mediterranean. The Commander in Chief US Naval Forces Europe directed the Sixth Fleet Commander to keep his ships and aircraft at least 100 nautical miles away from the coast of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and the UAR and at least 25 nautical miles away from Cyprus. These directives did not provide specific instructions to the USS *Liberty*.²⁰ When the USS *Liberty's* ship captain, Commander William L. McGonagle, heard

that war had broken out, he immediately requested from Commander Sixth Fleet a destroyer escort that could protect the USS *Liberty* and serve as an auxiliary communications center.²¹

On 6 June, Commander Sixth Fleet replied to the Commander USS *Liberty* that the ship was clearly marked and in international waters and not a participant in the conflict; therefore, the request for escort support was denied. However, he reassured Commander McGonagle that if anything occurred he could have aircraft from the Sixth Fleet overhead and providing protection within ten minutes.²²

Early on 7 June, due to the area hostilities, the Commander Sixth Fleet directed the USS *Liberty* to report all threatening actions via flash precedence. For some unknown reason, the USS *Liberty* did not receive this message.²³ The USS *Liberty* was underway off the coast of the UAR, approaching operational areas two and three. The Commander and Chief US Naval Forces Europe authorized the Commander Sixth Fleet to assume operational control of the USS *Liberty* on 7 June, in order "to facilitate area command and control and any possible requirement for protection during the Middle East hostilities and pointed out that the USS *Liberty's* schedule might be revised for safety reasons as dictated by the local situation."²⁴ The USS *Liberty* acknowledged receipt of the Operational Control or OPCON change effective 7 June 1967.

Joint Chief of Staff transmitted a message to Sixth Fleet requesting verification of their location and assurance that aircraft were not within 200 miles of the UAR, Syria, or Israel. This concern was possibly due to the successful Israeli drive into UAR territory and earlier allegations by the UAR of direct US involvement with Israel to include intelligence gathering²⁵ and air attack support against the UAR. Commander Sixth Fleet replied in the negative; the only communications he had with Israel had been to establish a radio voice communications link with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv.²⁶

In light of the UAR allegations of US complicity with Israel, Israel's successful operational push into UAR territory and the number of Soviet warships in the vicinity, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the US Chief of Naval Operations decided to move the USS *Liberty* to a position 100 nautical miles off the coast of Israel, UAR, and Syria and 25 nautical miles from Cyprus late on 7 June 1967. This message was conveyed vocally by MAJ Breedlove of the Joint Reconnaissance Center directly to the command center US Naval Forces Europe, indicating a formal message would follow from the Joint Chief of Staff.²⁷ Due to a number of policy and communication issues, the Sixth Fleet and the USS *Liberty* never received this message. The USS *Liberty* continued on course remaining in international waters at all times and flying the American flag in clear view.²⁸

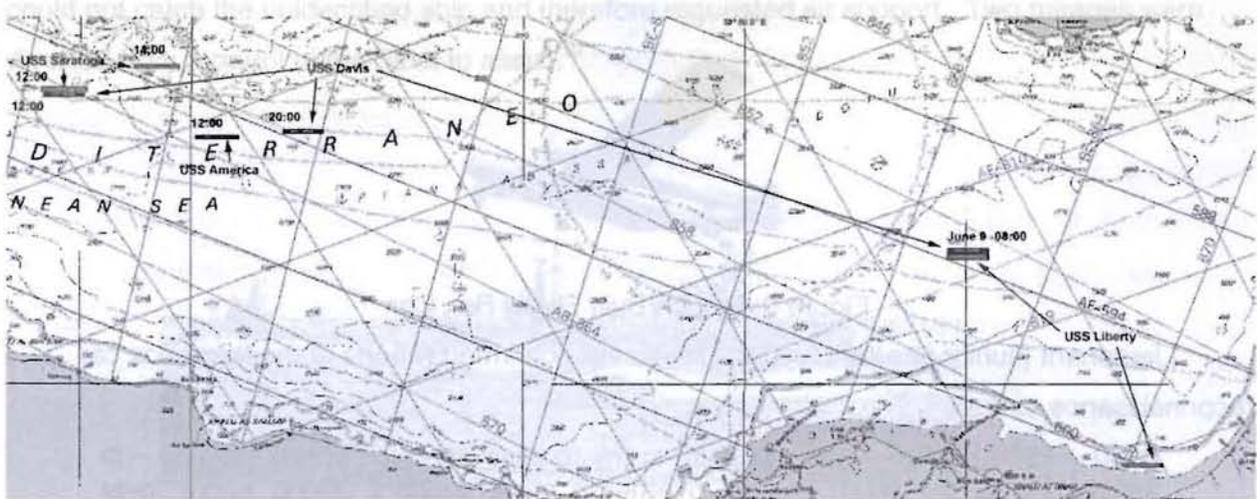


Figure 2: Location of USS Liberty Relative to Sixth Fleet Assets

On the morning of 8 June, the USS *Liberty* had taken up a position just outside Egypt's territorial waters, operating between al-'Arish and Port Said "in a lane rarely used by commercial traffic and which had been declared off-limits to neutral shipping by Egypt."²⁹ Due to the situation between Israel and UAR, increased Israeli maritime reconnaissance patrols were initiated in order to detect sea faring vessels prior to their entry into the Israeli coastal radar system. At approximately 0600, the first of eight Israeli reconnaissance aircraft were noted by the USS *Liberty* crew. During the first over flight, the Israeli observer communicated to Israeli Naval HQ a "US Navy cargo type ship" with markings of GTR-5 was located just outside Israeli coastal radar coverage. This information was forwarded to the Israeli navy intelligence directorate. Later in the morning, using *Jane's Fighting Ships*, the Israelis established the identity of the ship as the USS *Liberty*.³⁰ Once the USS *Liberty* was identified, staff officers at Israeli HQ in Haifa changed the label from red (unidentified) to green (neutral) on the plot board.

Although there were eight reconnaissance flights, the Israeli pilots were focused on possible Egyptian submarines which had been spotted off the coast.³¹ The USS *Liberty* crew reported to Sixth Fleet a reconnaissance aircraft circling the ship three times around 0900. The crew was not able to identify the plane. Again, at 1056 an aircraft circled the ship and was later identified as a French-built Noratlas NORD 2501, piloted by the Israeli Air Force.³² The crew of the USS *Liberty* assumed the reconnaissance flights were Israeli as they originated and returned in the direction of Israel.³³



Figure 3: French Built Flying Box Car

Lieutenant (Junior Grade) Lloyd Clyde Painter confirmed reports of the flying box car reconnaissance aircraft:

0800 – 1200 Hours - I was assigned to my regular duties on board the ship – in spaces below the water line. I overheard crewmembers talking about “over flights” that morning. I went topside to check it out. When I reached the bridge area, I saw a slow moving “flying box car” with the Star of David visible on the plane. I felt secure, as the Israelis were our allies.³⁴

Over ninety percent of Israel's population and industry was located along the shores of the Mediterranean. The Israeli Navy was significantly weaker than the Egyptian naval force, being outnumbered four to one. The Egyptians also had the support of over 70 Soviet naval vessels. For some time, the Israelis had requested a naval liaison with the Americans, but this request was ignored. Although the Sixth Fleet was a counterweight to the Soviet vessels, Israel had no way of contacting the Sixth Fleet directly. Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, General Yitzhak Rabin, warned the US naval attaché “the United States should either acknowledge its ships in the area or remove them...All unidentified vessels sailing at over twenty knots – a speed attainable only by gunboats – would be sunk.”³⁵

The USS *Liberty* continued its course off the Gaza strip at approximately five knots.³⁶ At 1100 hours, the Israeli staff officer completed his duty shift and, in accordance with the Israeli procedures, removed the USS *Liberty* from the control board. It was assumed anything older than five hours had left the area.³⁷

At 1124, an explosion occurred at an ammunition dump near the beaches of al-'Arish. At the time, the Israelis believed it was Egyptian shelling from two vessels observed off the coast. Due to the vulnerability of the coast, General Rabin was adamant to sink any unidentified ship in the war zone but advised caution not to target Soviet vessels.³⁸

At 1205, three torpedo boats were dispatched to find the vessel responsible for the presumed shelling of the beaches at al-'Arish. At 1341, they found the unidentified ship. They miscalculated the speed of the ship at 30 knots. At this speed, the torpedo boats realized they

could not catch the unidentified ship and therefore requested air support. Two mirages were diverted from a patrol of the Sinai to assist.³⁹



Figure 4: Israeli Motor Torpedo Boats

Scenario of the Attack

Lloyd Painter confirms the dispatch of the torpedo boats:

1200 – 1300 Hours - I was assigned to Bridge Duty as Officer of the Deck (OOD). From the bridge, I again observed the slow flying Israeli aircraft circle our ship. At approximately 1255 hours, I also checked the radarscope and saw three surface (Naval) contacts with a steady bearing decreasing range approaching our ship [USS *Liberty*] at a high rate of speed. I notified the Captain.⁴⁰

At 1400 hours, both mirages attacked the *Liberty* with 30mm cannon and 36 rockets.⁴¹ The ship was unprepared and suffered intense damage. The USS *Liberty* crew could not see any markings on the attacking aircraft. The ship attempted to contact Sixth Fleet for assistance but found the communication frequencies jammed except for the few seconds the rockets were in-flight to the target. A message for help went out and was received by the USS *Saratoga* and relayed to the flagship USS *Little Rock*. Commander of Sixth Fleet, ADM William Martin, ordered both the USS *Saratoga* and the USS *America* to immediately launch American aircraft in defense of the USS *Liberty*.⁴² The USS *Saratoga* was able to do this within minutes but the USS *America* was not prepared to launch immediately. After the aircraft had departed, for many reasons – some unclear, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and President Lyndon B. Johnson directed Commander Sixth Fleet to immediately return the aircraft to base.⁴³

After the Israeli Mirages expended their ordinance, the *Mystères* continued the attack with rockets, cannon fire, and napalm.⁴⁴

Fifteen years after the attack, an Israeli pilot approached *Liberty* survivors and then held extensive interviews with former Congressman Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey about his role. According to this senior Israeli lead pilot, he recognized the *Liberty* as American immediately, so informed his headquarters,

and was told to ignore the American flag and continue his attack. He refused to do so and returned to base, where he was arrested.⁴⁵

Minutes into the first attack a few members of the *Liberty* crew saw a periscope pop up from under the water.⁴⁶

Israeli Account: The *Mystères* pilots realized the ship did not return fire and became suspicious. They attempted to identify the ship but saw no flag. Then, they did see the markings C-T-R-5 and realized Egyptian warships were almost always identified with Arabic lettering. This information was radioed to the command center and the *Mystères* left the vicinity. General Rabin was concerned the ship was Soviet, not American, meaning Moscow could now intervene in the war.⁴⁷

USS Liberty crew account: More aircraft joined the attack after the *Mystères* napalm attack.⁴⁸ During the attack, Commander McGonagle realized the American flag had been shot down and ordered the largest flag on board to be hoisted on the yardarm as the main halyard had been destroyed.⁴⁹ At 1424, the surface attack began with three torpedo boats closing in with 20mm and 40mm machine guns firing.⁵⁰ At 1434, the boats began launching five torpedoes, with one striking mid-ship. Again, the *USS Liberty* sent a distress message which the *USS Saratoga* received.⁵¹ Crew on the *USS Liberty* observed the torpedo boats purposely firing on the launched inflated lifeboats – this act was clearly a war crime.⁵² Due to this, the Captain had to rescind the order to abandon ship.⁵³ During the attack, Commander McGonagle believed he saw an Israeli flag on the boats. The torpedo boat attack continued until after 1500 hours.

At 1450, the Sixth Fleet Commander sent an unencrypted message to the *USS America* and *USS Saratoga* to launch fighters to come to the assistance and protection of the *USS Liberty* with orders to destroy any hostile threat against the US naval vessel.⁵⁴ At 1516, the directive was implemented with instructions to “destroy or drive off any attackers who are clearly making attacks on the *USS Liberty*. Remain over international waters. Defend yourself if attacked.”⁵⁵ The aircraft would be on the scene at approximately 1715 hours.⁵⁶

Approximately 1515, two Israeli helicopters circled the *USS Liberty* twice. The Star of David insignia was clearly visible. *Israeli Account:* The mission of the helicopters was to identify the ship’s origin and search for any survivors. The first helicopter did not see anyone or any markings; but the second helicopter saw the American flag and reported to the Air Force command center.⁵⁷ The *USS Liberty* crew saw soldiers dressed in full combat gear and assumed the helicopters’ personnel would attempt to board and take control of the vessel.⁵⁸ The helicopters were later identified as “French-built Aerospatiale SA321 Super Frelons

(Hornets) ... designed for heavy assault and antisubmarine operations. This model is the largest helicopter made in France and can carry thirty armed troops; it has a boat-type hull and stabilizing fins to permit amphibious operations."⁵⁹ After circling the ship, both helicopters departed and did not attempt communications or landing of crew with the ship.



Figure 5: French-built Aerospatiale SA321

From 1536 to approximately 1645, the Israeli torpedo boats were again in the area several times without signal or action.⁶⁰ At 1549, President Johnson was informed of the attack on the USS *Liberty*.⁶¹ At 1600 hours, the US Naval Attaché, Commander E.C. Castle, was called to the Foreign Liaison Office, Israel Defense Force, and informed of the attack on the USS *Liberty* made in error. This message was immediately forwarded to the White House, Department of State, and others.⁶² When the commander Sixth Fleet saw Castle's transmission of the Israeli error, he immediately recalled the strike force back to USS *Saratoga* and USS *America*.⁶³ At 1729 hours, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a message cancelling the authorization of force and learned the Sixth Fleet Commander had already issued a recall order.⁶⁴ All aircraft were recounted for by 1849 hours.

Aftermath of the Assault in International Waters

At 1645 hours, Walt Rostow, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, informed President Johnson of the accidental attack on the USS *Liberty* by Israel. Immediately a "hot line" message was drafted for the Kremlin. The following was received in Moscow at 1724 hours:

We have just learned that USS *Liberty*, an auxiliary ship, has apparently been torpedoed by Israel forces in error off Port Said. We have instructed our carrier, *Saratoga* in the Mediterranean to dispatch aircraft to the scene to investigate. We wish you to know that investigation is the sole purpose of this flight of aircraft, and hope that you will take appropriate steps to see that proper parties are informed. We have passed this message to Chernyakov [Soviet Charge d'Affaires] but feel that you should know of this development urgently.⁶⁵

At 1810 hours, a helicopter with Commander Castle on board departed Tel Aviv and proceeded to the USS *Liberty*. The helicopter approached the USS *Liberty* at 1835 but was unable to land due to obstructions on deck and the speed of the *Liberty*. Castle delivered a message to the USS *Liberty* stating who he was and asking if there were casualties. Using the Aldis lamp, the USS *Liberty* affirmed casualties but was not sure if Commander Castle understood. Castle received the message but was unsure the number of casualties – whether four or forty.⁶⁶

At 1910 hours, he returned to the US Embassy. At 2300 hours he contacted General Getty at the National Military Command Center in Washington DC with an assessment of the current situation.⁶⁷ Evidence of a US clandestine submarine mission operating in the vicinity of the USS *Liberty* was confirmed in documents at the LBJ Library.⁶⁸ Prior to the attack, an unknown contact had been noted on the USS *Liberty*'s plotting boards on June 4, 5, and 7 with a penciled X. This contact was on an intercept course with the USS *Liberty* on the 5th and had merged with the *Liberty* on the 7th. At this point, the plotting was erased and discontinued.

LT James Ennes questioned LT James O'Connor about the contact. He said "he didn't know." LT Ennes interpreted that answer as he didn't have a need to know.⁶⁹ As we have noted, during the attack a submarine periscope was seen. After the attack, one of the injured crew members at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital met a man with the USS *Liberty* patch on his uniform and asked him "were you there?" He stated he was there but aboard a submarine, and that their submarine took pictures of the attack. After the book *Assault on the Liberty* was published, other crew members came forward and reconfirmed the account. However, information or pictures from this submarine remain unavailable possibly due to their classified nature.⁷⁰

Within 24 hours, Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander-in-Chief, Naval Forces Europe, orally directed Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, President of the Court, to complete the investigation within one week.⁷¹ A formal letter followed on 10 June 1967.

The one week deadline was unusual for an incident of this magnitude. Both Admiral Kidd and Captain Ward Boston, Jr., Senior Counsel to the USS *Liberty* Court of Inquiry, estimated a proper investigation would take six months.⁷² At the completion of the inquiry, the court record was classified Top Secret.⁷³

Interpretation of Events

Over the years, since the USS *Liberty*'s attack, viewpoints of what individuals and governments believe to have occurred remain in dispute. These differences generally fall into

two camps. The first camp believes the unfortunate incident was due to the fog and friction of war, causing the USS *Liberty* to be mistakenly identified as an Egyptian vessel. The second camp believes the attack on the USS *Liberty* was a well-planned and coordinated operation by the Israeli Defense Forces.

The Israeli government has consistently stated the USS *Liberty* was a tragic accident. The fear of an Egyptian attack from the sea compounded with the explosion at al-'Arish, set the events into motion.⁷⁴ The torpedo boats miscalculated the speed of the ship at 30 knots which would classify it as a war ship. The torpedo boats' top speed was 36 knots. When the torpedo boats called in air support, the Mirages didn't see any ship identifications and proceeded with an air strike. More air support arrived and continued the strike with rockets, cannon, and napalm. One of the aircraft identified the ship markings as GTR-5 and immediately realized the vessel was not Egyptian as Egyptian ships were normally marked with Arabic lettering not Latin. The air strike was cancelled.

The torpedo boats were ordered to stop the attack and remain at a safe distance. This message was documented in the log book of the torpedo boat, but the mission commander claimed to have never received it. The crew of the torpedo boats determined the enemy vessel to be the *El Quseir*.⁷⁵ Since the USS *Liberty* was returning machine gun fire, the torpedo boat continued the assumption that the vessel was hostile and launched a series of torpedoes with one striking the ship. Israel then sent helicopters to confirm the identity of the ship; made aware of the tragic mistake,⁷⁶ they immediately contacted the US Naval Attaché in Tel Aviv.⁷⁷

Many people who were witnesses to the events that day, or were involved in the aftermath, disagree with Israel's position of mistaken identity. They argue that many of the details are not consistent with what they saw occur, or that the overwhelming data and circumstantial evidence do not support the concept of mistaken identity, or both. The notion that the torpedo boats miscalculated the speed does not make sense as this supposedly occurred at 1341. At that time, the torpedo boats were beyond their maximum radar range and could not possibly have picked up the USS *Liberty*. Therefore, it would have been impossible to calculate any speed since the USS *Liberty* was not even on radar.⁷⁸

The attack on the USS *Liberty* was sudden and powerful – the aircraft did not take the time to identify the ship.⁷⁹ If it had, the American flag and the markings GTR-5 would have been clearly visible, as it was to the earlier maritime reconnaissance flight that morning. The weather was sunny and clear with a good breeze.⁸⁰ Later in the attack, the original 5x8-foot flag was destroyed and replaced immediately with a holiday 9x15-foot flag.⁸¹ Furthermore Dwight Porter,

US Ambassador to Lebanon, saw a transcript of an intercepted Israeli message given to him by the CIA station chief:

Israeli planes had been given the order by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) to attack the *Liberty*, but a pilot replied that it was an American ship. The order was repeated, but the pilot still insisted that he could see the American flag. He was then told harshly that he had his orders: "attack it."⁸²

After the book, *Assault on the Liberty* was published; a former Israeli Air Force pilot contacted James M. Ennes, a survivor of the *Liberty* and the author of the book. He recounted his experience to Ennes and later, he interviewed extensively with former Congressman Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey. He was a pilot in the lead Mirage aircraft. He saw the American flag and informed his headquarters. He was ordered to continue the attack but refused to do so. When he returned to base, he was arrested. However, the other pilots executed the attack.⁸³

The Israelis claim the marker for the USS *Liberty* was removed from the plot board during the duty shift change as it had not been updated since the 0600 observation. This doesn't seem plausible given the fact there were eight reconnaissance flights prior to the 1400 assault. The Israelis state they were focused on submarines⁸⁴; however, a reconnaissance flight is just that. The Israeli Air Force was well regarded and it seems unlikely they would not make note of the ship on their reconnaissance flights.

The torpedo boat pilots guessed the identity of the ship to be the *EI-Quseir*. This Egyptian transport vessel is similar in silhouette but has many differences with the USS *Liberty*. The *Liberty* is 200 feet longer, covered with antennas, and has a state-of-the-art parabolic satellite dish.⁸⁵ Perhaps there could have been a mistake, but based on the distance of the patrol boats to the USS *Liberty* it's questionable.



Figure 6: USS Liberty and EI Quseir Size and Profile Comparison

When the helicopters approached, the crew saw the size and type of helicopter filled with combat dressed soldiers and assumed the ship would be boarded. One of the crew yelled, "They've come to finish us off."⁸⁶ However, the Israeli helicopters only passed by the ship several times with no hostile maneuvers and no attempt to communicate. Some crew later speculated the helicopters' mission was changed from an attack mission to observation and

return to base after hearing the unencrypted message from Sixth Fleet ordering deployment of attack aircraft to defend the USS *Liberty*. According to this logic, the helicopters attack mission was cancelled after their mission to destroy the USS *Liberty* was compromised. Now that the US was aware the vessel was under attack and would learn shortly that it was an Israeli attack, Israel chose a cover story for the incident and "mistaken identification" was given as the reason. Israel then contacted the US Naval Attaché in Tel Aviv.

The details of the battle also lend credence to the concept of a deliberate attack. The original US flag was destroyed but replaced with a much larger flag. Several crew members described the deliberate destruction of life boats, conveying the message that there would be no survivors. The lifeboat incident was not included in the publicly released court of inquiry.⁸⁷ The timing and execution of the attack was well coordinated with the *Mystères* arriving immediately after the *Mirages* expended their ammunition. The torpedo boats followed the *Mirages* and heavily fired upon the already burning ship.

The conduct of the board of inquiry was disconcerting as well. A thorough investigation of this matter would have taken at least six months to conduct; however, the Johnson administration clearly gave Admiral Kidd one week to complete the entire investigation. This suggested that the investigation didn't have a high priority, raising uncomfortable questions about its seriousness. Much was accomplished in one week, but due to the time limitations and the fact that many of the witnesses were injured and evacuated to US Naval vessels and land-based medical facilities; the court was only able to interview 14 of the 260 surviving members of the crew.⁸⁸

Another 60 witness declarations from hospitalized crew members could not be included as evidence.⁸⁹ After reviewing evidence, Admiral Kidd and Captain Boston felt the necessity to interview Israeli members involved in the incident. However, Admiral Kidd was adamantly told by Admiral McCain "we were not to travel to Israel or contact the Israelis concerning this matter."⁹⁰ Although both Admiral Kidd and Captain Boston were convinced the attack was deliberate, Admiral Kidd was ordered by President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to conclude that the attack was a case of "mistaken identity."⁹¹ Admiral Kidd told Captain Boston when he returned from Washington D.C., "he had been ordered to sit down with two civilians from either the White House or the Defense Department and rewrite portions of the court's findings."⁹² The report was rapidly processed through official channels and classified Top Secret.⁹³ Admiral Kidd was told to caution everyone involved in the incident never to speak of it again.⁹⁴

Years later, when the document was declassified and released by the US government, more questions arose after Captain Boston received a copy. He distinctly remembers testimony on the intentional destruction of the lifeboats as being recorded into evidence. However, the document released to the public does not include this information. The copy Captain Boston certified in June of 1967 had many handwritten corrections and initials. The released version had none. The original had no deliberately blank pages--the released version did.⁹⁵

Many senior government officials who served during June 1967 have expressed the view the USS *Liberty* incident was deliberate and not an accident. Among them is the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency at the time, Richard Helms, in his book *A Look Over My Shoulder*. Helms recalls:

I had no role in the board of inquiry that followed, or the board's finding that there could be no doubt that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing in attacking the *Liberty*. I have yet to understand why it was felt necessary to attack this ship or who ordered the attack.⁹⁶

Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, writes in his book *As I Saw It*:

I was never satisfied with the Israeli explanation. Their sustained attack to disable and sink the *Liberty* precluded an assault by accident or by some trigger happy local commander. Through diplomatic channels we refused to accept their explanations. I didn't believe them then and I don't believe them to this day. The attack was outrageous.⁹⁷

Clark M. Clifford, Counsel to President Johnson, states in his book *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*:

I do not know to this day at what level the attack on the *Liberty* was authorized and I think it is unlikely that the full truth will ever come out. Having been for so long a staunch supporter of Israel, I was particularly troubled by this incident; I could not bring myself to believe that such an action could be authorized by Levi Eshkol. Yet somewhere inside the Israeli government, somewhere along the chain of command, something had gone terribly wrong – and had been covered up. I never felt the Israelis made adequate restitution or explanation for their actions....⁹⁸

Although the official inquiry might have stated it was "mistaken identity," years after the incident it was apparent no one involved with the incident believed that assessment.

If the Attack was Deliberate, Why?

Several reasons have been espoused for the attack. Was Israel trying to inhibit the US ability to collect intelligence on possible war crimes being committed? Reports of a massive Egyptian POW execution persist, but no hard evidence of such has been found.⁹⁹ Could Israel have been so concerned with Soviet alliances with neighboring Arab states and Soviet military

forces deployed in the region, that they concocted a plan to attack a US naval vessel with the intent that the blame would fall on Egypt?

If the US believed Egypt attacked a US Navy ship, that action would cement the firm and direct involvement policy with Israel that they were seeking, because in the late sixties the US policy was to support the "political independence and territorial integrity of all Middle Eastern states."¹⁰⁰ But a US/Israeli alliance could also create a regional and possible global confrontation between the US and the USSR. Would Israel want to be at the epicenter of that confrontation? Remember Captain Nikolai Shashkov's mission to conduct a rocket strike into Israel if the 'Americans and Israelis' attacked into Syria.

Or did Israel not want the US to know the full extent of their military objectives, which might have included the total invasion of Syria? If Israel perceived the USS *Liberty* to be collecting intelligence on their intent to invade and secure Syria, perhaps they felt the necessity to eliminate that intelligence and therefore, the USS *Liberty*. However, on 1 June 1967, a senior Israeli official did inform Richard Helms, the Director of the CIA, that a pre-emptive strike against Israel's Arab neighbors was imminent and Israel did not want to lose the advantage of surprise.¹⁰¹

Israel did little to hide their intentions in either the Golan Heights or their progress in the Sinai.¹⁰² Therefore, if Israel thought the USS *Liberty* was gathering intelligence on the war, why did Tel Aviv freely give the Director of CIA information prior to the start of the war or continue to report their progress? None of the reasons stand up to scrutiny. If Israel never admits the attack on the USS *Liberty* was deliberate, we will probably never know the reason why.

Why would the US assist in Israel's cover-up?

Perhaps author Wilbur Crane Eveland, former covert operator and advisor to the CIA was correct when he wrote in his book *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East*:

Even moves by Congress to stop all aid to Israel until seven million in compensation for the *Liberty* was paid, succumbed to White House and Department of State pressure. Why? Defense Minister Dayan had stated his government's position bluntly: unless the United States wishes the Russians and Arabs to learn of joint CIA – Mossad covert operations in the Middle East and of Angleton's discussions before the 1967 fighting started, the questions of the lost American ship and how the war originated should be dropped.¹⁰³

In 1980, Senator Adlai Stevenson III coordinated an effort with Senator Barry Goldwater to investigate the events surrounding the attack. The wheels were in motion for an official inquiry by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Suddenly, Israel reversed their decision and offered to pay six million dollars in damages on the ship – something they had refused to

consider for the past thirteen years as the incident was considered an American blunder. After the agreement was signed by President Carter, Senator Stevenson could not find support for a congressional investigation and the issue was dropped. Were these two events related or was this just a coincidence?¹⁰⁴ And in this connection it is well worth asking what role, if any, did the fear American politicians have of the Israel Lobby in the US play? The power of this lobby to influence US foreign policy on the Middle East region was well documented by two distinguished American scholars [John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt essay] at Harvard and the University of Chicago – in their recent study *The Israel Lobby*.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Since this event occurred almost forty years ago, much personal testimony has surfaced regarding the incident. Based on the testimony of many eyewitnesses and the memoirs of senior government officials, the attack on the USS *Liberty* was most likely deliberate. Unfortunately, this issue may go to the grave unresolved unless the US government and the government of Israel release all data related to the incident. Perhaps forty years ago at the height of the cold war and with fears of major Soviet expansion into the Middle East, the information regarding the USS *Liberty*, the unknown subsurface contact (submarine), and the intelligence collecting aircraft (EC121) that were supposedly not there, would have been too sensitive to disclose.¹⁰⁶ However, now that the Cold War is long over and the global conditions have changed, the US and Israeli governments should release all pertinent information and conduct an official inquiry. There is no discernable national security rationale for continuing to keep these records secret. Only when they are finally released for careful scrutiny can we finally close the book on this unfortunate and tragic naval incident.

Endnotes

¹ Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 378.

² Agreement Between the Government of The United States of America and the Government of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas, available from www.state.gov/t/ac/trt/4791.htm#treaty; internet; accessed 31 March 2007.

³ A. Jay Cristol, *The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 2002), 3.

⁴ Cristol, 4.

⁵ Cristol, 5.

⁶ Policy Analysis: Ancient History: U.S. Conduct in the Middle East Since World War II and the Folly Of Intervention, available from <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-159.html>; internet; accessed 10 April 2007. [In Donald Neff's book *Warriors for Jerusalem: Six Days That Changed the Middle East*, goes on to say, "As the Vietnam war heated up and Johnson's popularity cooled, the Jewish American-Israeli connection became increasingly important to him. Administration officials spent considerable amounts of times trying to enlist Jewish American support for the war-which many Jews violently opposed-by extending support to Israel.]

⁷ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 171.

⁸ Cristol, 14-15.

⁹ Rusk, 384.

¹⁰ Nikolai Cherkashin, "On Moscow's Orders," *Russian Life*, October 1996, 13 and Christopher Mitchell, dir., *Dead In the Water*, 60 min., Source Films for British Broadcasting Corporation, 2002, DVD.

¹¹ Oren, 171.

¹² Cristol, 7.

¹³ Cristol, 12-13 and James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency* (United States: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2001, 2002), 197-198. [NSA Analyst, Frank Raven said: "She (USS Liberty) could do everything that the national requirement called for [from the coast of Crete]. Somebody wanted to listen to some tactical program or some communications or something which nobody in the world gave a damn about – local military base, local commander. We were listening for the higher echelons.... Hell, you don't want to hear them move the tugboats around and such, you want to know what the commanding generals are saying, 198." Frank went on to file a complaint with his leadership in order to get the USS Liberty out and to a safe collection position.]

¹⁴ Ibid, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid, 14.

¹⁶ William D. Gerhard and Henry W. Millington, *Attack on a Sigint Collector, the U.S.S Liberty* (Fort Meade, MD: National Security Agency/ Central Security Service, 1981), 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17 -18.

¹⁸ Ibid, 16.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ The Story of the USS *Liberty*, available from http://judicial-inc.biz/USS_Liberty.htm; internet; accessed 13 March 2007.

²² The Attack on the USS Liberty and Its Cover Up. available from http://www.ifamericansknew.org/us_ints/ul-akins.html; internet; accessed 1 March 2007. (This is a transcript of a speech delivered by Former Ambassador James Akins at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine in September 1999.) and James M. Ennes, Jr., e-mail message to author, 30 March 2007. Ennes' recollection and that of his boss, Dave Lewis (Commander, USN, Retired), but Ennes has never seen copies of messages confirming that exchange. Ennes participated in the drafting of the request, and thinks it was handled on CRITICOMM circuits, which is probably why it never showed up on general service or fleet traffic messages.

²³ Gerhard and Millington, 20.

²⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁵ Mitchell, DVD.

²⁶ Gerhard and Millington, 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ The Attack on the USS *Liberty* and Its Cover Up. p2.

²⁹ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 263.

³⁰ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, available from <http://www.USSLiberty.org/report/report.htm>; internet; accessed December 10, 2006. (This report was submitted by the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association, Inc. to the Secretary of the Army in his capacity as Executive Agent for the Secretary of Defense, June 8, 2005.) and Oren, 263.

³¹ Ibid., 263 – 264.

³² Gerhard and Millington, 25.

³³ The National Security Agency/ Central Security Service report *Attack on a Sigint Collector, the USS Liberty*, states that it was impossible to see identifying markings on the aircraft. However, in an e-mail from James M. Ennes, Jr. the Officer on Deck the USS *Liberty* at the time, clearly remembers seeing the Star of David under the wings. It was Lt. Toth who drafted the reporting message and not Ennes, therefore, the information may not have been included in the original message.

³⁴ Lloyd C. Painter, personal letter from Mr. Painter to Mr. Gary Brummett both surviving members of the attack on the USS *Liberty*; provided to author on 23 March 2007 from Commander Mark A. Stroh, USN of the US Army War College. The original signed letter was dated 18 April 2005. Information was confirmed during telephone interview on 13 March 2007, with surviving members James Ennes, Dave Lewis, Gary Brummett and Phillip Tourney.

³⁵ Oren, 264.

³⁶ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, 4.

³⁷ Oren, 264.

³⁸ Ibid, 264.

³⁹ Ibid 265.

⁴⁰ Lloyd C. Painter, personal letter from Mr. Painter to Mr. Gary Brummett both surviving members of the attack on the USS *Liberty*; provided to author on 23 March 2007 from Commander Mark A. Stroh, USN of the US Army War College. The original signed letter was dated 18 April 2005.

⁴¹ The Story of the USS *Liberty*.

⁴² A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, 5-7.

⁴³ James M. Ennes, Jr., *Assault on the Liberty* (United States: Reintree Press, 2004), 304 and RADM (Ret) Merlin Staring, Former Judge Advocate General of the Navy, telephone interview by author, 20 April 2007. RADM Staring related a story of how RADM Lawrence R. Geis, commander of the carrier task force protested the decision of Robert McNamara on providing air support to the USS *Liberty*. RADM Geis, requested to talk with McNamara's superior – President Johnson came on the communication link and told Geis to return the aircraft back to the fleet and "that he didn't care if the ship sunk, he would not embarrass his allies."

⁴⁴ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, 5.

⁴⁵ USS *Liberty* – Israeli Pilot Speaks Up, 14 July 2003, available from <http://www.rense.com/general39/pilot.htm>; internet; accessed 17 February 2006.

⁴⁶ Ennes, 64.

⁴⁷ Oren, 266.

⁴⁸ Ennes, 69 and *The Attack on the USS Liberty and Its Cover-Up*, 3.

⁴⁹ Gerhard and Millington, 28.

⁵⁰ The Story of the USS *Liberty*.

⁵¹ Gerhard and Millington, 29.

⁵² *The Attack on the USS Liberty and Its Cover-Up*, 3 and Painter. In Painter's letter he states:

I personally observed an Israeli MTB [Motor Torpedo Boats] methodically machine gun one of the *Liberty's* empty life rafts that had been cut loose and was floating in the water. I knew at that split second that the thrust of the IDF attack was to kill every American sailor on board. There were to be no survivors that day.

⁵³ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, 7 and LtCdr (RET) James M. Ennes, Jr., surviving member of the USS *Liberty*, telephone interview by author, 13 March 2007

⁵⁴ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, 8.

⁵⁵ Gerhard and Millington, p31.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Audio Recording Transcripts (In English), available from <http://www.nsa.gov/Liberty>; internet; accessed 21 March 2007. (Declassified intercepted transcripts of audio communications between Israeli helicopters and Israeli headquarters.) and Cristol, 58.

⁵⁸ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, June 8, 1967, 9.

⁵⁹ Ennes, 96.

⁶⁰ Gerhard and Millington, 31.

⁶¹ Cristol, 61.

⁶² Gerhard and Millington, 32.

⁶³ Ennes, 99.

⁶⁴ Cristol, 64, 243.

⁶⁵ Gerhard and Millington, 32.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 34 and James M. Ennes, e-mail message to author, 30 March 2007. That "message" was written on Castle's calling card and was dropped on the forecastle in a brown paper lunch bag weighted with an orange from someone's lunch. The card eventually found its way to NSA where someone pocketed it and years later gave it to Dave Lewis who gave it to James Ennes for use in his book, *Assault on the Liberty*.

⁶⁷ Cristol, 60.

⁶⁸ Ennes, 305 and Mitchell, DVD.

⁶⁹ Ennes, 36, 38, 42, 64.

⁷⁰ Ennes, 64, 305 and Bamford, 208.

⁷¹ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, 14.

⁷² Ward Boston, Jr., signed affidavit from Ward to USS *Liberty* Veterans Association, Inc. and other parties, dated 8 January 2004. Copy of this declaration was provided to author from James M. Ennes, Jr. on 23 March 2007.

⁷³ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, 16 and James M. Ennes, Jr, e-mail message to author, 31 March 2007. ("*Liberty's* mission was indeed top secret, Top Secret Codeword, but as always with such things there was an unclassified "cover" [Unclassified cover name] mission which was something like "Research in Communications". I'm sure that was the rationale for covering up everything concerned with the attack, but I'm also sure that was not the "real" reason... I think you have read that some of the people directly involved with intercept have told me that they were told to avoid copying Israeli signals. "If you get an Israeli signal, note it and drop it." They say they were MOST interested in Soviet signals from Soviet long range bombers in Egypt. Yet my boss, Dave Lewis, says we're there to copy anything we could get. Dave should know. But the operators and translators were doing the nitty gritty work, and they say their advice from NSA was to concentrate on Soviets and ignore Israel (and Arabs)."

⁷⁴ Oren, 264.

⁷⁵ Oren, 269.

⁷⁶ Oren, 266, 267.

⁷⁷ Gerhard and Millington, 32.

⁷⁸ Ennes, e-mail.

⁷⁹ The Attack on the USS *Liberty* and Its Cover-Up, 2.

⁸⁰ Cristol, 38 and USS *Liberty* – Israeli Pilot Speaks Up, available from www.rense.com/general39/pilot.htm; internet; accessed on 13 March 2007.

⁸¹ The Attack on the USS *Liberty* and Its Cover-Up, 4. [Dan Raviv an award-winning CBS correspondent and Yossi Melman, a 1989-90 Nieman Fellow at Harvard discuss in their book *Every Spy a Prince*, on page 162: When they saw the U.S. flag, "the Israelis thought it was probably the Egyptians pretending to be Americans and did not bother to check."]

⁸² Ibid, 6.

⁸³ Ennes, 309 and USS *Liberty* – Israeli Pilot Speaks Up, available from www.rense.com/general39/pilot.htm; internet; accessed on 13 March 2007.

⁸⁴ Oren, 264.

⁸⁵ Cristol, 153-154.

⁸⁶ Ennes, 96.

⁸⁷ Boston, 3.

⁸⁸ Clarence A. Hill, Jr. RADM, Letter to The Honorable Gordon England, Secretary of the Navy, dated 27 July 2005 forwarded to author by James M. Ennes on 23 March 2007.

⁸⁹ Boston, 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Boston, 2 and RADM Staring. RADM Staring related to author that Admiral Kidd felt as if the White House and Senior Department of Defense officials did not want to hear the facts as they related to the USS Liberty.

⁹³ A Report: War Crimes Committed Against US Military Personnel, 15.

⁹⁴ Boston, 3.

⁹⁵ Boston, 3 and RADM Staring.

⁹⁶ Richard Helms with William Hood, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2003), 301.

⁹⁷ Rusk, 388.

⁹⁸ Clifford Clark with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Random House, 1991), 447.

⁹⁹ Ennes, 312 and Bamford, 201-203.

In *Body of Secrets*, Bamford writes: As the Liberty sat within eyeshot of El Arish, eavesdropping on surrounding communications, Israeli solidiers turned the town into a slaughterhouse, systematically butchering their prisoners. In the shadow of El Arish mosque, they (Israel) lined up about sixty unarmed Egyptian prisoners, hands tied behind their backs, and then opened fire with machine guns until the pale desert sand turned red. [I saw a line of prisoners, civilians and military,] said Abdelsalam Moussa, one of those who dug the graves, [and they opened fire at them all at once. When they were dead, they told us to bury them.] Nearby, another group of Israelis gunned down thirty more prisoners and then ordered some Bedouins to cover them with sand. In still another incident at El Arish, the Israeli journalist Gabi Bron saw about 150 Egyptian POWs sitting on the ground, crowded together with their hands held at the backs of their necks. [The Egyptian prisoners of war were order to dig pits and then army police shot them to death,] Bron said. [I witnessed the executions with my own eyes on the morning of June eighth, in the airport area of El Arish.] The Israeli military historian Aryeh Yitzhaki, who worked in the army's history department after the war collected testimony from dozens of soldiers who admitted killing POWs. According to Yitzhaki, Israeli troops killed, in cold blood, as many as 1,000 Egyptian prisoners in the Sinai, including some 400 in the sand dunes of El Arish. Aryeh Yitzhaki goes on to say: "The whole army leadership, including [then] Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Chief of Staff [and later Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin and the generals knew about these things. No one bothered to denounce them."

¹⁰⁰ Rusk, 378.

¹⁰¹ Helms, 299-300.

¹⁰² Oren, 270.

¹⁰³ Wibur Crane Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (New York: NY, W.W. Norton & Co., 1980), 325.

¹⁰⁴ Ennes, 313.

¹⁰⁵ The Israel Lobby Debate, available from http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/mear01_.html; accessed 12 April 2007. [The author was directed to this source by Playthell Benjamin, co-author of *Reconsidering the Souls of Black Folks: Thoughts on the Groundbreaking Classic Work of W.E.B. Dubois*. Playthell is a veteran columnist, Historian, University Professor, critic and radio show personality with his program 'Round about Midnight' on WBAI, 99.5 FM, New York, New York.]

¹⁰⁶ Cristol, 133-139 and Bamford, 194-197, 204-205.