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Volume 1

UNITED  
STATES

Attack on [REDACTED]  
the U.S.S. *Liberty* (S- [REDACTED])

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NATIONAL  
SECURITY  
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UNITED STATES

*Special Series*

*Volume 1*

Attack on  
the U.S.S. *Liberty* (S)

William D. Gerhard

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY/CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE  
1981

NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

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## Foreword

~~(S)~~ The Israeli attack on the U.S.S. *Liberty* some 14 years ago was, indeed, a wrenching experience. The loss, particularly in the case of [redacted] who gave their lives or were wounded, was difficult to accept. The knowledge that the tragedy resulted not only from Israeli miscalculation but also from faulty U.S. communications practices was even more difficult to accept.

~~(S)~~ The passage of time has made it possible for the authors to reexamine the *Liberty* incident objectively and answer a number of persistent questions. The authors accordingly set forth the technical rationale for the *Liberty* mission, the particulars of the Israeli miscalculation, the details of the American communications failures, a narrative of the attack [redacted] and the lessons to be learned from the event.

~~(S)~~

---

~~(S)~~ A word about the authors, who worked on this project part time after they had retired. An experienced operations officer and research specialist, Mr. Gerhard [redacted] as well as the Special Research Element that produced studies of [redacted], who spent most of his career in research and documentation activities, was for years in charge of the NSA Library.

Vincent J. Wilson, Jr.  
Chief, [redacted], and Publications Staff

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## Authors' Note

Many people contributed to the completion of this history. The authors gratefully acknowledge the efforts of members of the NSA History and Publications Staff who offered substantive suggestions and labored over publication format and preparation — Vincent J. Wilson, Jr., Chief; [redacted] Historian; [redacted], Editor; and [redacted] Secretary. [redacted] of the History Staff, spent many hours arranging for and conducting interviews of personnel intimately associated with the *Liberty* incident. In turn, [redacted] painstakingly transcribed the interview tapes.

To [redacted], [redacted] Records Declassification Staff, we are indebted for his security classification review.

Both Bob Rush, Electronic Security Command, and James Gilbert, Intelligence and Security Command History Staff generously provided useful source materials from their collections.

William D. Gerhard

8 December 1980

## Chapter I

## Political-Military Background (U)

(U) A brief look at the Middle Eastern situation during early 1967 is necessary for an appreciation of the mounting political and military tensions that ultimately led to the U.S. decision to position the U.S.S. *Liberty* in the eastern Mediterranean.

(U) Since the mid-1950s, the major world powers had been keenly aware of and sensitive to the buildup of tensions in the Middle East. Both the Soviet Union and Communist China were quick to take advantage of unsettled conditions there to extend their own influence over governments wherever possible — often competing with one another in this effort.

(U) By the end of the 1950s the Chinese Communists had begun to assert themselves, especially in Iraq and Syria. In May 1966, Syria's new president, Nureddin el-Attassi, scoffed at waging a conventional war against Israel and urged what he called a "people's war of liberation," Chinese-Communist style.<sup>1</sup> The head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Ahmed Shukairy, also admitted to receiving Chinese aid. PLO representatives had been sent to Vietnam and communist China to observe communist guerrilla techniques, and PLO troops were receiving arms from Communist China.<sup>2</sup>

(U) As for the Soviets, they had particular cause for not wishing to see the Syrian Government humiliated, defeated, and, perhaps, overthrown. The increasingly radical Syrian Governments which had assumed power since the beginning of 1966 had come to rely more and more on Soviet military and economic aid, to permit increasing numbers of Soviet advisers to be stationed in the country, and all in all to offer the most promising field for Soviet penetration and influence in the Middle East. The Soviets genuinely feared massive Israeli retaliation that might topple the Syrian Government; they therefore spurred the Egyptians on to vigorous counteraction, the full repercussions of which they could not foresee.<sup>3</sup>

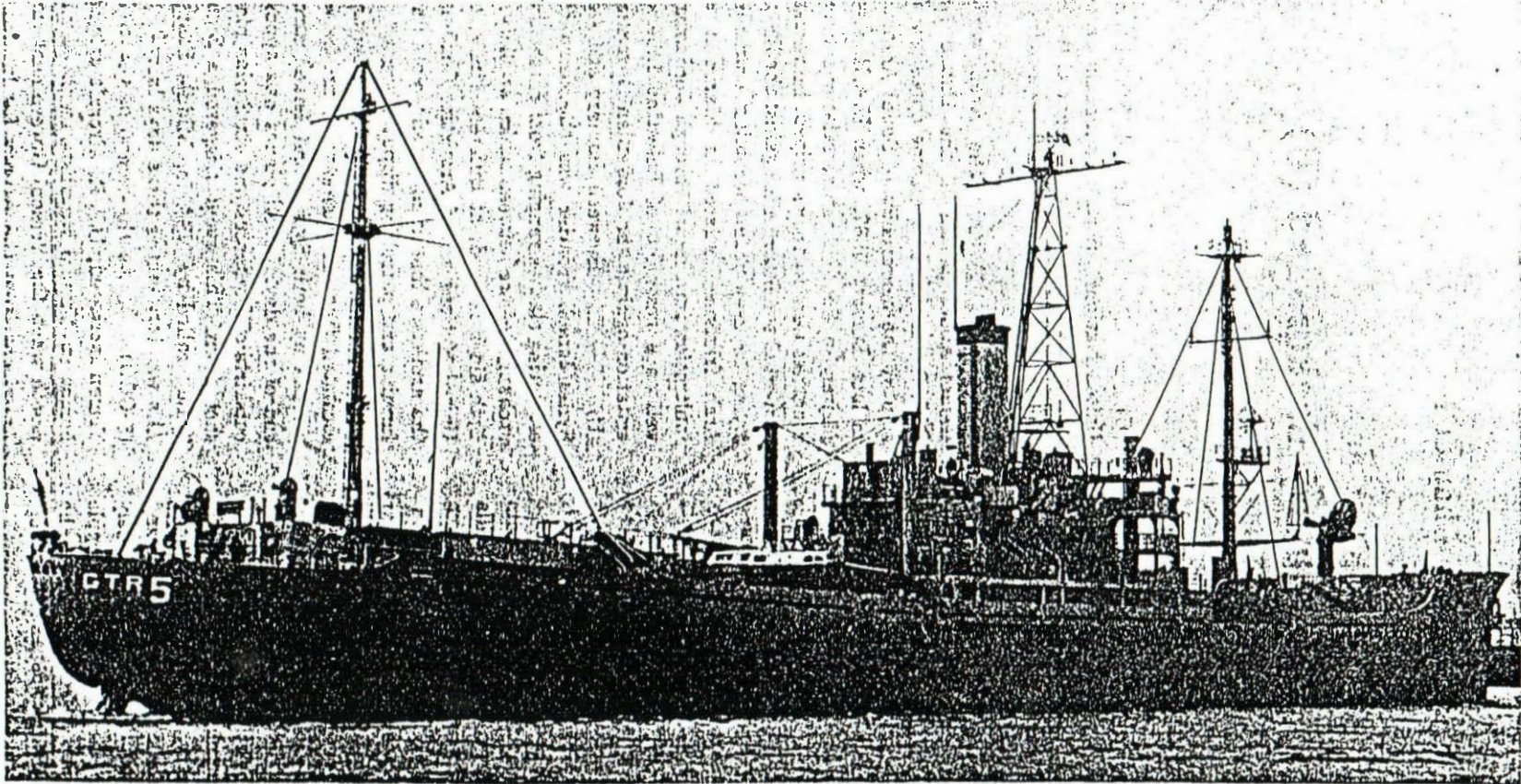
(U) The United States supported the United Nations' efforts to maintain peace in the area and, while championing the right of the State of Israel to exist, urged restraint and respect for the rights of all nations.

(U) Within the Arab world, President Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.) sought to overcome opposition to his leadership by the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Jordan.<sup>4</sup> In late January 1967, when U.A.R. aircraft bombed Najran in Saudi Arabia, relations between the two countries were further strained. In Yemen, the U.A.R. supported the insurgents against the Royalists. Jordan, trying to keep from becoming embroiled in Israeli-Arab frictions, ordered in March a halt to Arab infiltration into Israel through Jordanian territory as well as a cessation of Palestine Liberation internal agitation against the Jordanian Government.

(U) Between January and April 1967, the Syrian-Israeli frontier was the scene of a series of escalating clashes ranging from potshots at tractors to exchanges of fire between tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Both sides refused, at different times, to permit the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission to mark the armistice line at disputed points and insisted on farming and patrolling disputed areas.<sup>5</sup>

(S) On 7 April 1967, a Syrian-Israeli clash escalated from an exchange of fire between tanks to attacks by both Syrian and Israeli aircraft. By the end of the day, Israeli planes had appeared over the outskirts of Damascus and six Syrian planes had been shot down.

(S) — As the tempo of the civil war within Yemen increased, U.A.R. aircraft dropped poison-gas bombs on Yemeni Royalists on 22 April. Later that month when the Yemeni Government imprisoned two Americans from the Agency for International Development



(U) The U.S.S. *Liberty* was commissioned in May 1945 as a victory ship and later converted into a technical research ship (December 1964). She had an overall length of 455 feet, a maximum speed of 18 knots with an allowable personnel complement of 9 officers and 151 enlisted men along with an additional

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

opment (AID),

~~(S)~~ From 11-14 May, U.A.R. aircraft attacked towns in Saudi Arabia

~~(S)~~ When on 14 May the U.A.R. placed its air defense units on full alert and deployed its tactical naval units,

(U) On 17 May, the U.A.R. requested that the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) withdraw from the Gaza Strip. The U.N. complied, and Nasser immediately began moving troops into the Sinai. This decision by the U.A.R. government — presumably encouraged by the Soviets and Syrians — to move its armed forces up to the Sinai armistice line thus reestablished the direct Egyptian-Israeli military confrontation which had been the major immediate cause of the 1956 war.<sup>10</sup>

~~(S)~~ Five days later on 23 May 1967, the U.A.R. blockaded the Strait of Tiran, thereby closing the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and prohibiting unescorted tankers of any flag from reaching the Israeli port of Elat. This action reproduced another element that had brought on the 1956 war. Because Israel had repeatedly asserted that she would go to war if the U.A.R. blocked the Gulf,

(U) The U.A.R. blockade precipitated quiet but full-scale mobilization by Israel. Arab forces were repositioned, and on 30 May Egypt and Jordan signed a five-year military alliance, completing Arab encirclement of Israel. Shortly thereafter, Soviet naval vessels entered the Mediterranean through the Dardenelles.<sup>12</sup>

(U) On 1 June, as pressure to open the Strait of Tiran built within Israel, Moshe Dayan was appointed Israeli Minister of Defense. The next day, Friday, 2 June, the United States and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement declaring the Gulf of Aqaba an international waterway to which all states were entitled free passage.

(U) The weekend of 3 and 4 June passed uneventfully, but then lightning struck. On Monday, 5 June at approximately 0845 Middle East time, Israel launched simultaneous air strikes against all forward U.A.R. airfields on the Sinai and in the Suez Canal Zone. While the bulk of the 400-plane Israeli air force concentrated on U.A.R. targets, the remaining Israeli jets made coordinated attacks against airfields in Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Israeli raids against Arab air bases continued throughout 5 June and by nightfall

Israel had complete mastery of the sky having virtually destroyed four Arab air forces.<sup>13</sup>

~~(S)~~ Forty-five minutes after the launching of the Israeli air offensive, Israeli troops started their crushing ground attack against U.A.R. forces in the Sinai. In the Gaza Strip, Israeli ground forces took Rafah and Khan Yunus. Meanwhile tank columns raced thirty miles west into the Sinai to capture Al 'Arish. With this rapid spread of hostilities,

(U) On Tuesday, 6 June, U.A.R. President Nasser, charging that U.S. and British planes had intervened in the war on the side of Israel, closed the Suez Canal to all shipping and severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. In turn, the U.S. broke diplomatic ties with Cairo.

(U) On the battlefield, Israeli tank columns advanced toward the Suez Canal on three major fronts: through Al 'Arish toward Al Qantarrah in the north; through Abu'Uwayjilah along the central route toward Ismailia; and to Al Qusaymah on the southern route. Farther south, other columns advanced to Al Kuntillah in the Sinai.

(U) Operating against the Jordanian forces, Israeli troops captured the cities of Janin, Qalqilyah, and Ram Allah and took the high ground north of Jerusalem on 6 June.

(U) On 7 June, Israeli units swept across the Sinai to advance within eighteen miles of the Suez Canal in the north and reached toward the Mitla Pass in the south. Other Israeli forces captured Ash Sharmah at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, breaking the blockade at the Strait of Tiran. Also on the 7th, Israel gained control of the Gaza Strip plus the West Bank of the Jordan River. The Jordanian army and accompanying Iraqi units were defeated.

(U) The United Nations called for a cease-fire. Israel accepted provided the other belligerents complied. On 7 June, Jordan agreed to the cease-fire, but the U.A.R. rejected it. The following day (8 June), however, both the U.A.R. and Syria accepted the cease-fire. At approximately 1400 hours this same date the U.S.S. *Liberty* was attacked.

(U) On 9 June, following an Israeli charge that Syria had violated the cease-fire, Israeli troops and armored forces smashed deep into Syria. By the time both sides agreed, on 10 June, to observe the U.N. cease-fire, the entire southwestern corner of Syria was in Israeli hands, including the Golan Heights which dominated Israeli territory in the Jordan Valley and around the Sea of Galilee.

(S) On this same day, when the Soviet representative to the U.N. threatened direct Soviet intervention if the Security Council did not halt the fighting,

<sup>15</sup> A cease-fire, negotiated by the U.N., finally went into effect and all hostilities ceased at 1830 hours Mid-East time on Saturday, 10 June 1967.

Notes

Source documents are in the *Collection* of the NSA History

<sup>1</sup>(U) Theodore Draper. *Israel and World Politics*. Viking Press, New York, 1968, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>(U) Hal Kosut, editor. *Israel and the Arabs: The June 1967 War*. Facts on File, New York, 1968, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>(U) Charles W. Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War; How it Began," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Jan 1968), p. 310.

<sup>4</sup>(U) The United Arab Republic was formed in 1958 with the union of Egypt and Syria and then dissolved in September 1961. Even though the union was dissolved, Egypt was still referred to as the U.A.R. until 2 September 1971 when the name was changed to the Arab Republic of Egypt. In this history U.A.R. is used throughout to mean Egypt.

<sup>5</sup>(U) *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>7</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>(U) Charles W. Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War; How It Began," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Jan 1968), p. 319.

<sup>11</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>(U) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>(U) *Ibid.*

## Chapter II

### Considerations Leading to the Ship's Deployment (U)

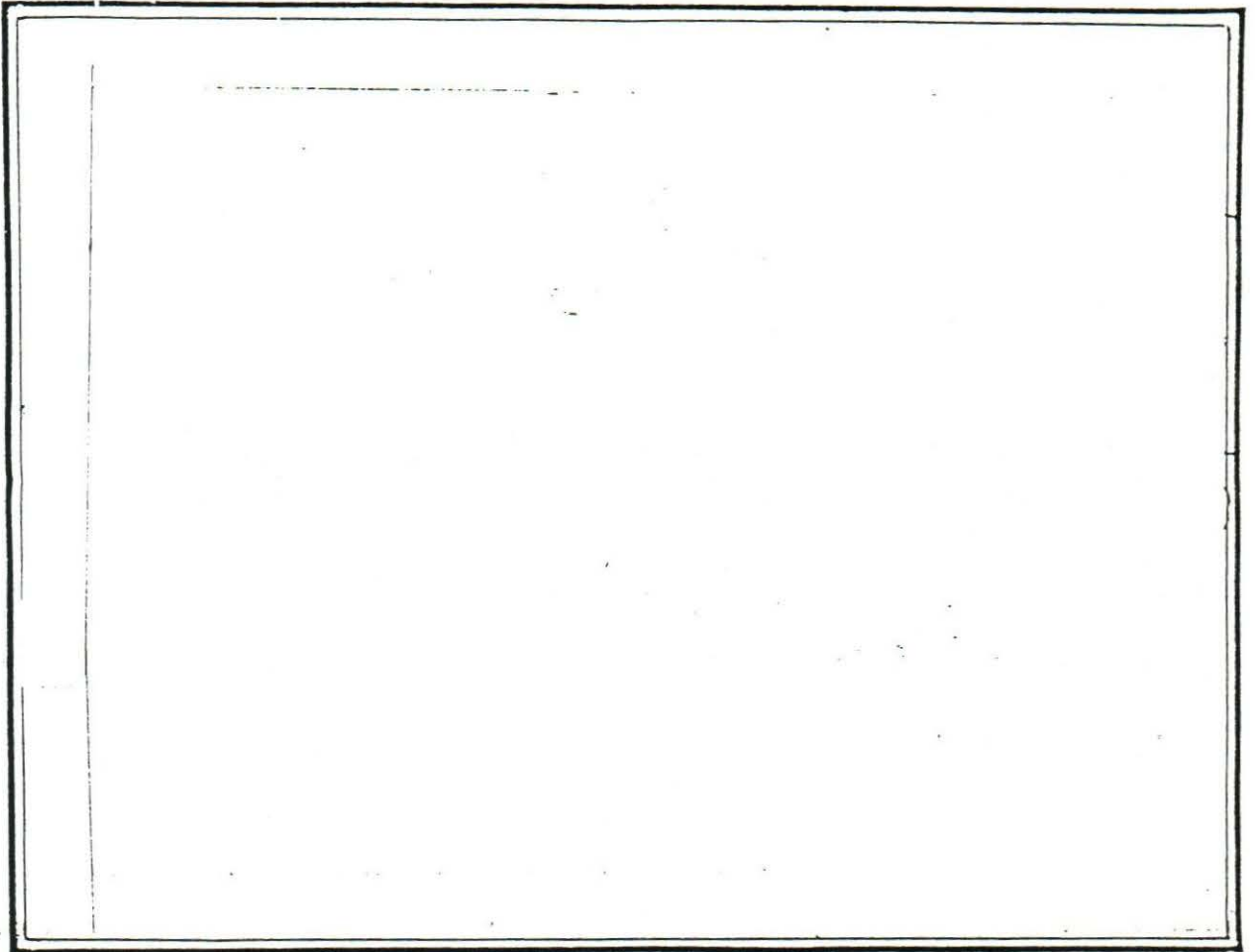
Looking back upon the *Liberty* incident today, Americans might well question why the U.S. introduced [redacted] into a war theater in which Americans were not direct participants and expose that ship to the risk it did. The decision to deploy, it should be noted, came before the Six Day War erupted. It came after careful

[redacted] from this troubled region, of technical factors which would govern the [redacted] and of the need to develop [redacted] in the event future U.S. involvement in Middle East hostilities should bring a requirement to support U.S. forces. The [redacted]

[redacted] was, moreover, only one of many actions taken to improve [redacted]



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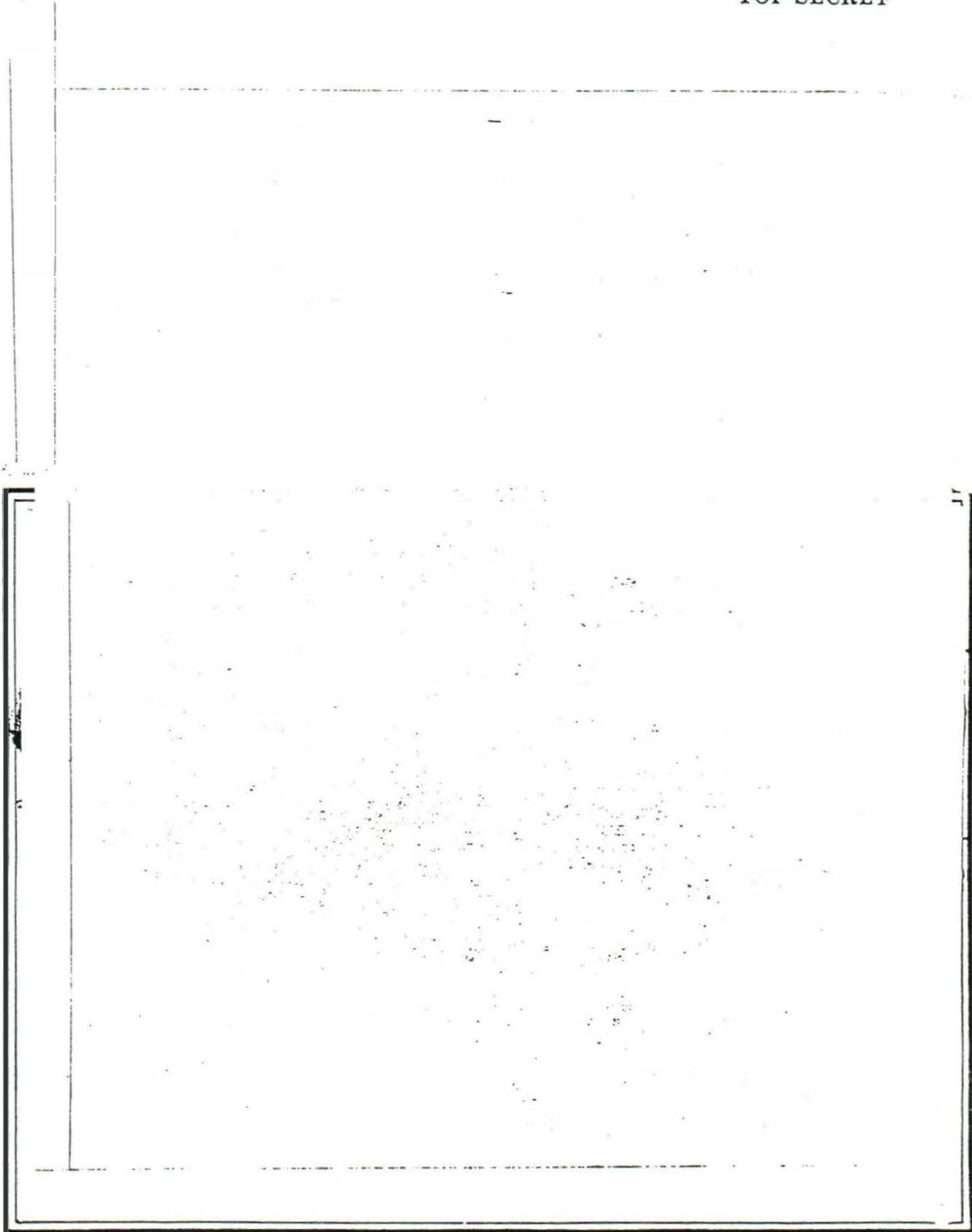


Technical

Factors (U)

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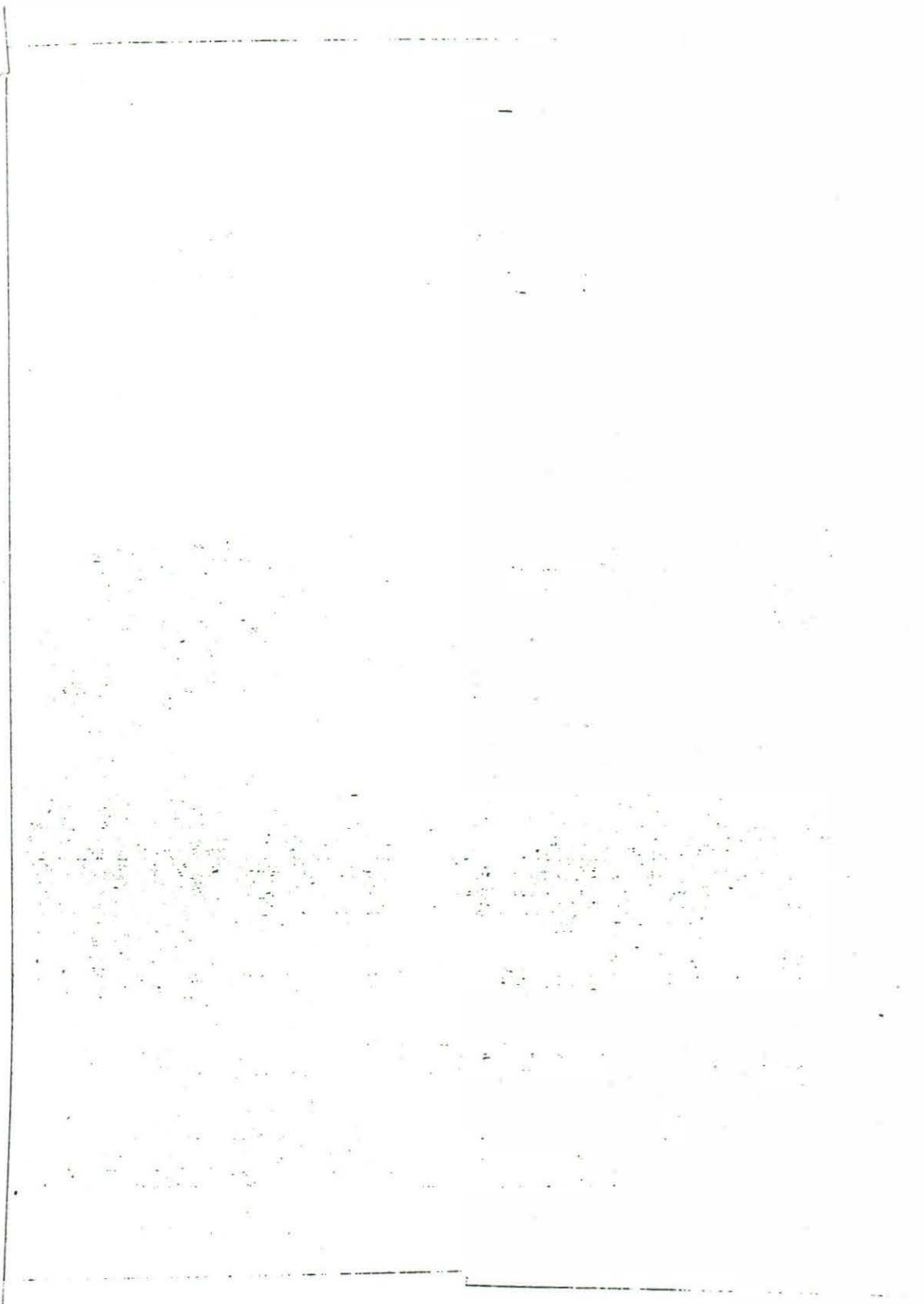


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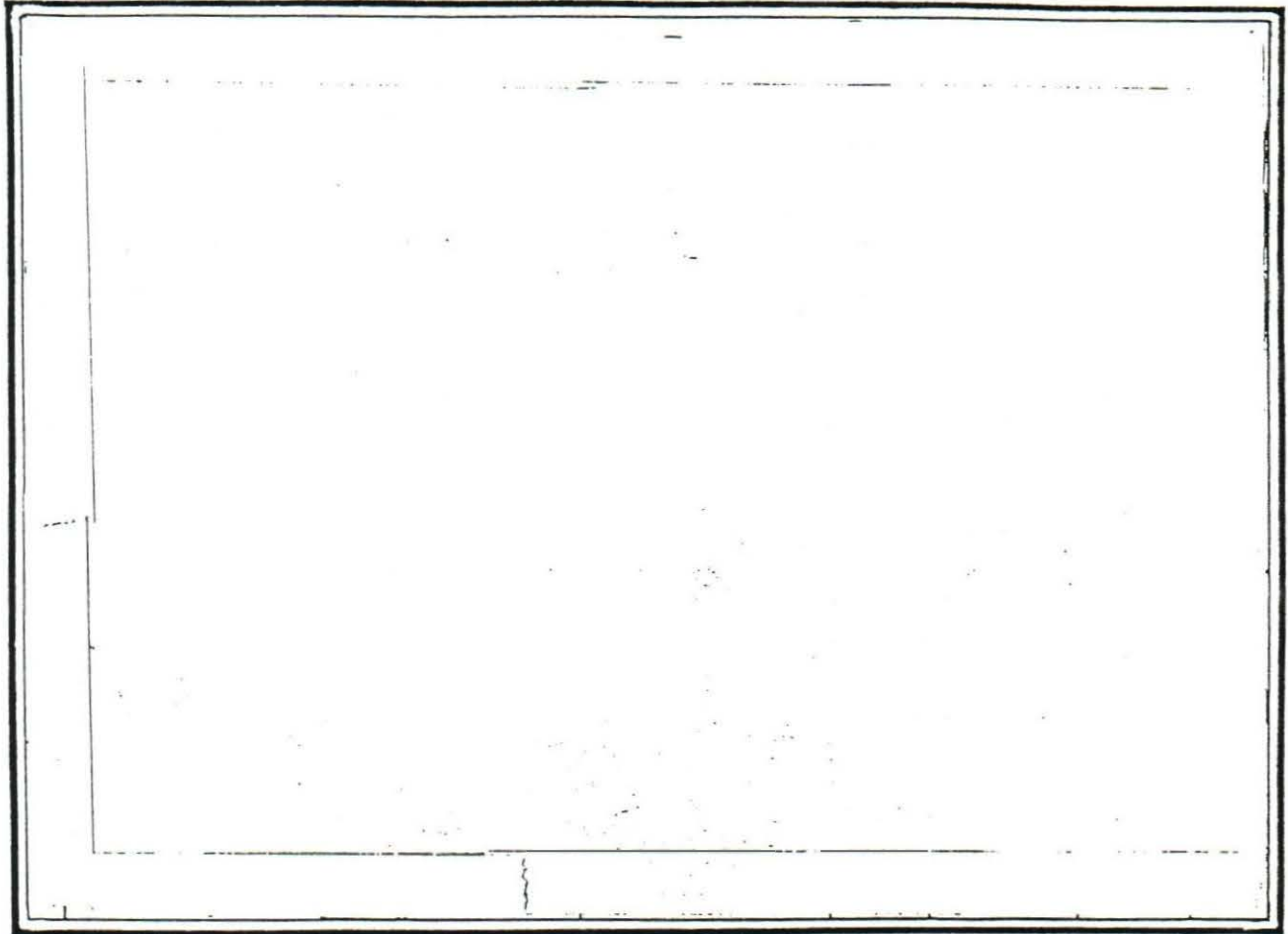
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The Decision to Deploy the *Liberty* (U)

Notes

Source documents are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the NSA History Collection.

(U) NSA Staff, "Fact Sheet for DIRNSA," undated.

(U) "Report to the Director, NSA," p. 1.  
Informal information from NSA Staff Officer,

(U) NSA Staff ca.

16 Jun 1967.



**CONFIDENTIAL**

<sup>7</sup>(U) John R. Rasmuson, *A History of Kagnew Station and American Forces in Eritrea*, 25 May 1973.

<sup>8</sup>(U) Kagnew Station, Office of Operations, *Annual Historical Report, FY 1967*, vol. II; pp. 11-12, 20.

<sup>9</sup>(U) NSA Staff, " ca. " pp. 20, 37.

<sup>10</sup>(U)

<sup>11</sup>(U) Julie Alger, "A Review of the Technical Research Ship Program, 1961-1969," 1 May 1970; Interview with Gene Sheck, 11 Aug 1980, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>(U) U.S. Army Communications Support Unit, *Annual Historical Report, FY 1967*, vol. I, 1 Oct 1967; (U) pp. 12-14; (U) "Report to the Director, NSA," Tabs A and B.

<sup>13</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "

Jun 1967; "Report to the Director, NSA," p. 2; ca. 16 pp. 17-18.

<sup>14</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "

<sup>15</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Fact Sheet for DIRNSA," undated; "Report to the Director, NSA," Tab A; pp. 16-17. Interview with Gene Sheck, 11 Aug 1980, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>(U) U.S. Army Communications Support Unit, *Annual Historical Report, FY 1967*, vol. I; (U) pp. 12-14.

<sup>17</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Fact Sheet for DIRNSA," undated.

<sup>18</sup>(U) Julie Alger, "A Review of the Technical Research Ship Program, 1961-1969," 1 May 1970.

<sup>19</sup>(U) p. 18.

### Chapter III

## Deployment to the Mediterranean (U)

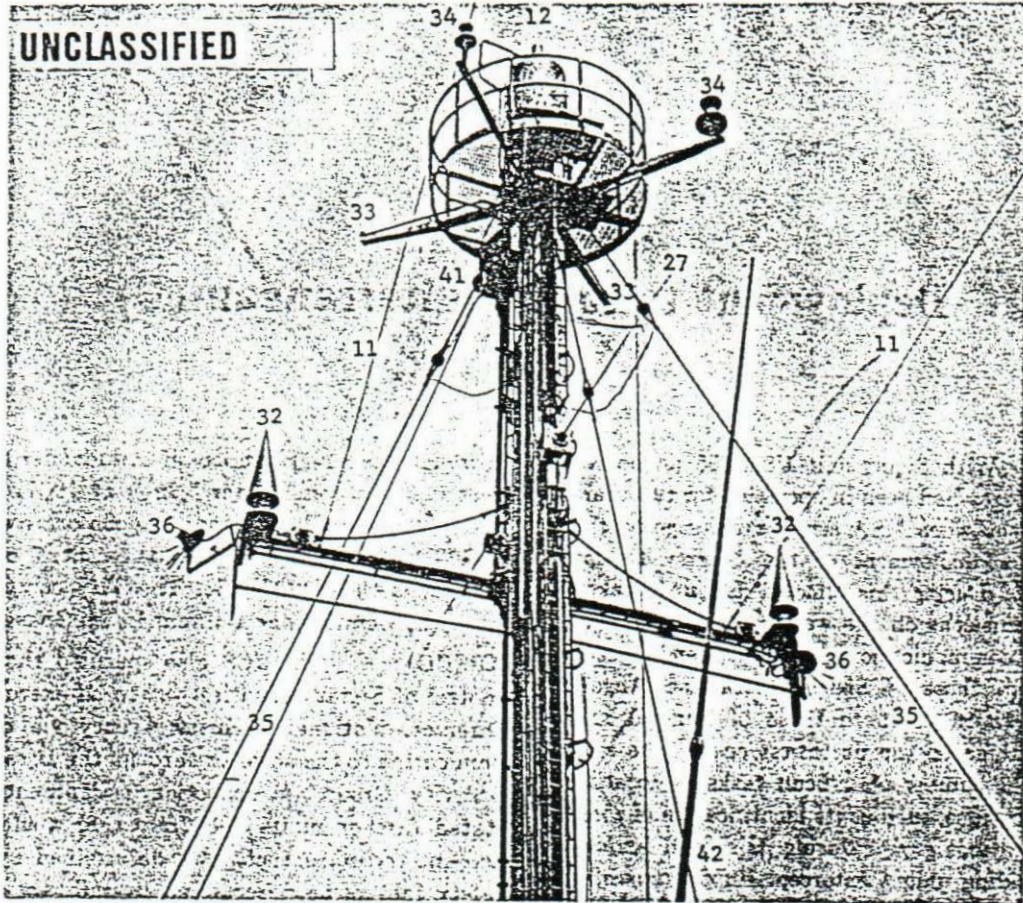
"through the naval component commander to a specific fleet or force commander." In May 1967, the U.S.S. *Liberty*, an auxiliary general technical research ship (AGTR) was operating under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic. The TRS commanding officer was Commander William L. McGonagle.

### U.S.S. *Liberty's* Modus Operandi (U)

(U) U.S. reconnaissance operations came under the purview of the J-3, Joint Chiefs of Staff. A Deputy Director for Reconnaissance assisted the J-3 in the exercise of operational control over reconnaissance activities of the unified and specified commands. The Joint Reconnaissance Center (JRC) worked for the Deputy Director for Reconnaissance and had authority over U.S. reconnaissance operations. NSA had a representative to the Joint Reconnaissance Center, Mr. John Connell.

(U) In 1965 the JCS had given general guidance on the conduct of technical research ship (TRS) operations. Operational control of the ships was to be effected by unified and specified commanders

← Paddy E. Rhodes, during an interview, described the area of the *Liberty*



(U) A small portion of the antenna configuration of the U.S.S. *Liberty* included:

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) Perhaps the most visible technical feature of the ship was its antennas, some 45 in all.

(U) Not so visible was, however, the ship's armament, which was minimal — four .50-caliber machine guns, 2 forward and 2 aft, one Browning automatic rifle, and a number of small arms.<sup>2</sup>

Abidjan to Rota, 24-31 May 1967 (U)

~~(S)~~ The TRS was at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, at the end of May on its fifth African cruise when, in response to <sup>1</sup>, the JCS/JRC, with approval of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, directed movement of the ship to the eastern Mediterranean via Rota, Spain, and requested the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic to change operational control of the ship to the Commander-in-Chief, Europe upon its arrival at Rota.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the *Liberty* was under the operational control of the Commander, Service Squadron 8, a component of the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic, and on 24 May the Commander, Service Squadron 8 issued sailing orders to the *Liberty*, with information copies to Commander, Sixth Fleet and others, directing the ship to move at once to Rota.<sup>4</sup> The *Liberty* departed Abidjan at 0530Z, 24 May, with estimated time of arrival in Rota, 31 May.<sup>5</sup>

*Liberty* at Rota,  
31 May to 2 June 1967 (U)

(U) When the *Liberty* arrived at Rota on 31 May, it came under the operational control of the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe (Gen. L.L. Lemnitzer) who turned over control to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe.<sup>6</sup> While delegating his control, General Lemnitzer still wanted operational information on the ship's progress and asked on 1 June that situation reports (Sitreps) and planned intended movement (Pim) reports from the *Liberty* arrive at his headquarters daily and that any incidents be reported as soon as possible in accordance with the existing reconnaissance reporting instructions.<sup>7</sup>

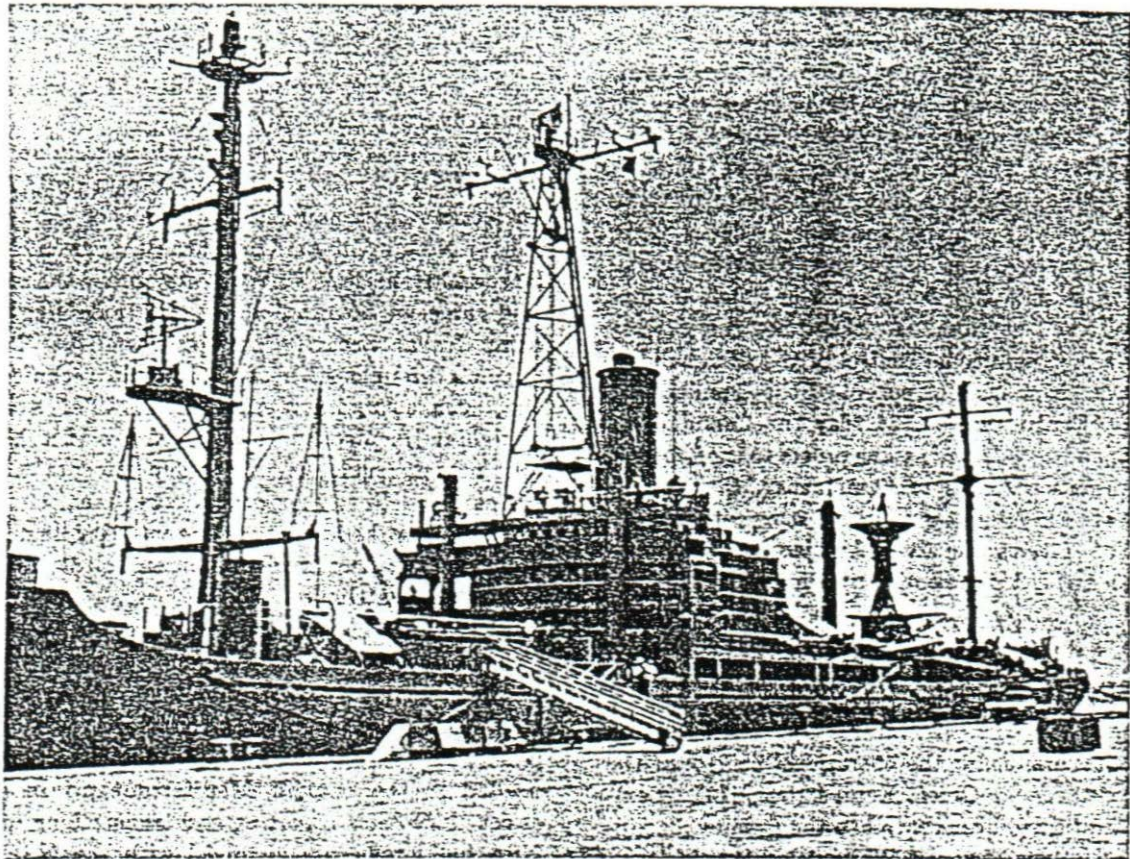
~~(S)~~ After taking control, Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, directed the *Liberty* to send to his headquarters daily Sitreps and position reports and in those reports to include the Pim for the next 24 hours and any comments on status of the ship. He directed the *Liberty* to depart for the eastern Mediterranean when ready, provided guidelines for its staying within international waters, and asked for adherence to established communications procedures for the region. <sup>8</sup>

(U) At Rota, the *Liberty* prepared for its deployment to the eastern Mediterranean, taking on

provisions and fuel, acquiring the military documentation necessary for its assignment to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe and later to the U.S. Sixth Fleet, and repairing its TRSSCOMM which had a faulty hydraulic system.

~~(S)~~ To facilitate the planning for

<sup>10</sup> With the territorial limits established by Middle East countries in mind, JCS subsequently directed the Commander-in-Chief, Europe to deploy the *Liberty* to operational area three with closest point of approach (CPA) to Algeria, Libya, and the U.A.R. of 13 nautical miles during transit. On arrival in operational area three, CPA was to be 12.5 nm to the U.A.R. and 6.5 nm to Israel.<sup>11</sup> Acting upon the JCS message for Commander-in-Chief, Europe and after hearing from the *Liberty* that it had



(U) The *Liberty* docked in Rota, Spain, to be readied for deployment to the eastern Mediterranean. In Rota, the operational control of the *Liberty* was turned over to the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe, who in turn delegated the control to Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe.

(Photograph courtesy of \_\_\_\_\_  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

completed repairs to the TRSSCOMM hydraulic system, Admiral McCain directed the *Liberty* to follow the schedule prescribed by JCS.<sup>12</sup> The *Liberty* then departed Rota on 2 June at 1230Z through the Strait of Gibraltar on a course paralleling the North African coastline.

### Processing Center (U)

← While the *Liberty* was enroute to Rota from Abidjan, ...

and 33 other addressees including the Commander, Sixth Fleet that as of 0001Z, 7 June, the *Liberty* would be guarding the fleet broadcast from the Naval Communications Station at Asmara, Ethiopia, which served the eastern Mediterranean. In accordance with customary communications procedures, the *Liberty* would guard the fleet broadcast of the Naval Communications Station, Morocco, until it reached the eastern Mediterranean.

(U) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe apprised Commander, Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral William I. Martin, on 3 June, that the *Liberty's* mission was to conduct an "extended independent surveillance operation in the eastern Mediterranean" and that Sixth Fleet might be called upon to provide logistic and other support.<sup>17</sup>

(U) With the outbreak of the war on 5 June, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe in a message to the Commander, Sixth Fleet and others took note of the movement of some 20 Soviet warships with supporting vessels and an estimated 8 or 9 Soviet submarines into the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean and, along with other guidance, instructed Vice Admiral Martin to keep his ships and aircraft at least 100 nm away from the coasts of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and the U.A.R. and at least 25 nm away from Cyprus.<sup>18</sup> The Commander, Sixth Fleet directed his units to comply later that day.<sup>19</sup> Neither the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe nor the Commander, Sixth Fleet directives included specific instructions to the U.S.S. *Liberty*.

Enroute to Operational Area Three (U)

~~(S)~~ *Liberty's* move into the Mediterranean proceeded according to plan. It reported that it overtook and passed three Soviet ships during its passage through the Strait of Gibraltar.<sup>15</sup> Following the North African coastline,

(U) At 1330Z, 2 June the *Liberty* informed the Navy Movement Report Office in London

~~(S)~~ While it was neither NSA's responsibility nor intention to adjudge the safety factors of the *Liberty's* mission, in view of the outbreak of hostilities, NSA's Gene Sheck and did

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ask the NSA liaison officer to the JCS/JRC, Mr. J. Connell, on 5 June if any consideration was being given there to a change in the *Liberty's* operational area. They reminded Connell that

The NSA liaison officer discussed the matter with JRC's ship-movement officer and then advised Sheck and that no action was then under consideration.<sup>22</sup>

(U) On 6 June, as it was passing between Libya and Crete, the *Liberty* reported to Sixth Fleet that its TRSSCOMM, which had had malfunctions in its power supply and hydraulic systems on the trip from Rota, was again operating satisfactorily and, in reply to a Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe query concerning Pims not being received, provided the date-time group of Pims previously sent.

(U) On this same day, 6 June, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe told the Commander, Sixth Fleet that the *Liberty* was to come under his operational control at 0001Z, 7 June 1967 in order "to facilitate area command and control and any possible requirement for protection during the Middle East hostilities" and pointed out that the *Liberty's* schedule might be revised for safety reasons "as dictated by the local situation."<sup>24</sup> *Liberty* acknowledged the instructions concerning its operational control at 2036Z on the 6th. *Liberty's* commanding officer, Commander McGonagle, also told the Commander, Sixth Fleet that the ship was in a "Readiness Condition Three-Modified" and reminded his superior that the ship's "self-defense capability" was limited to four .50-caliber machine guns and small arms.

(U) Three hours later the Commander, Sixth Fleet cautioned its new charge by message to "maintain a high state of vigilance against attack or threat of attack" in view of the "unpredictability of U.A.R. actions." He directed the *Liberty* to report by Flash precedence any threatening actions or "any diversion from schedule necessitated by external threat" and to submit "reports of contact with ships, aircraft, and submarines which are unidentified, of

intelligence interest, or engage in harassment." Admiral Martin also instructed the *Liberty* to copy the fleet broadcast and to use his fast carrier task force (TF-60) tactical circuits if necessary.<sup>25</sup> *Liberty* did not receive, for one reason or another, this message.<sup>26</sup>

(U) On 7 June at 0800Z the *Liberty* was off the coast of the U.A.R. and approaching operational areas two and three. Despite the Immediate Precedence assigned to the *Liberty's* Sitrep/Posit report at 0908Z, 7 June, giving its position at 0800Z at 33-06N 28-54E, it took, according to a JCS postmortem report, some fifteen and one-half hours for the *Liberty's* position report to reach the Commander, Sixth Fleet, the action addressee.<sup>27</sup> *Liberty* was now guarding the fleet broadcast of the Naval Communications Station, Asmara. On this day a number of actions were under way to minimize the appearance of U.S. involvement in the Middle East hostilities and to change the *Liberty's* operational area.

### Directions to Withdraw the *Liberty* (U)

(C) In view of the sensitivity regarding the and following a question from the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations about the wisdom of *Liberty's* assignment in the war zone,<sup>31</sup> the JCS/JRC made a new assessment of the danger inherent in the *Liberty's* operations. JRC considered the distance of the *Liberty* from the Sixth Fleet, some 300 to 400 miles.

(U) In a message conveying the sense of urgency then developing in the Pentagon staff, JCS expressed concern in a message at 2230Z to Commander-in-Chief, Europe over the Middle East situation and stated that the JCS-directed operational area for the *Liberty* was "for guidance only" and could be "varied as local conditions dictate." JCS also instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Europe to change CPA to the U.A.R. to 20 nm, to Israel 15 nm.<sup>33</sup> Although a copy of the message was to have gone to the *Liberty*, it would not reach the ship prior to the attack. The Department of Army Communications Center in error sent it to the Naval Communications Station in the Pacific.<sup>34</sup>

(U) Further deliberation within the JCS/JRC following discussions with the Chief of Naval Operations, who was pressing for a 100-mile CPA for the *Liberty*, now resulted in a JCS decision to move the *Liberty* well off the hostile shoreline. Contributing to the decision, as JRC's Captain Merriwell Vineyard (USN) told NSA's JRC representative, John Connell, late on the 7th, was the desire of General Wheeler, Chairman, JCS, to support in any way the U.S. position taken at the U.N. in answer to U.A.R. charges of complicity. U.S. Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg had stated on the 6th to the Security Council that "All Sixth Fleet aircraft are and have been several hundred miles from the area of conflict."

(U) At 2350Z, one hour after the JCS had given its instructions restricting the *Liberty* to the 15-

20 nm CPA, JRC's Major Breedlove, skipping normal Commander-in-Chief, Europe channels, on Vocom called Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe's command center to convey the JCS/JRC decision and to direct that the *Liberty* be moved back to a CPA of 100 nm to the coasts of Israel, U.A.R., and Syria and a CPA of 25 nm to Cyprus. He indicated to Lieutenant E. L. Galavotti, the operations duty officer there, that a confirming JCS message would follow. Breedlove explained the urgency of the matter "because time [was] getting short to where she will be in those limits." Galavotti said he would go to Sixth Fleet right away and had an appropriate message ready by 080001Z for release by his superiors to Sixth Fleet. Some fourteen minutes after calling Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, Breedlove called the Commander-in-Chief, Europe JRC watch officer, informing him of the verbal request to NAVEUR and telling him that NAVEUR had promised to take action.<sup>35</sup>

(U) Within the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe command center, an unfortunate delay took place, however, in relaying this JCS/JRC instruction to the Sixth Fleet for action. Mindful that this directive had skipped channels and was only verbal, Galavotti's superior, Captain M. J. Hanley, Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Navy Europe, directed that the message to Sixth Fleet not be released until the date-time group of the JCS confirming message was at hand. NAVEUR policy allowed for acceptance of oral instructions from higher headquarters to move ships and aircraft only if given by flag or general officers or if firm evidence of a message directive were provided — for example, the date-time group of a confirming message. Instead of releasing the message, Captain Hanley told the NAVEUR command center duty officer, Commander C. G. Jorgensen, to apprise Commander-in-Chief, Europe of the matter and ask that headquarters to obtain the date-time group of the confirming JCS message. Jorgensen then called the U.S. European Command's (EUCOM) command duty officer at 080030Z, who indicated he would check and call back. The JCS confirming message, JCS 080110Z was, of course, not yet released at the time of the call. Its transmission by the Department of Army Communications Center in the Pentagon to Commander-in-Chief, Europe was at 080211Z.<sup>36</sup>

(U) Not hearing from the higher headquarters, Commander Jorgensen repeated his call at 0325Z on 8 June to check again on the status of the action and again asked EUCOM to obtain a date-time group, this time speaking with a duty officer in the JRC section of EUCOM, Lieutenant Colonel C. K. Russell. European Command's delay of three hours in



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responding to NAVEUR had resulted from its assumption, based on Breedlove's call from the JCS/JRC, that NAVEUR was already taking action.<sup>17</sup> Shortly thereafter, Russell was able to give Jorgensen the required JCS date-time group, the message having just arrived in the EUCOM JRC duty officer's hands, but this was about the same time as NAVEUR's information copy of JCS 080110Z, the confirming message, arrived in the NAVEUR command center itself — the time, 0325Z, 8 June. A precious four hours had gone by since Major Breedlove's call.

(U) Commander Jorgensen then asked for a telecon with Sixth Fleet's staff duty officer and at 080355Z was experiencing difficulties in establishing contact because of atmospheric conditions. He then had his radio operator contact Sixth Fleet by single sideband radio and request the telecon as soon as possible. The two-way telecon with Sixth Fleet began at 080410Z.

(U) When the Sixth Fleet staff duty officer told Jorgensen his command did not have JCS 080110Z as yet (the Army Communications Center, Pentagon, having misrouted this message to Hawaii), Jorgensen passed it to him three times before gaining an acknowledgement at 080440Z from the Sixth Fleet's duty officer, who was having difficulty in hearing NAVEUR. Jorgensen then sent a confirming message: "From CINCNAVEUR Command Duty Officer to COMSIXTHFLT Duty Officer. Be advised that JCS 080110Z FORAC. Official msg follows."

(U) Ironically, the Sixth Fleet's duty officer then indicated to Jorgensen that Sixth Fleet did not hold reference (a) on the critical JCS message and asked for a copy. Since NAVEUR also was without a copy of the referenced message, despite both NAVEUR and Sixth Fleet's having been designated for information copies (JCS 7337/072230Z), Jorgensen would obtain it from Commander-in-Chief, Europe and later, on obtaining a copy, outline to the Sixth Fleet's duty officer its contents which had, by that time, been overtaken by events.

(U) From 080440Z June 67 it became the Commander, Sixth Fleet's responsibility to direct the *Liberty* to a safer area of operations than the one in which she was then steering. Vice Admiral Martin's message to the *Liberty*, directing it not to approach the coast of the U.A.R., Syria, or Israel closer than 100 nm, went out some four and one-half hours later, at 080917Z, the delay in this case being attributed to

preparations on board the U.S.S. *America* for a press conference relating to the U.A.R. charges of U.S. complicity with Israel in the prosecution of the war and to Sixth Fleet's need to transmit other traffic of equal or higher precedence.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile *Liberty* was, of course, already in its operational area. Its position at 080800Z was within 30 nm of 31-45N 33-30E in area three.

(U) When it rains, it pours, and there would be even further delays in the attempts to get the word to the *Liberty*.

(U) JCS's investigating team, the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry, and later a congressional staff gave close attention to the Sixth Fleet message to the *Liberty*, following the status of the message in the critical hours before it came under attack. Essentially, the findings were these:

Time	Status
0630Z, 8 June	Sixth Fleet Staff Duty Officer had message ready for release by Assistant Chief of Staff (Operations).
0917Z	Message released with Immediate Precedence.
1035Z	Message transmitted to the Naval Communications Station, Morocco, for relay to the <i>Liberty</i> , the delays owing to the transmission of equal or higher precedence messages. Unaware that the <i>Liberty</i> , pursuant to its instructions, was now guarding the fleet broadcast of the Naval Communications Station, Asmara, the Sixth Fleet routing clerk erred in sending this message to Morocco.
1050Z	Message received at the Naval Communications Station, Morocco, and passed over Defense Communications System to DCS station, Asmara. Through error, the Asmara DCS station sent the message to the Naval Communications Station, Greece, at 1238Z. The latter sent it back to the Asmara DCS station.
1510Z	Asmara DCS station delivered the message to the Naval Communications Station.
1525Z	Naval Communications Station, Asmara, put the message on its fleet broadcast.

The *Liberty* would not receive the critical message in time.

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(U) The action messages directing withdrawal of the *Liberty* to a CPA of 100 nm were three in number: JCS 080110Z, Sixth Fleet 080917Z referred to in the foregoing, and Commander-in-Chief, Europe's 080625Z to NAVEUR confirming informal exchanges giving action on the JCS message to NAVEUR. Information copies of the JCS and the CINCEUR action messages were to have gone to the U.S.S. *Liberty*, and it is, of course, entirely possible that timely receipt of these might have triggered a withdrawal action on the part of the *Liberty's* Commander McGonagle. But the same unkind fate guarding the action messages was also looking after the information copies. These too ran into communications problems of one kind or another, and the *Liberty* would not receive them.<sup>19</sup>

### Operational Area Three, 8 June (U)

### *Liberty's* Processing Mission (U)

#### Notes

Source documents are in the ' of the NSA History Collection.

<sup>1</sup>(U) Julie Alger, "A Review of the Technical Research Ship Program, 1961-1969," 1 May 1970.

<sup>2</sup>(C- Source documents used for information on *Liberty's* mode of operation include:

JCS message cite no. 5838, 052235Z Nov 65; and (U) NSA oral history interview with Terry L. McFarland on 23 Jun 1980.

<sup>3</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 6499, 291602Z May 1967.

<sup>4</sup>(U) COMSERVRON 8 msg, 240020Z May 1967.

<sup>5</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg, 241732Z May 1967.

<sup>6</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg, 300932Z May 1967.

<sup>7</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg 010035Z Jun 1967.

<sup>8</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Informal Paper on *Liberty's* Communications," 22 Jun 1967; NSA oral history interview with Gene Sheck on 11 Aug 1980.

<sup>9</sup>(C- Source documents relating to *Liberty's* preparations at Rota include:

<sup>10</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg to JCS/JRC, 292013Z May 1967.

<sup>11</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 6724, 011545Z Jun 1967.

<sup>12</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg to CINCPACFLT, 021132Z Jun 1967; CINCPACFLT msg, 020717Z Jun 1967.

<sup>13</sup>(U) Source documents used in discussion of the

<sup>14</sup>(U) 16 Jun 1967; NSA Staff,

undated; NSA Staff

undated.

<sup>15</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg to ' , 292201Z May 1967.

<sup>16</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg, 022108Z Jun 1967.

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<sup>16</sup>(U) NSA oral history interview, Terry L. McFarland, 23 Jun 1980.  
<sup>17</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 031016Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>18</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msgs, 051352 and 051850Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>19</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg, 052015 Jun 1967.  
<sup>20</sup>(U) NSA oral history interview, 6 May 1980; DIRNSA msg 252317Z May 1967.  
<sup>21</sup>(U) NSA oral history interviews with on 6 May 1980 and with Paddy E. Rhodes on 13 June 1980.  
<sup>22</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Report to the Director," 12 Jun 1967; House Appropriations Committee Surveys and Investigations Staff, *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*, vol. I, p. iv, "U.S.S. Liberty Incident," December 1967.  
<sup>23</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Informal Paper on Liberty's Communications," 22 Jun 1967.  
<sup>24</sup>(U) CINCNAVEUR msg to Sixth Fleet, *Liberty*, and others, 061357Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>25</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg to *Liberty* and others, 062349Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>26</sup>(U) MG J. R. Russ, USA, "Report of the JCS Fact Finding Team-U.S.S. Liberty Incident, 8 Jun 1967," p. 17. Hereafter cited as the Russ Report.  
<sup>27</sup>(U) Russ Report, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "j" undated.  
<sup>29</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 7239, 070259Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>30</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msgs to JCS, 070626Z and 071503Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>31</sup>(U) Russ Report, p. 19.  
<sup>32</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Report to the Director," 12 Jun 1967, chronology section.  
<sup>33</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 7337 to CINC-EUR with information copy to *Liberty*, 072230Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>34</sup>(U) Russ Report, pp. 35, 36.  
<sup>35</sup>(U) Russ Report, p. 23; NAVEUR Contingency Watch Team, "Memorandum-U.S.S. Liberty Incident," 12 Jun 1967; NSA Staff, "U.S.S. Liberty-Chronology, 23 May-8 Jun."  
<sup>36</sup>(U) Russ Report, p. 23 and Tab 2 to Annex D.  
<sup>37</sup>(U) Ibid, p. 24.  
<sup>38</sup>(U) Ibid, pp. 26-27.  
<sup>39</sup>(U) Detailed information on the communications delays is in the Russ Report and also in the House Appropriations Committee report cited in footnote 22.  
<sup>40</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 022333Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>41</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Note for the Director, ; (U) NSA Staff, "Questions by Gen. Carroll, Director, DIA - Answers Provided by ;" 27 Jun 1967.  
<sup>42</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 022333Z Jun 1967; NSA Staff, 10 Jul 1968.

## Chapter IV

### The Attack (U)

(U) Thursday morning, 8 June 1967, found the *Liberty* cruising slowly in international waters on station as directed. At approximately 0830 hours (local time), the *Liberty* notified the Commander, Sixth Fleet that her position for the next 24 hours would be within 30 nautical miles of coordinates 31-45N and 33-30E.<sup>1</sup> The sea was calm and the clear sky permitted visibility of ten miles; a light breeze ruffled the *Liberty's* ensign.<sup>2</sup>

(U) *Liberty's* projected course for that day was to proceed to a point 13 nautical miles from the U.A.R. coast at 31-27.2N, 34-00E (Point Alpha), thence to 31-22.3N, 33-42E (Point Bravo), thence to 31-31N, 33-00E (Point Charlie) retracing this track until new orders were received. Normal steaming speed was to be five knots and typical steaming colors (which indicated conditions were normal) were flown.<sup>3</sup> A "condition of readiness three, modified" was set; i.e., a normal steaming watch, except that one man was stationed at each of the forward two .50-caliber machine guns, numbers 51 and 52. Lookouts on the bridge were designated to man machine guns 53 and 54 just aft of the bridge, in the event of a surprise air or surface attack.<sup>4</sup>

(U) At about 0930 hours, it was possible to visually sight the minaret at Al 'Arish on the U.A.R. coast. This was used as a navigational aid and the ship's position was verified as being within its operating limits. There were no other conspicuous or outstanding navigational features in the area.<sup>5</sup>

#### Reconnaissance of the *Liberty* (U)

(U) Shortly before 0900 hours (local time), two delta-wing, single-engine jet aircraft orbited the *Liberty* three times at 31-27N, 34-00E. The planes' altitude was estimated at 5,000 feet, at a distance of approximately two miles. *Liberty* notified the Commander, Sixth Fleet and others of this reconnaissance, stating that identification was unknown and that no amplifying report would be submitted.<sup>6</sup>

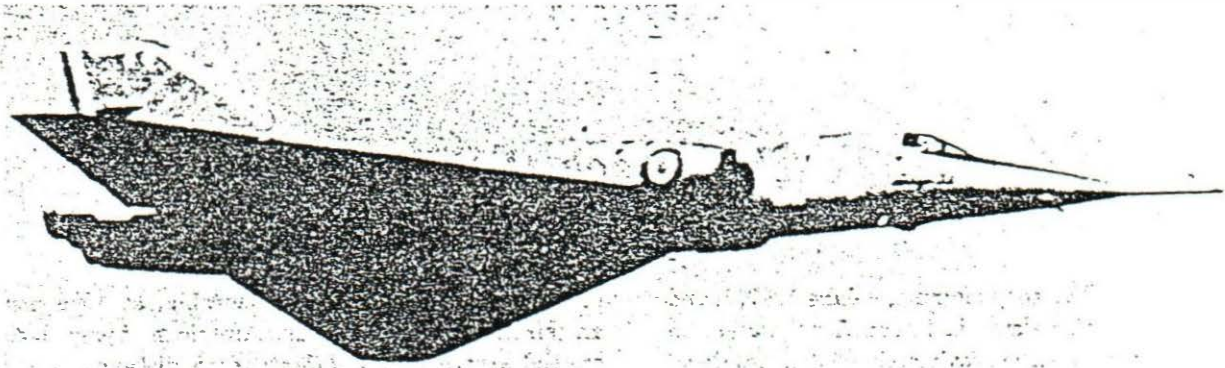
(U) Later in the morning, at 1056 hours, an aircraft similar to an American flying boxcar crossed astern of the *Liberty* at a distance of about three to five miles. The plane circled the ship around the starboard side, proceeded forward of the ship and headed back toward the Sinai peninsula. This reconnaissance was repeated at approximately 30-minute intervals. It was impossible to see any identifying markings on the aircraft. The plane never approached the *Liberty* in a provocative manner and made no attempt to signal the ship. Nor did the *Liberty* attempt to signal it.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent investigations of the attack on the *Liberty* identified the aircraft as a French-built Noratlas NORD 2501, piloted by Israeli Air Force.

(U) Though this plane was unidentified, the thoughts of (civilians aboard the *Liberty*) must have been shared by his shipmates. (c) remembered thinking when he saw the plane, that "it 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 that it was Israeli. I didn't think much of it. They were just out there checking us out. That's what I would do too."<sup>8</sup>

(U) Being sensitive to its exposed and unprotected position, the *Liberty* reported to the Naval Security Station Command, at approximately 1100 hours, that she had destroyed all superseded May publications and intended to destroy all irregularly superseded material daily because of the "current situation and shallow water in operating area."<sup>9</sup>

#### General Quarters Drill (U)

(U) After the lunch hour, at 1310 hours, the *Liberty's* crew was exercised at general quarters for drill purposes for a mandatory noncompetitive exercise to train the crew in chemical-attack procedures. This was a routine activity, part of the ship's



(U) The Dassault Mirage jet bomber of the type which attacked the *Liberty* on 8 June.

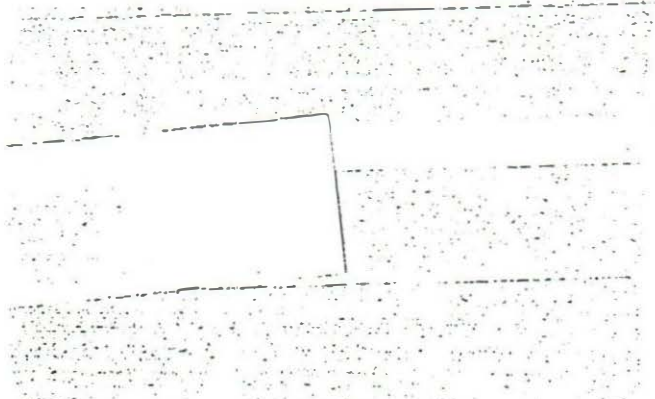
(Photograph courtesy of *Jane's All the World's Aircraft.*)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

training program established by the Commander, Service Force, Atlantic Fleet, and was not related to her mission in the eastern Mediterranean. The drill was performed satisfactorily and the ship returned to her "modified condition three" at 1345.<sup>10</sup>

(U) Following the general quarters drill, the *Liberty's* Commanding Officer, Commander William L. McGonagle, fixed her position by radar as being 25.5 nautical miles from the minaret at Al 'Arish, which was to the southeast (bearing 142° true.)

### Air Attack Begins (U)



(U) During the general quarters (GQ) drill, Lieutenant James G. O'Connor (Assistant Technical Operations Officer of the Research Department) had been officer of the deck on the bridge. At the conclusion of the drill, he went up to the O4 level (above the bridge) to see if he could locate the

approaching airplanes that had been picked up on radar by the lookouts. It was 1400 hours. From the starboard wing of the bridge, Commander McGonagle observed a single jet aircraft that appeared similar, if not identical, to those that had been sighted earlier in the day and about which a sighting report had been submitted. The relative bearing of this plane was about 135°, its position angle was about 45°-50°, its elevation approximately 7,000 feet, and it was approximately five to six miles from the ship. It appeared to McGonagle that the plane was traveling parallel to, and in the same direction as the *Liberty*. With his binoculars trained on the aircraft, the Commander was unaware of a second plane swooping in from the port side to launch a rocket directed toward the bridge. When the rocket exploded two levels below the bridge, McGonagle ordered the general alarm to be sounded.

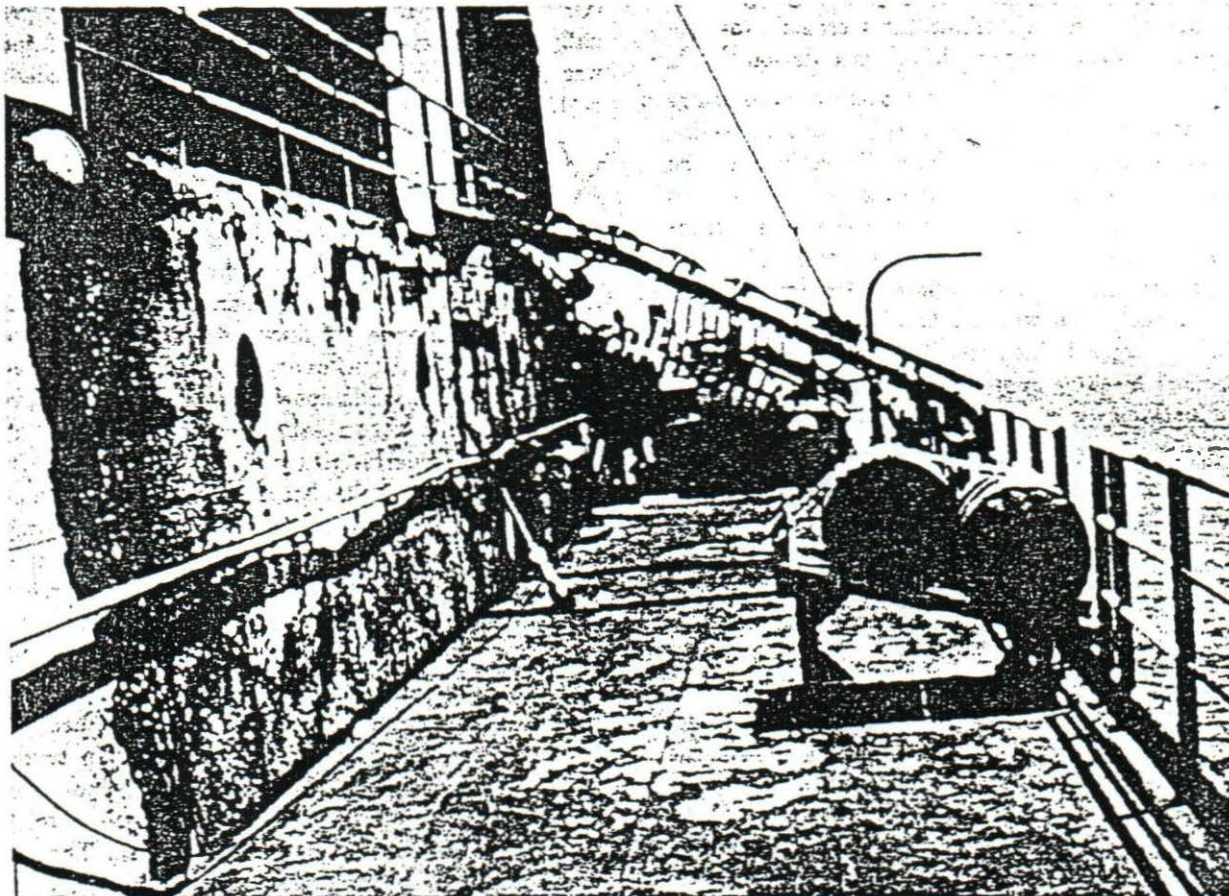
(U) CT3 Paddy E. (Dusty) Rhodes was headed below decks from his GQ station, damage control detail. At the end of the GQ drill, the Commander had ordered the whaleboat engine tested and, when Dusty heard a muffled explosion, he thought, "Those damned deck apes blew that boat up and I've got to go back up and fight the fire." Simultaneously, Dusty heard the general quarters alarm. Scampering back up the ladder, he could smell burning powder and started "dogging down" doors when a rocket tore through a bulkhead to his right ripping steel all about.

(U) Down in the, Terry McFarland, wearing his headphones, was vaguely aware of flickers of light coming through the bulkhead. He didn't realize that these were armor-piercing tracer bullets slicing through the *Liberty's* skin. The "flickers" were accompanied by a strange noise that sounded to Terry like chains being pulled across the bottom of the ship. Next, he saw Seaman "Red" Addington race down the ladder from above with blood running down his right leg from a wound in the knee. "Somebody's up there shootin' at us," said Red. Nobody spoke, but Terry could see the fear in the faces about him. Someone ordered the men to perform emergency destruction, and they turned to dumping classified material in the weighted, white canvas bags specially made for this purpose.

went up to the second deck from the / spaces to empty safes on that upper level.

(U) Hearing the general quarters alarm, CT3 Clyde W. Way ran from the mess deck to his station

(U) Topside, one level above the main deck, the exploding rocket had started a blazing fire in two 55-gallon gasoline drums stowed below the bridge on the port side. McGonagle quickly ordered his Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Philip M. Armstrong, to go down and release the gasoline cans. Lieutenant O'Connor joined the Exec. Just as



(U) Starboard side of the *Liberty*, scorched by fire from exploding rockets that were launched by the Israeli attack aircraft.

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

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both reached the top of the ladder to proceed down, a bomb hit near the whaleboat on the starboard side, immediately aft of the bridge. Armstrong and O'Connor were thrown back onto the bridge and other personnel in the pilot-house were blown from their feet. McGonagle grabbed the engine order annunciator and rang up all head flank speed — an order for maximum speed. At the same time, he ordered Lieutenant Maurice H. Bennett to report to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) via the high-command radio circuit (hicom) that the *Liberty* was under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and required immediate assistance. This Flash message, giving the *Liberty's* position as 33-25E, 31-23N, was received by the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga* (CVA-60) and relayed to Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; Commander, Sixth Fleet; and Commander, Task Force 60 (CTF 60).<sup>11</sup> *Liberty's* transmission was not made without difficulty. During the attack and intermittently thereafter, the hicom voice circuit was subjected to loud jamming regardless of frequency. This electronic interference was described as a steady carrier without modulation.<sup>12</sup>

(U) After being blown back onto the bridge floor, Lieutenant O'Connor realized he had no feeling in his body from the waist down. To get out of the way, he dragged himself into the combat information center (CIC) behind the bridge, where several others had also sought safety. Lying face down, O'Connor soon noticed that there was a lot of blood on the floor and then realized it was his. About this time, Ensign O'Malley stepped into the CIC and helped stop O'Connor's bleeding by stuffing a T-shirt into the holes in his back.

(U) A few moments after the bomb blast on the starboard side, Commander McGonagle was hit by flying shrapnel and knocked off his feet, but, though shaken up, he remained on the bridge, totally in command.

(U) For the next five or six minutes, aircraft made criss-cross attacks on the *Liberty* at about one-minute intervals, hitting her with rockets and machine-gun fire. A final count entered into the Court of Inquiry's record, showed 821 separate hits on the ship's hull and superstructure. The attacking aircraft were later identified as French-built Dassault Mirage jet fighters whose armament consisted of two 30mm cannon, two 1,000-pound bombs, and four rocket pods (18 rockets each).

(U) During the first or second strafing run, the ship's public-address system, the electrically powered intercom system, and most sound-powered phone circuits were severed or destroyed.

(U) In the first minutes of the air attack the *Liberty* suffered a complete loss of external communications because of badly damaged radio transmitting equipments and antenna systems. In spite of this, emergency restoration of hicom voice capability was completed within minutes. All U.S.S. *Liberty* communications immediately thereafter were via the hicom voice network.<sup>13</sup>

(U) The coordinated strafing, rocket, and incendiary air attacks created three major fires topside that covered large areas of the *Liberty* with flames and heavy smoke. Eight men were killed or died of injuries received during the air attack: two killed or mortally wounded on the bridge, two killed at machine gun 51, one killed at machine gun 52, one died from wounds received on the main deck starboard side, and two died of wounds received on the 01 level portside. Throughout the topside area, 75 men had been wounded by shrapnel and shock of exploding rockets.

(U) During this period, the *Liberty* gradually built up speed from five knots; her exact speed was not known but it is doubtful that she exceeded 11 or 12 knots while under attack.

### Torpedo-Boat Attack (U)

(U) At about 1424 hours, look-outs sighted three high-speed boats approaching the *Liberty* from the northeast on a relative bearing of approximately 135° at a distance of about 15 miles. The boats appeared to be in a wedge-type formation, spaced about 150 to 200 yards apart, and closing in a torpedo-launch attitude at an estimated speed of 27 to 30 knots. Commander McGonagle ordered a sailor from the bridge to man the starboard gun and take the boats under fire. Using the hicom circuit, the *Liberty's* radioman reported the approach of the torpedo boats. This was received and relayed by the U.S.S. *Saratoga* to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe and to the Commander, Sixth Fleet.<sup>14</sup>

(U) It was then that the Commander noticed that the *Liberty's* American flag had been shot down. He immediately ordered a signalman to hoist the "holiday ensign" — the largest flag aboard (approximately 7 x 13 feet) — from the yardarm, the normal flag halyard having been destroyed. There was smoke from the burning whaleboat and other topside fires in the vicinity of the bridge.

(U) Commander McGonagle passed the word, "Stand by for torpedo attack." He held his course, since turning away from the boats would bring the ship closer to land, and turning toward them would

swing the ship broadside toward the attackers, giving them a larger target.

(U) When [redacted] heard the torpedo attack warning, he remembered one of the seamen telling him to sit on the floor and brace his feet against the wall.

(U) In the processing and reporting area, CT Terry McFarland was told to "tuck pant legs into your socks, button top collar, get rid of loose material, and lie flat on floor and hold your head in your hands to protect your face."

(U) When the motor torpedo boats were approximately a mile away, the center boat was seen flashing a signal light. Because of smoke and flames in the direction from which the boats were approaching, Commander McGonagle could not read the signals, but he saw what he believed to be an Israeli flag. As the air attack had knocked out the *Liberty's* starboard signal light, he attempted to signal with a hand-held Aldis lamp. This may not have been powerful enough to penetrate the smoke pouring from the fires started by the attackers. Believing that the air attack might have been in error, Commander McGonagle quickly shouted to the starboard forward gun to withhold fire. The gunner fired a short burst at the motor torpedo boats before he understood the CO's order. At the same time, though unattended, the after gun on the starboard side opened fire: flames from the burning whaleboat had ignited bullets in the gun and in the

ammunition box; causing the gun to fire in the direction of the attacking boats.

(U) At this time, the motor torpedo boats opened fire with their gun mounts, killing the *Liberty's* helmsman. In a matter of seconds one torpedo crossed astern of the ship at about 25 yards. The time was then 1434 hours. A minute later, a second torpedo struck the ship on the starboard side, just forward of the bridge and a few feet below the water line. Again, using the hicom net, the *Liberty* broadcast that the ship had been torpedoed and was listing badly. The *Saratoga* picked up the transmission and relayed it to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe and to the Commander, Sixth Fleet.<sup>15</sup>

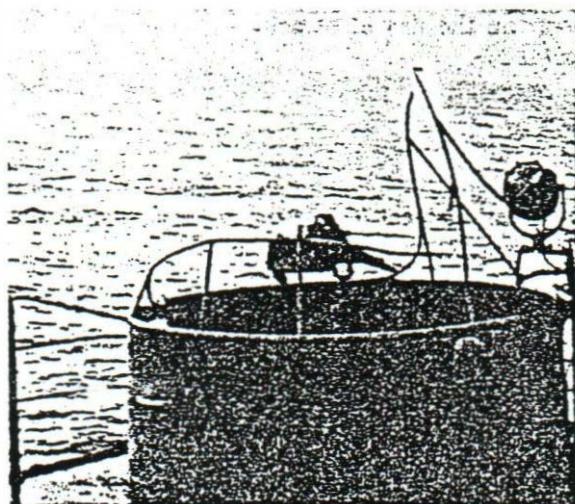
(U) To Lieutenant O'Connor, lying on the floor of the combat information center, the torpedo's deafening explosion seemed to lift the ship right out of the water, and when it settled back he thought it was going to roll over.

(U) In the [redacted] where the torpedo struck, everything went black; oil and debris were everywhere. Water rushed in and equipment fell over Terry McFarland, but he managed to keep clear and make his way in the darkness to the ladder to go topside. When he got out there was about a foot and a half of air space left.

(U) CT Clyde W. Way was in [redacted] spaces above the [redacted] With the explosion below, all equipment fell to the floor and smoke poured from the [redacted] hatch. Way started pulling men out as they came up the ladder. There was no panic. A Marine went down the ladder to help locate men possibly trapped in the water. As the water rose in the [redacted], Lieutenant Maurice Bennett realized that he had to close the hatch to contain the flooding. Attempts to contact the Marine who had gone back failed, and Lieutenant Bennett reluctantly and sorrowfully ordered the hatch closed. McFarland and Way then went topside to help fight fires and attend the wounded.

(U) The torpedo explosion had torn a hole in the side of the ship that extended from a few feet above the water line to below the turn of the bilge. It was shaped like a tear-drop, and was 39 feet across at its widest point. Its immediate effect was to flood all compartments on two decks below the water line, from frame 53 to frame 66. These frames supported watertight bulkheads, and marked the location of the *Liberty's* [redacted] and store rooms. Twenty-five men died in these spaces some from the blast, others drowned.

(U) The torpedo hit did not start a major fire, probably because of the immediate flooding of the

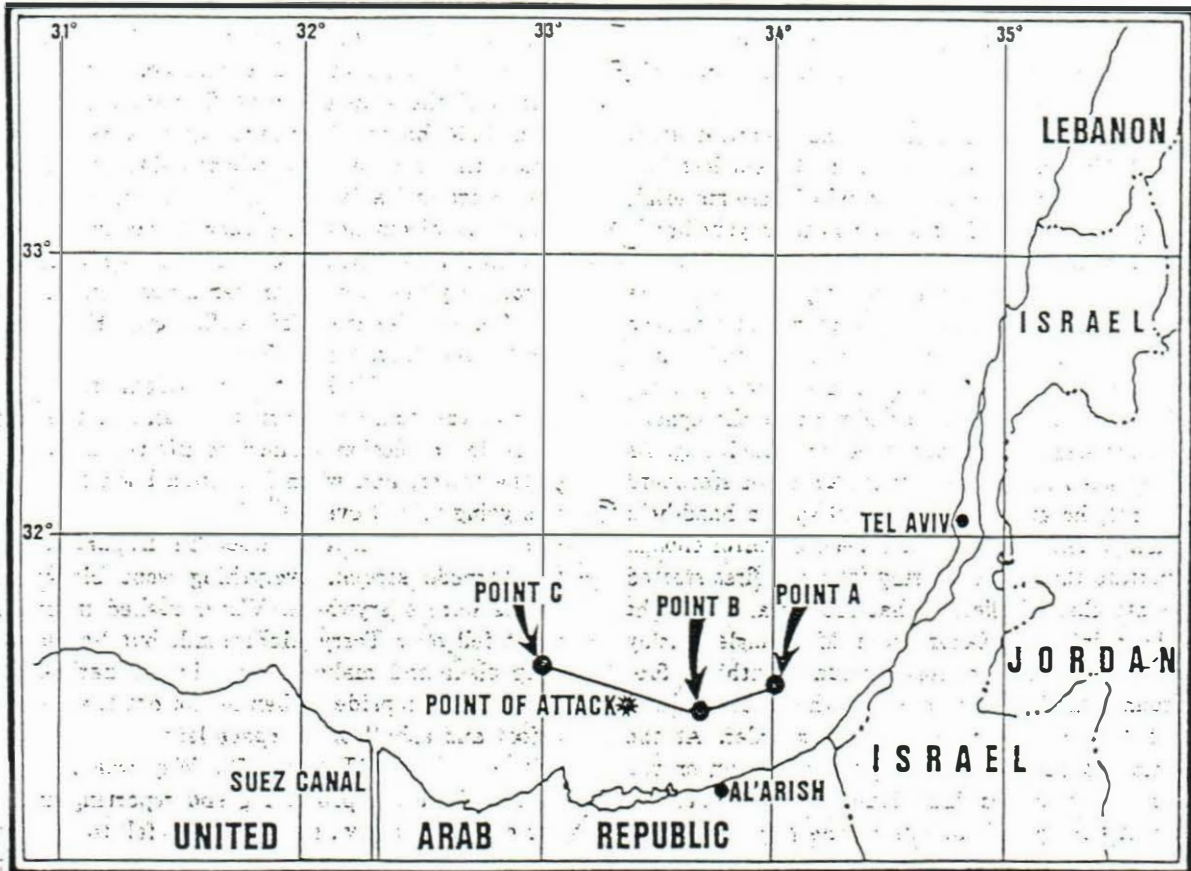


(U) During the attack, severe damage was done to one of the two forward area 50-caliber gun mounts.

Photograph courtesy of [redacted] NSA.  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



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(U) The projected track of the *Liberty* on the day of attack.

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

affected area, but the *Liberty* immediately listed nine degrees to starboard. Power and steering control were lost temporarily and the ship came dead in the water. The time was 1440 hours.

(U) The three torpedo boats also stopped and then milled around astern of the *Liberty* at a range of approximately 500 to 800 yards. One of the boats signaled by flashing light, in English, "Do you require assistance?" Not being able to signal by light, Commander McGonagle ordered a signalman to hoist the international flag signal for "not under command," meaning that the ship was maneuvering with difficulty and that they should keep clear. One of the torpedo boats was identified by a hull number of 204-17. All boats retired toward shore at 1505 hours. The attacking torpedo boats were later identified as French-built motor torpedo boats of the Israeli Ayah class. These

were 62-ton craft, capable of 42 knots, with a crew of 15 and armament consisting of one 40mm cannon, four 20mm cannon, and two torpedos.

#### Post-Attack Reconnaissance (U)

(U) At about 1515 hours, two helicopters approached the *Liberty* and circled around the ship at a distance of about 100 yards. The Star of David insignia was clearly visible. One of the helicopters was numbered 04 or D4, the other 08 or D8. The helicopters departed, returned, and departed again.

(U) Commander McGonagle designated the mess decks as a casualty collection station, and the wounded were taken there by repair party personnel and other crew members able to assist.

(U) Reports received from damage control central indicated that the flooding was under control.

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(U) Following this, at 1549 hours, the Commander, Sixth Fleet relayed to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, (CINCUSNAVEUR) his message of instruction to the carriers concerning the use of force and observance of Israeli and Egyptian territorial limits.<sup>19</sup>

(U) Commander, Task Force 63, reacting to the *Liberty's* plight, sent a message to Sixth Fleet at 1610 hours recommending that fleet ocean tug U.S.S. *Papago* (ATF-160) of the Abnaki class be diverted to proceed at maximum speed to assist the *Liberty*.

### Washington Informed (U)

(U) An hour and eleven minutes after the *Liberty* was attacked, the National Military Command Center (NMCC) in the Pentagon was phoned by CINCEUR and told of the situation as known. At 0915 hours (DST), 8 June, NMCC phoned the  
to notify NSA of the attack.<sup>20</sup>

(U) At the White House, President Lyndon B. Johnson was busy telephoning cabinet members and congressional leaders when he was interrupted at 0949 hours (DST) by Walt Rostow, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, and told that "the *Liberty*, has been torpedoed in the Mediterranean. The ship is located 60-100 miles north of Egypt. Reconnaissance aircraft are out from the 6th fleet. ...no knowledge of the submarine or surface vessel which committed this act....shall keep you informed."<sup>21</sup>

(U) Rostow phoned again at 1014 hours to advise the President that the *Liberty* was "listing badly to starboard. The *Saratoga* has launched 4-A4's and 4-A1's...."<sup>22</sup>

### Israel Reports Error (U)

(U) In Tel Aviv, Israel, the U.S. Naval Attaché, Commander E. C. Castle, was called to the Foreign Liaison Office, Israel Defence Force at approximately 1600 hours (local time) and told that Israeli air and sea forces had attacked the *Liberty* in error. Immediately the U.S. Defense Attaché office sent a Flash message to advise the White House, Department of State, and others of this development.<sup>23</sup>

### Johnson Informs Kosygin (U)

(U) The message was received by the White House, NMCC, and other members of the U.S. military and intelligence community at 1045 hours

(DST). Walt Rostow informed the President and immediately drafted a "hot line" message to the Kremlin. President Johnson approved the following text which was sent to Chairman Kosygin at 1117 hours (DST):

We have just learned that U.S.S. *Liberty*, an auxiliary ship, has apparently been torpedoed by Israel 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 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 but feel that you should know of this development urgently.<sup>24</sup>

The message was received in Moscow at 1124 hours (DST).<sup>25</sup> At 1210 hours Kosygin replied by "hot line" that he had passed the message to President Nasser of Egypt.<sup>26</sup> Thereafter instructions were issued by JCS and Commander, Sixth Fleet to withdraw the aircraft launched to defend the *Liberty*. By 1849 hours Sixth Fleet reported all planes recalled and accounted for.<sup>27</sup>

(U) Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance notified the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, by phone at 1700 hours that all news releases on the *Liberty* affair would be made at the Washington level — no releases were to be made aboard ships. This information was relayed to the Commander, Sixth Fleet.<sup>28</sup>

### *Liberty* Recovers (U)

(U) Unaware of what was happening at fleet headquarters or in Washington and Tel Aviv, the *Liberty* was struggling to regain full engine power and to reach deeper water. The gyro compass was out but the pilot-house magnetic compass appeared to be working.

(U) The ship remained at general quarters while the crew effected post-attack emergency measures. Sixth Fleet was notified that the *Liberty* had carried out the emergency destruction of all crypto publications and key cards. Her only means of communication remained the hicom circuits.<sup>29</sup>

(U) *Liberty's* medical officer, Lieutenant Richard F. Kiepfer, Medical Corps, USN, performed one major operation and gave emergency treatment to wounded men as best he could. He manned the main battle dressing station, together with one hospital corpsman, while the other corpsman operated a secondary station in the forward part of the ship. Both stations were flooded with seriously injured men and for a time there was little opportunity to do more than give first aid. Bleeding was stopped, men were given

Power was restored to the bridge at 1520 hours, but steering control could not be regained from the bridge, making it necessary to give rudder orders by telephone to men in the "after steering" compartment, and for some time they operated the ship's heavy rudder by hand.

(U) At 1536 hours, the Israeli torpedo boats again approached the *Liberty* from the starboard, at a range of five miles. During the next hour and a quarter, the boats returned toward the ship several times before disappearing over the horizon without further signal or action.

(U) Communications were restored at about 1600 hours, and Commander McGonagle dictated a message to Lieutenant Bennett providing additional information concerning the attack by unidentified aircraft and the fact that the torpedo boats had been identified as Israeli. A preliminary estimate of the number of dead and casualties, as well as the condition of the ship, was also provided. Transmission of this message was delayed because shipboard emergency measures demanded immediate attention to preserve the safety and stability of the ship and minimize new casualties.

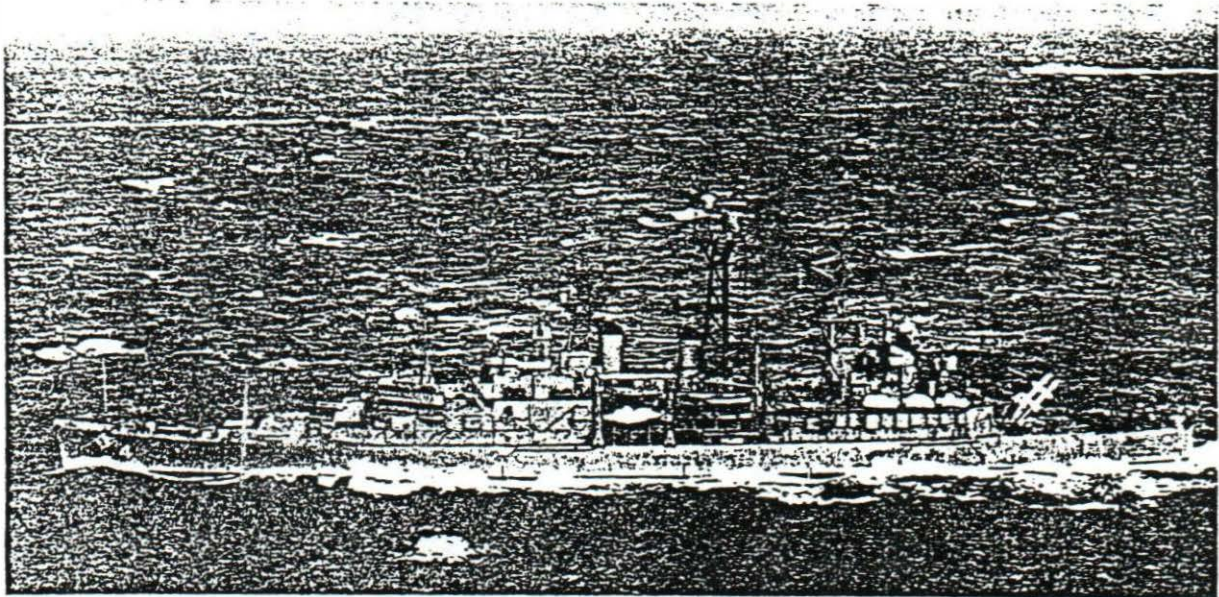
(U) Fifteen minutes later two unidentified jet aircraft approached the *Liberty* from the starboard side and reconnoitered from a distance before disappearing from the scene.

## Sixth Fleet Reacts (U)

(U) Aboard his flagship, the guided-missile light cruiser U.S.S. *Little Rock* (CLG-4), the Commander, Sixth Fleet received (from the *Saratoga*) the *Liberty's* messages about the air and torpedo boat attacks. At 1450 hours, fifty minutes after the attack began, he ordered the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *America* (CVA-66) to launch four armed A-4 Skyhawks and the carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga* (CVA-60) to launch four armed A-1 attack planes to defend the *Liberty*. The *America* was also directed to provide fighter cover and tanker aircraft to refuel the fighters, if necessary.<sup>16</sup> At this time, the Sixth Fleet was located south of Crete, approximately 450 miles west of the *Liberty*.

(U) At 1516 hours, Commander, Task Force 60, implemented Sixth Fleet's directive and instructed his carrier pilots to "destroy or drive off any attackers who are clearly making attacks on the *Liberty*. Remain over international waters. Defend yourself if attacked."<sup>17</sup>

(U) On the heels of this action, at 1520 hours, the Commander, Sixth Fleet, informed U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe (CINCEUR) of the attack and aircraft being deployed to defend the *Liberty*. It was estimated that the first aircraft would be on the scene at 1715 hours.<sup>18</sup>



(U) U.S.S. *Little Rock*, a guided missile light cruiser and the flagship of the Commander, Sixth Fleet.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

SECRET

morphine for pain and treated for shock, and those with lung wounds were treated to ease breathing.

(U) At 1750 hours, Sixth Fleet advised the *Liberty* that destroyers were on the way at maximum speed and that the *Liberty* was to proceed on a course of 340° magnetic until 100 miles from present position, then turn 270° magnetic.

### U.S. Naval Attaché Helicopters to the *Liberty* (U)

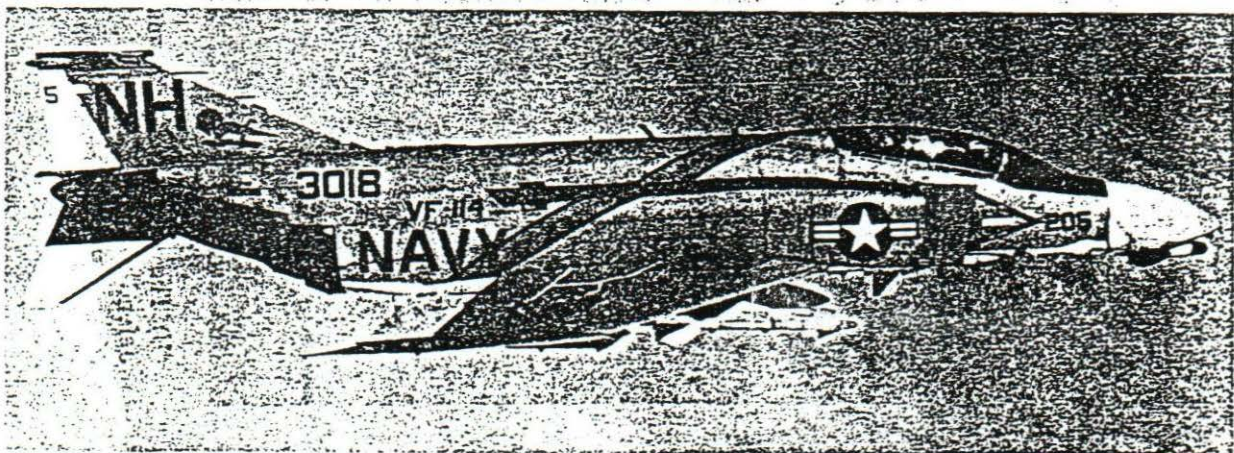
(U) Back in Tel Aviv, the Israeli Foreign Liaison Office was arranging for a helicopter to fly Commander Castle, U.S. Naval Attaché, to the *Liberty* so that he might communicate with its commanding officer. The helicopter left Dov Hoss (now Sde-Dov) airfield on the northern side of Tel Aviv at 1810 hours and proceeded directly to the *Liberty*. By 1835 hours, the Israeli Sikorsky helicopter, carrying Commander Castle, was over the ship hovering at approximately 30 feet from bridge level. Lettering on the tail of the helicopter was SA32K and on the fuselage were the numerals 06 or D6. The helicopter had neither an electric megaphone nor hand-held signal light with which to communicate with the *Liberty*.<sup>30</sup>

(U) Wearing civilian clothes, Commander Castle could not convey his identity to the bridge of *Liberty* but by visual means indicated that he wished to be lowered aboard the ship. At first, Commander McGonagle prepared to receive the attaché but, considering the obstructions in the forecastle area, sig-

naled a wave-off to the transfer attempt. Simultaneously, the helicopter pilot said he could not make the transfer because of the *Liberty*'s speed. A few minutes later an impromptu package weighted with an orange was dropped from the helicopter onto the forecastle. Inside the package was a message written on a calling card of "Commander Ernest Carl Castle, United States Navy, Naval Attaché for Air, Embassy of the United States of America, Tel Aviv." On the back of the card was written, "Have you casualties?" Using an Aldis lamp, the *Liberty* attempted for ten to fifteen minutes, to reply to this message with "affirmative casualties." It was not clear to those on the ship that the reply was understood. Castle, however, had received the message but was uncertain as to whether the number flashed was four or forty. The bodies of three crew members had not yet been removed from the forecastle and must have been observed by those in the helicopter. With the waning light and approach of dusk the helicopter departed the ship at approximately 1900 hours.<sup>31</sup>

(U) Shortly thereafter, at 1915 hours, the *Liberty* transmitted to CNO a post-attack situation report.<sup>32</sup>

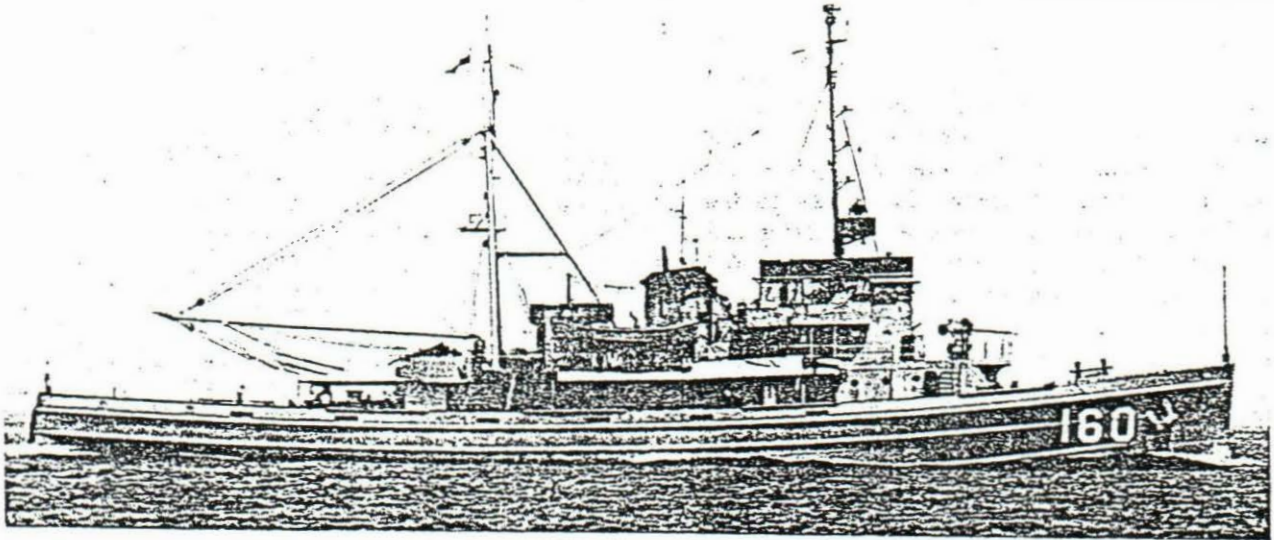
Back at NSA, within an hour of learning that the *Liberty* had been torpedoed, the



(U) The *America* also was ordered to dispatch F4 Phantom fighters, like this one, to provide cover for the Skyhawks.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



(U) U.S.S. *Papago*, ocean tug of the Sixth Fleet, was sent to aid the *Liberty* and was used to recover classified material adrift from the torpedo hole in the *Liberty's* hull.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

suffering from the loss of blood and experiencing a great deal of pain from his wounds. By remaining on the bridge, McGonagle believed his presence there would give reassurance to the crew. The *Liberty's* doctor, Lieutenant Kiepfer, had seen McGonagle on the bridge but made no effort to get him below to a battle dressing station. In Lieutenant Kiepfer's words, The Commanding Officer at that time was like a rock upon which the rest of the men supported themselves. To know that he was on the bridge grievously wounded, yet having the conn and helm and ... calling every change of course, was the thing that told the men "we're going to live." When I went to the bridge and saw this, I should say that I knew that I could only insult this man by suggesting that he be taken below for treatment of his wounds. I didn't even suggest it."

(U) The attack had demanded the very best from the *Liberty's* crew and they had responded exceptionally well. Damage control competence minimized *Liberty's* structural wounds and kept her afloat. The engineering crew under Lieutenant George Golden maintained power to the engines so that the *Liberty* could move away from dangerous shoals in the attack area and head toward the Sixth Fleet. The medical officer and his two corpsmen needed help and they got it. In Kiepfer's words,

Any time we needed one volunteer, we'd get ten. If anything had to be done ... there were hands everywhere. When we

### *Liberty* Licks Its Wounds (U)

(U) As darkness settled over the *Liberty*, Commander McGonagle remained on the bridge, still

asked for two pints of blood for transfusion, we had people on the adjoining tables who were saying, "If you need some, I have this type." These were people already wounded.<sup>14</sup>

NSA civilian, remembered, too, that surprisingly there was no panic. When the men were ordered to do something, they did it. Everyone was kept busy. Though some were obviously scared to death, there was simply no panic; nobody ran rampant through the ship. No one slept much that night. Helping the wounded became everyone's job — even those with no medical training. Men learned to dress wounds or do stitches. In some cases to quiet a man, he was given a bottle of rum to drown his pain. With the lengthening hours of darkness, deepening depression and shock caused some men to break down and succumb to the fears they had been able to restrain during the attack and immediately thereafter.<sup>17</sup>

(U) Alone, battered, and scarred but unvanquished, the *Liberty* steamed steadily on throughout the night toward a rendezvous with Sixth Fleet destroyers. Three musters were taken to identify the dead, the seriously injured, and those who were missing. Casualty messages were completed as quickly as possible and necessary message notifications sent.

Notes

Source documents are in the *Collection of the NSA History*

- <sup>1</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 080634Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>2</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty*, "Ship Weather Observation Sheet," 8 Jun 1967.
- <sup>3</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 151003Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>4</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.
- <sup>5</sup>(U) Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 080742Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>7</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.
- <sup>8</sup>(U) Oral interview transcript, 6 May 1980.
- <sup>9</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 080856Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>10</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.
- <sup>11</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Saratoga* msg 081235Z Jun 1967.

<sup>12</sup>(U) U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.

<sup>13</sup>(U) MG J.R. Russ, USA, JCS. "Report of the Fact Finding Team, U.S.S. *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967", p. 39. (Hereafter cited as the Russ Report.)

<sup>14</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Saratoga* msg 081237Z Jun 1967.

<sup>15</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Saratoga* msg 081254Z Jun 1967.

<sup>16</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 081250Z Jun 1967.

<sup>17</sup>(U) CTF 60 msg 081316Z Jun 1967.

<sup>18</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 081320Z Jun 1967.

<sup>19</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 081349Z Jun 1967.

<sup>20</sup>(U) National Military Command Center, "Memorandum for the Record, 1530 EDT, 8 Jun 1967 and NSA Senior Operations Officer Log, 0730-1530, 8 Jun 1967.

<sup>21</sup>(U) The White House Daily Diary, 8 Jun 1967, 9:49 a.m. telephone call from Walt Rostow, p. 2, and the White House Memorandum to the President from W.W. Rostow, 9:50 a.m., 8 Jun 1967.

<sup>22</sup>(U) The White House Daily Diary, 8 Jun 1967, 10:14 a.m. telephone call from Walt Rostow, p. 3, and Memorandum to the President from W.W. Rostow, 10:15 a.m., 8 Jun 1967.

<sup>23</sup>(U) Other addressees for U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Tel Aviv, msg 081414Z Jun 1967, were: OSD, CNO, JCS, Sixth Fleet, and NAVEUR USDAO, Tel Aviv msg 151615Z Jun 1967.

<sup>24</sup>(U) Yuriy Nikolaevich Chernyakov was Minister-Counselor at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., from 1965 to 1969. He often substituted for the Ambassador.

<sup>25</sup>(U) The White House Daily Diary, 8 Jun 1967, p. 3 and "hot line" msg to Chairman Kosygin from President Johnson, 8 Jun 1967, 11:17 a.m.

<sup>26</sup>(U) The White House Daily Diary, 8 Jun 1967, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup>(U) JCS msg 081529Z Jun 1967, and COMSIXTHFLT msg 081649Z Jun 1967.

<sup>28</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 081517Z Jun 1967.

<sup>29</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 081514Z Jun 1967.

<sup>30</sup>(U) USDAO, Tel Aviv msg 151615Z Jun 1967.

<sup>31</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.

<sup>32</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 081715Z Jun 1967.

<sup>33</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 081356Z Jun 1967.

<sup>34</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.

<sup>35</sup>(U) Ibid.

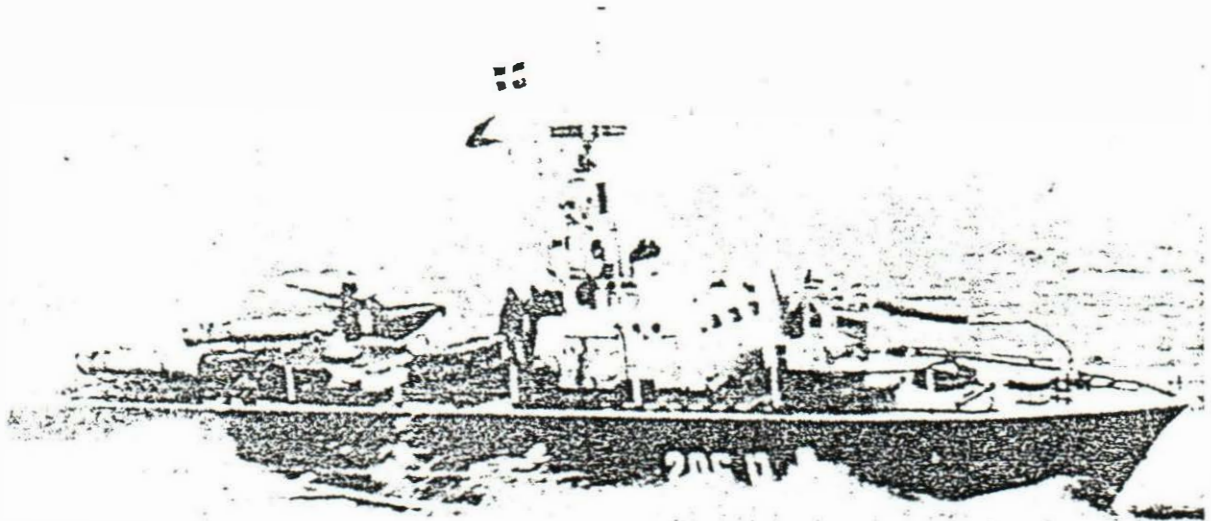
<sup>36</sup>(U) Oral interview transcripts: 6 May 1980; CTC Clyde W. Way, 6 Jun 1980; and CTC Terry L. McFarland, 23 June 1980.

Chapter V

The Israeli Explanation (U)

Chronology of Israeli Actions (U)

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(U) Israeli motor torpedo boat of the class which attacked the *Liberty*.

(Photograph courtesy of *Jane's Fighting Ships*.)

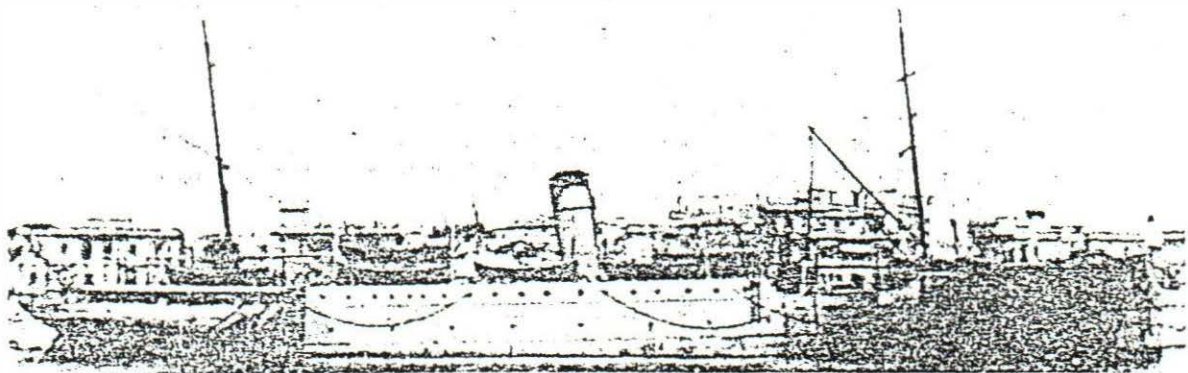
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



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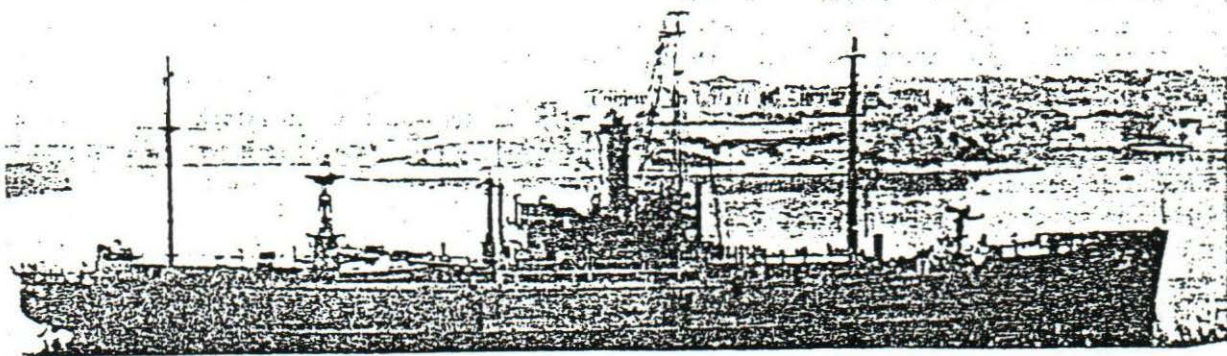


(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* was mistaken by the Israelis for this Egyptian ship, *El-Kasir*.  
(Photograph courtesy of *Jane's Fighting Ships*.)  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) In summation, the judge concluded that in all the circumstances of the case the conduct of the naval officers concerned in the *Liberty* incident could not be considered unreasonable to an extent which would justify committal for trial.

#### Explanation Reexamined (U)

(U) Reexamination of Israel's explanation of why its air and naval forces attacked the *Liberty* reveals egregious errors in both command judgments and operational procedures.



(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* arriving in Malta after the attack.  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) The Department of State expressed its view of the torpedo attack in these words:

The subsequent attack by Israeli torpedo boats, substantially after the vessel was or should have been identified by Israeli military forces, manifests the same reckless disregard for human life. The silhouette and conduct of U.S.S. *Liberty* readily distinguished it from any vessel that could have been considered hostile....It could and should have been scrutinized visually at close range before torpedoes were fired....The United States Government expects the Government of Israel also to take the disciplinary measures which international law requires in the event of wrongful conduct by the military personnel of a State...[and] to issue instructions necessary to ensure that United States personnel and property will not again be endangered by the wrongful actions of Israeli military personnel.<sup>1</sup>

(U) When NSA's Deputy Director read the decision of the Israeli Defence Forces Preliminary Inquiry, he summed up his personal feelings on the subject by calling it "a nice whitewash."<sup>4</sup>

#### Notes

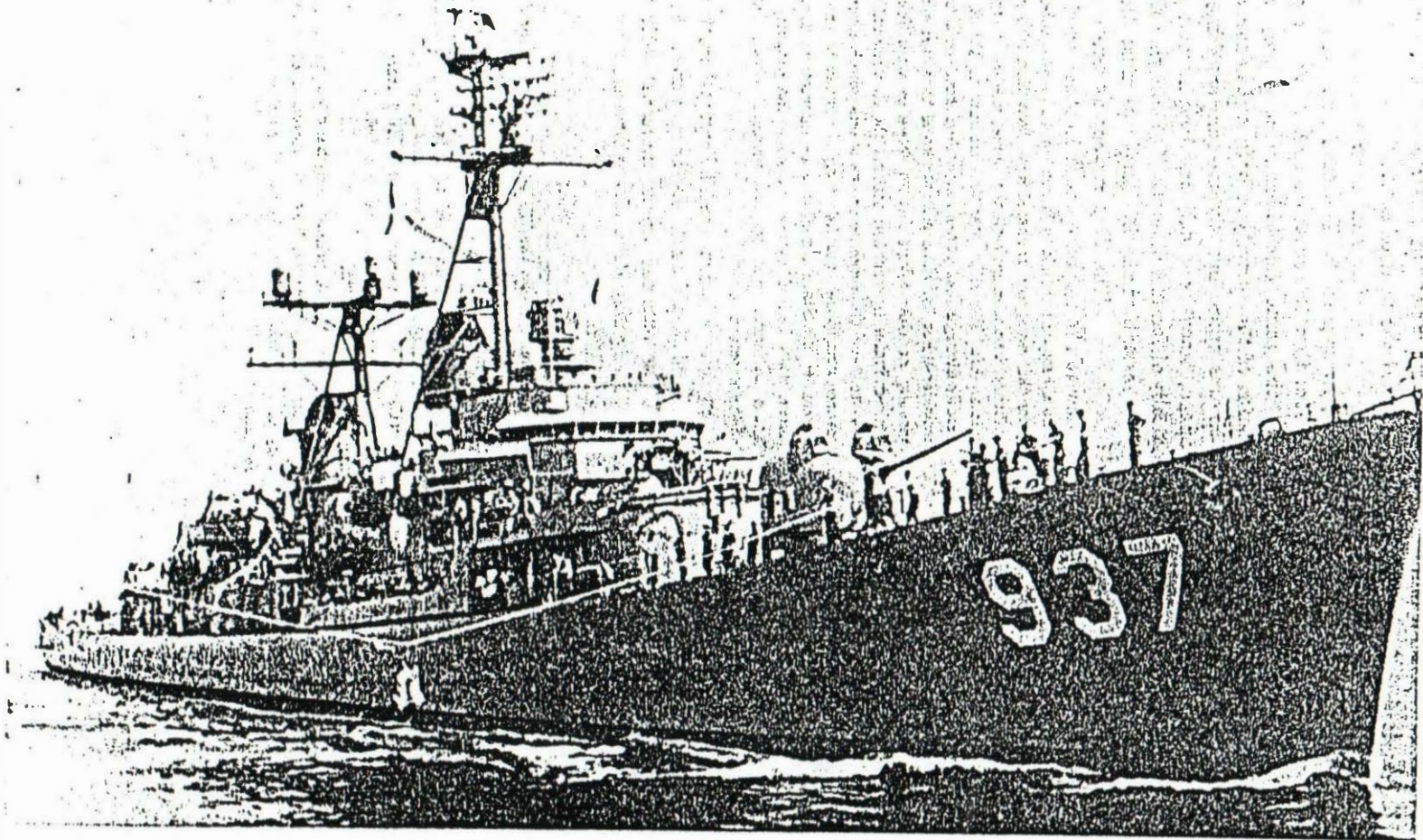
Source documents are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the NSA History Collection.

<sup>1</sup>(U) Department of State Telegram No. 210139, to the U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv, 11 June 1967.

<sup>2</sup>(U) Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>(U) A penned long-hand comment by Louia W. Tordella, Deputy Director, NSA, 26 August 1967.

<sup>1</sup>Footnote 1).



(U) U.S.S. *Davis*, one of the two destroyers to reach the *Liberty*, runs a line to the stricken ship. The *Davis* assumed all communications functions for the *Liberty*.

- Photograph courtesy of [redacted] NSA.)  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

## Chapter VI

## Recovery and Initial Assessment (U)

(U) Sixteen and one-half hours after the *Liberty* was attacked, U.S. assistance finally reached her. At 0625 hours (local time) on 8 June, the destroyers U.S.S. *Davis* (DD-937) and U.S.S. *Massey* (DD-778) rendezvoused with the ship at 33-01N, 31-59E, a position 420 miles east-southeast of Soudha Bay, Crete. The carrier, U.S.S. *America*, was still 138 miles from the *Liberty*, closing at 30 knots.<sup>1</sup>

## Medical Assistance (U)

(U) The Commander of Destroyer Squadron Twelve, Captain H.G. Leahy, and other personnel from the *Davis* and *Massey* immediately boarded the *Liberty* to assist in controlling damage and in treating the injured. Only after this transfer did Commander McGonagle relinquish his watch on the bridge. He was exhausted and in danger of having his wounds become infected. Temporary command of the *Liberty* was assumed by the Operations Officer of Destroyer Squadron Twelve. Upon completion of a medical assessment, the Commander, Sixth Fleet was advised that the *Liberty* was ready to transfer 15 seriously wounded and 9 dead to the *America* when its helicopters arrived. The possibility of anyone being alive in the flooded spaces was deemed unlikely. Bulkheads were firm and the flooding contained, so that the *Liberty* was completely mobile to 10 knots. The *Davis* assumed all communications functions for the *Liberty*. Further, Sixth Fleet was advised that, upon arrival of the fleet ocean tug, U.S.S. *Papago*, the destroyer *Massey* could return to fleet duties.<sup>2</sup>

(U) While *Liberty's* on-board needs were being tended to, two boats from the destroyers searched the area around the *Liberty* for two hours looking for classified papers that might be washing out from the pear-shaped, gaping hole in the flooded spaces; no classified items were recovered.<sup>3</sup>

(U) At approximately 0915 hours, all ships got under way and headed toward the carrier *America* at 10 knots. By 1030 hours, two helicopters from the

*America* reached the *Liberty* and began evacuating the seriously wounded back to the carrier. One hour later, the *America* rendezvoused with the *Liberty*. Thereafter, the group of ships set a course for Soudha Bay, Crete, some 300 miles away.

## Commander, Sixth Fleet Arrives (U)

(U) Later that afternoon, Vice Admiral William L. Martin, Commander, Sixth Fleet, boarded the *Liberty* for one hour to visit its captain and crew and to personally survey the damages sustained. Following his visit, Vice Admiral Martin recommended to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., that the *Liberty* proceed direct to Malta for dry docking rather than to Soudha Bay first because of the primary necessity to protect the cryptomaterial and equipment. Admiral McCain gave his approval.<sup>4</sup>

(U) Also visiting the *Liberty* during the late afternoon of the 9th was Captain Russell Arthur, Sixth Fleet Maintenance Officer, who reported to the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe the following corrective actions: "established water-tight boundaries at frames 52 and 78 and at second-deck level and made repairs to gyro, engine-order telegraph, rudder-angle indicator, fathometer, sound-powered phones and bridge-steering control." The *Liberty's* crew was augmented as necessary, and accompanied by the tug *Papago*, and the destroyer, *Davis*, she proceeded toward Malta at 10 knots.<sup>5</sup>

## Replacement Inquiries (U)



(U) Helicopter from the U.S.S. *America* lowers a litter to receive the *Liberty's* wounded. The helicopter took the wounded back to *America*, which was several miles away.

Photograph courtesy of NSA

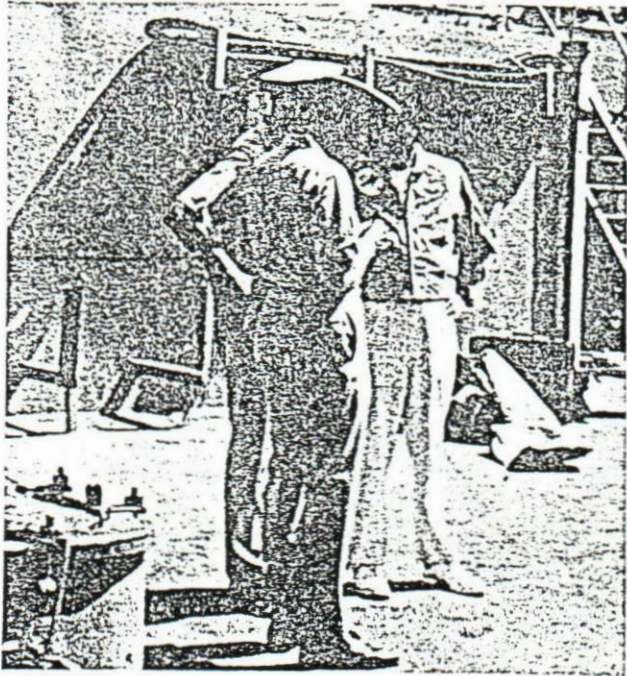
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

ruptured space prompted NAVEUR to direct Sixth Fleet on 9 June to do whatever is feasible to keep any Soviet ships out of *Liberty's* wake....maintain observation of *Liberty's* wake and if possible find out what sort of documents are being lost in the wake....take whatever steps may be reasonable and appropriate to reduce possibility of compromise, noting that a compromise could have both political and technical aspects.<sup>1</sup>

(U) *Liberty's* escorts reacted quickly and most effectively to minimize the uncontrollable loss of sensitive materials. Though a Soviet guided-missile destroyer (DDG 626/4) of the Kildin class remained in the vicinity of the *Liberty* between 1320 and 1600 hours on the 9th, she was kept under constant surveillance and did not stop or recover anything. The *Davis*, *Massey*, or *Papago* trailed in *Liberty's* wake-constantly to recover papers adrift. The first night,

### Recovery of Sensitive Materials (U)

(U) Mounting concern over the possible loss of sensitive documents drifting out of the *Liberty's*



(U) VADM William I. Martin (right), Commander of Sixth Fleet, visited the *Liberty* on the afternoon of 9 June.

— Photograph courtesy of \_\_\_\_\_, NSA.)  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

the *Papago* picked up one classified item ten miles behind *Liberty*.<sup>9</sup>

(U) In Washington, after the general details of the attack on the *Liberty* had been absorbed,

there was, quite naturally, a clamor for specific information about casualties — their names and extent of injuries. The *Liberty* forwarded the best information obtainable, but data about those missing was elusive. During the Israeli attack and immediately thereafter, the *Liberty* conducted no search for personnel because none had been reported overboard and she was trying to clear the area as soon as possible. On 10 June, the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe notified JCS that the *Liberty's* flooded compartment could not be opened to account for missing personnel until the ship was drydocked. To do otherwise would risk further flooding and peril the ship and the lives of the survivors who were taking the crippled vessel to port.<sup>11</sup>

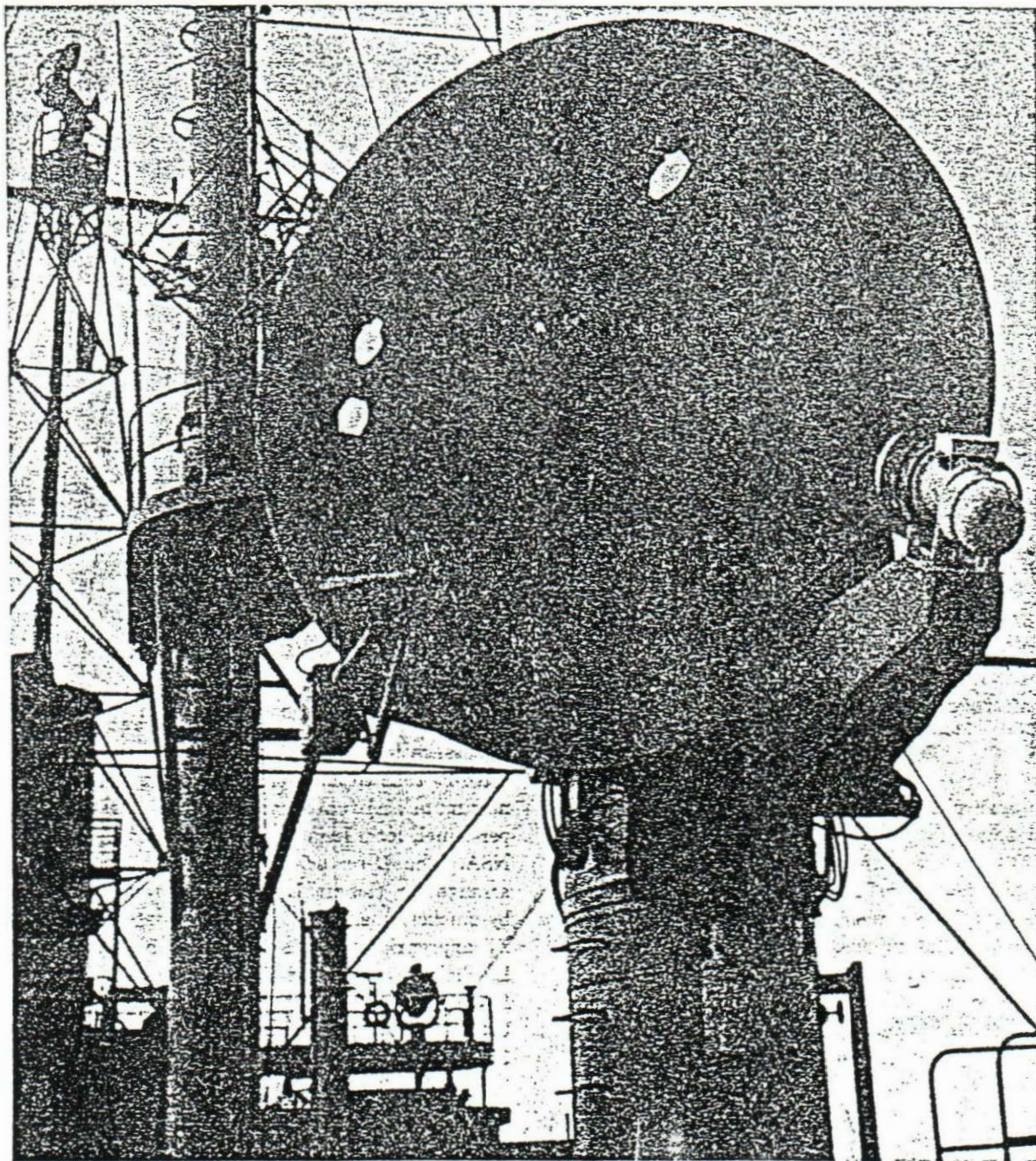
### Assistance to NSA Personnel

At NSA, when it was learned (through Navy personnel channels) that its employees Donald L. Blalock and Allen M. Blue were listed among *Liberty's* casualties, steps were taken to obtain more definite information and to notify next of kin. Late on the night of 8-9 June, the Chief and Deputy Chief, NSA Civilian Personnel (Messrs. William M. Holleran and Albert W. Ulino) drove to the Silver Spring home of Allen Blue's wife, Patsy, to notify her that Allen was missing in action.<sup>12</sup>

On 10 June, the Director, NSA sent a message to NSA Europe directing that a representative be sent to meet the *Liberty* at Malta to provide maximum assistance and guidance in respect to NSA personnel, local liaison, and informational reporting to NSA. The Director, NSA directed NSA Europe to arrange for \_\_\_\_\_ transportation home by quickest means and to relay messages for his wife. All appropriate assistance was to be given to Donald L. Blalock in arranging for his return to the U.S. Information copies of the message were sent to Senior U.S. Liaison Officer, London and to the Director, Naval Security Group Europe.<sup>13</sup>

### Cleanup Continues (U)

(U) As the *Liberty* steamed westward on 10 June, Commander McGonagle had the shrapnel removed from his leg and was resting comfortably. With adequate provisions of food, fuel, and water on board ship to reach Malta, there was concern about crew morale and Sixth Fleet was requested to have a helicopter pick up the *Liberty's* outgoing mail as soon



(U) *Liberty's* forward dish antenna after the strafing attack by Israeli jets.

~~NSA~~ - Photograph courtesy of ~~NSA~~, NSA.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



as possible and at the same time deliver mail addressed to the ship's company.<sup>14</sup> The *Liberty* continued clean-up operations aboard ship as well as the grisly task of accounting for personnel that were missing. On 11 June, the *Papago* recovered one body floating six miles astern of the *Liberty*; another person previously reported missing was now confirmed dead after recovery aboard ship.<sup>15</sup>

### Command Investigations Initiated (U)

(U) While the *Liberty* limped steadily toward Malta under the watchful protection of the *Davis* and *Papago*, U.S. military commands in the Pentagon and in Europe were feverishly arranging for the drydocking of the ship plus full-scale investigations of the events and circumstances surrounding the attack itself. The Joint Chiefs of Staff appointed a fact-finding team on 9 June and initiated plans for the team to visit, in turn, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe; U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe; Commander, Sixth Fleet; and the U.S.S. *Liberty*.<sup>16</sup>

(U) On the 10th, after conferring with the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, Europe recommended to JCS that a Navy Court of Inquiry be established. In his message to JCS, CINCEUR gave his rationale for this action as follows:

Have reviewed available data with respect to *Liberty* with CINCUSNAVEUR in general frame of chronology before accidental attack, during attack and subsequent thereto. We both have many very pertinent and as yet unanswered questions as we appreciate Washington has. At the same time, [it] must be recognized [that] crew members of *Liberty* from whom answers must be gotten are at point of exhaustion, suffering from wounds and shock, dead or missing. It simply does not make sense, legally or otherwise, to initiate barrage of uncorrelated questioning via long-haul communications at this time. Obviously facts must be developed involving actions and judgments of crew, *Liberty* command and chain of command, and also legal base must be established for possible claims against government of Israel. Therefore, I strongly endorse establishment of Court of Inquiry by Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, as proper procedure...although it may be somewhat time-consuming and create impatience among those who desire more rapid answers.

JCS gave immediate concurrence and on 11 June, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe convened the court in London with directions to proceed promptly to the Mediterranean and board the *Liberty* at sea as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup>

(U) In Israel, too, high-level investigations were being considered. On 13 June, the Israeli Defence Force Chief of Staff, General Rabin, appointed an official Court of Inquiry to examine the *Liberty* incident.<sup>18</sup>

### Preparations at Malta (U)

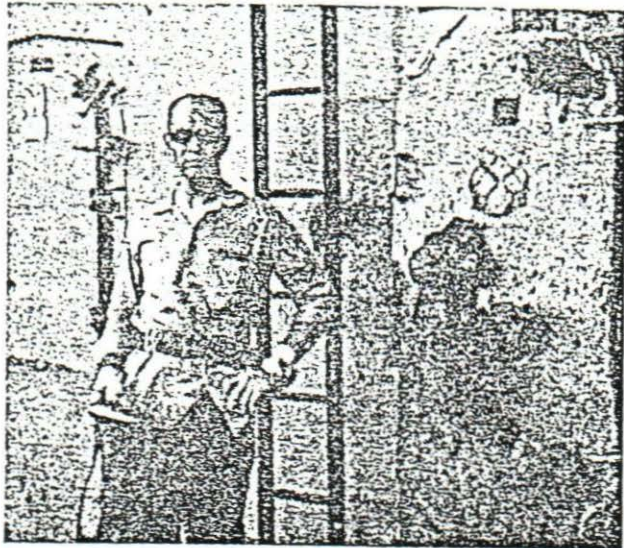
(U) To provide for the handling of the *Liberty* when she arrived at Malta, Admiral McCain, activated Task Force (TF) 100, effective 12 June, under the command of Rear Admiral Henry A. Renken, Commander, Service Force Atlantic Fleet stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. CTF 100 was charged with:

1. Supervising the drydocking, removal, and shipment of remains of personnel killed in action;
2. Preventing disclosure of classified information and material to unauthorized personnel; and
3. Readying the *Liberty* for repair by Commander, Service Force Sixth Fleet.

These functions were expected to be completed within two days after *Liberty's* expected arrival in Malta on 13 June. Subordinate task group commanders were instructed to be prepared to report in person to Rear Admiral Renken at the U.S. Embassy in Malta by noon, 12 June.<sup>19</sup>

(U) Of the eight subordinate task groups that comprised Task Force 100, the Director, Naval Security Group Europe was directed to provide personnel for TG 100.4, (Security); this group was to assume responsibility for all materials requiring special handling, including their removal from the *Liberty*, transfer to secure storage, and continuous security at all times.<sup>20</sup>

(U) After Rear Admiral Renken left Norfolk, guidance for his TG 100.3 (Public Affairs) was



(S) NSA civilian, Donald L. Blalock, was aboard the *Liberty*. Slightly wounded, he was evacuated to the *America* with the rest of the *Liberty*'s wounded.

(S) - Photograph courtesy of [redacted], NSA.  
(Figure is ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ -)

compiled and radioed for delivery to him as he passed through Rota, Spain, enroute to Malta. TG 100.3's mission was to satisfy the legitimate interests of newsmen without compromise of classified information, unwarranted interference with operations, or invasion of individual rights of privacy. Further, it was directed that all public affairs activities be conducted

[redacted], she was a communications research ship that was diverted from her research assignment to provide improved communication-relay links with the several U.S. embassies around the entire Mediterranean during the current troubles.<sup>24</sup>

(U) Specific ground rules were set forth for press coverage of *Liberty*'s arrival in Malta. Newsmen were not to be permitted in the immediate vicinity of the dockyard while the *Liberty* entered the dock, unless CTF 100 was satisfied that the torpedo hole was adequately covered; while the drydock was pumped out, regardless of covering; and after the dock was pumped out, until all remains were removed and

classified matter safeguarded. If newsmen asked about these restrictions, they were to be told that the actions were being taken primarily out of consideration of families of missing personnel, since remains may be in the exposed compartment and visible to photographers; and because communications spaces normally contain classified equipment and are closed to the public, since it must be assumed that some classified equipment is exposed. Additionally, no interviews of the officers or crew of the *Liberty* were to be granted until authorized by Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, after completion of the Court of Inquiry. If queried by the press about the reason for such policy, the security officer (TG 100.4) was to say that these men are potential witnesses before the Court of Inquiry and it is the desire of the convening authority and the President of the Court that recollections of witnesses remain as fresh as possible and not be influenced in any way by outside discussions. The doctrine of security at the source was to be followed at all times and there was to be no censorship of newsmen's material.<sup>25</sup>

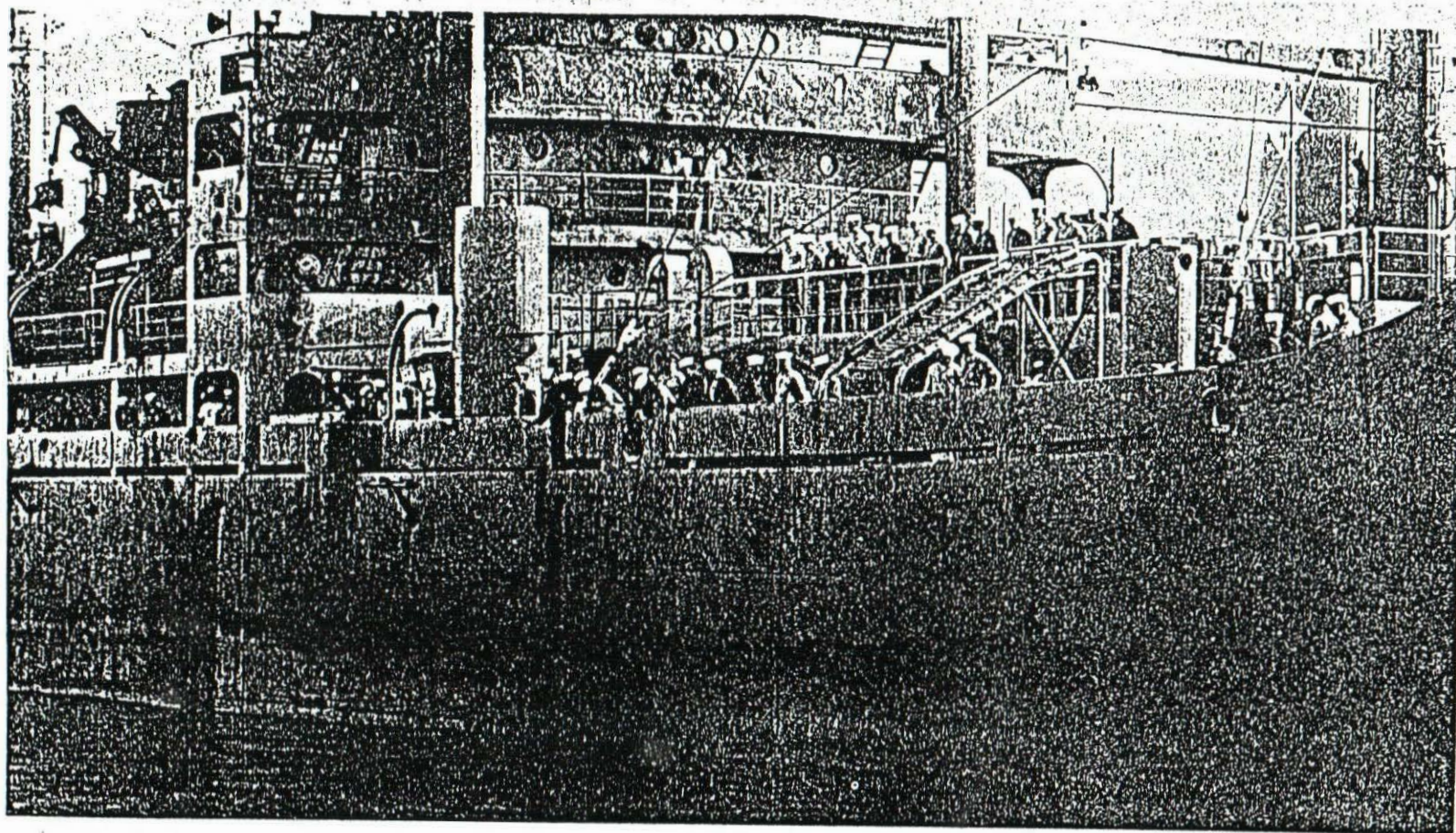
(U) Upon arriving at Malta, Rear Admiral Renken met with his task group commanders and American embassy officials on Tuesday, 13 June, to complete plans for docking operations, which would commence on *Liberty*'s arrival — then estimated at about 2300 hours that night.<sup>26</sup>

### Blalock Returns Home (U)

(S) That same afternoon, NSA civilian, Donald L. Blalock (earlier evacuated from the *Liberty* to the U.S.S. *America* with minor shrapnel wounds) was released from *America*'s medical department and flown to Athens. There he was met by NSA Europe representative, Charles Cowardin, who arranged for Blalock's travel to the United States. Blalock arrived at Washington National Airport the following day.<sup>27</sup>

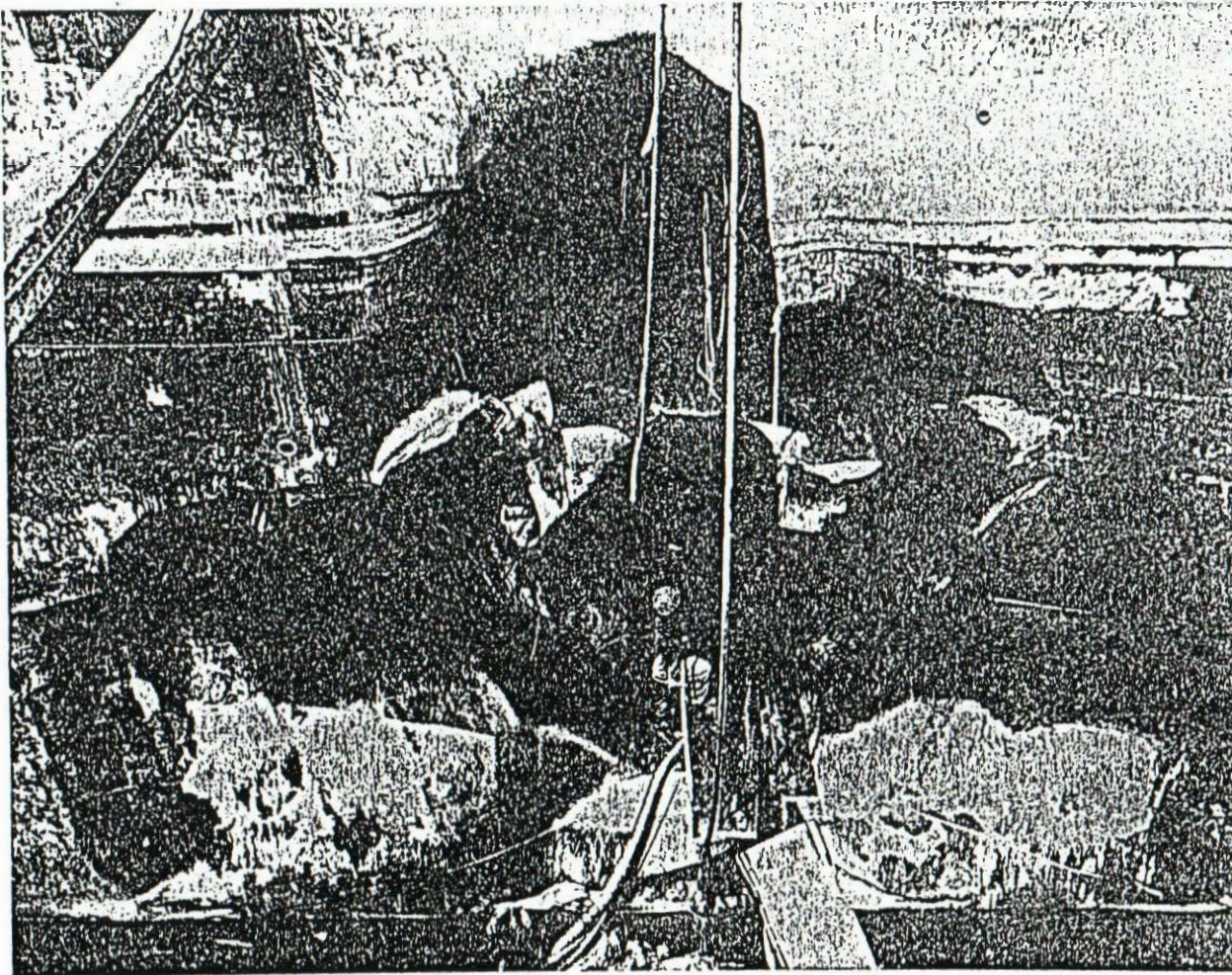
### *Liberty*'s Arrival at Malta (U)

(S) *Liberty*'s arrival in Malta was delayed until 0630 hours, 14 June. Precautionary safety measures had required additional shoring of damaged bulkheads and her speed was reduced. Divers from the *Papago* immediately began an underwater inspection of the ship's hull to determine whether or not changes in the keel blocks would be necessary before drydocking could begin. The keel was found to be straight and undamaged. At 1400 hours the *Liberty* entered the drydock; by 1530 hours a canvas net had been tied across the damaged side of the ship and screens had



(U) The *Liberty* arrived in Malta on 14 June. The torpedo hole is visible just above the water line, and the ship is riddled with holes from the rocket fire.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



(U) At the drydock in Malta, workmen inspect the torpedo-damaged hull of the *Liberty*. In comparison to the huge pieces of twisted metal, the workmen appear very small.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

been installed across all drydock drains. During the pump down, navy swimmers and men in a rubber raft picked up oil-covered paper as it floated out of the ship. When the drydock was completely drained, a thorough search of the entire drydock and each drain screen was conducted by Naval Security Group personnel. NSA Europe personnel, sent to Malta, witnessed all drainage operations.<sup>28</sup>

### Evacuation of (U)

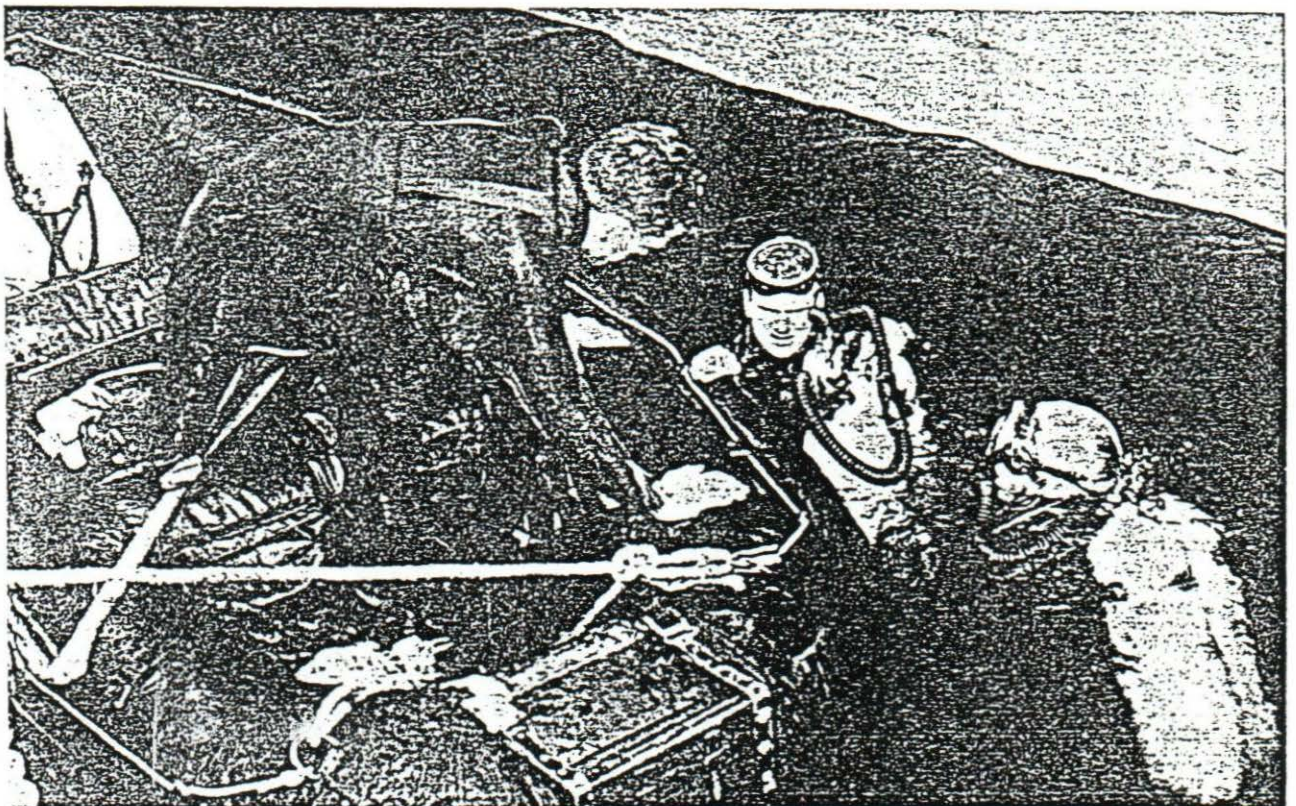
Earlier, as soon as the *Liberty* entered Malta, NSA Europe personnel boarded the ship to see NSA civilian . . . . . When . . . . . said he did not wish to stay aboard any longer, he was quickly ushered to the U.S. Consulate in Valletta for a short debriefing. Immediately thereafter, accompanied by

Lieutenant Colonel Green (from the NSA Europe staff), he returned home. Later . . . . . learned that his wife had been continually informed by NSA personnel of what was going on from the time the whole incident began; they had even offered to have someone stay with her.<sup>29</sup>

### Clearing Damaged Areas (U)

(U) In Malta the search for and removal of bodies began at 1830 hours on the 14th and continued until approximately midnight, by which time the remains of 20 men, including Allen Blue, had been recovered. Bodies of the remaining five missing men were presumed lost at sea enroute to Malta. *Liberty's* death toll stood at 34.

Clearance of the damaged area continued. Prior to opening the hatch leading down to the



(U) Navy divers Gilbert Damelio, John P. Highfill, and Daniel McDuffie recover classified debris adrift as the pump-down operations continue on the *Liberty* in Malta.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

space, a guard was posted and all personnel were required to log in when authorized access. Crews of personnel began removing all classified equipment and documents to a secure space one deck above the damaged area. This recovery process proved to be very slow because the classified equipment and material was mixed with the mass of twisted wreckage. Of course, no repair to the ship's side could begin until the damaged area was freed of all classified papers and equipment. By 19 June, all classified matter (including ) had been stowed under guard in a secure space aboard the *Liberty*.<sup>30</sup>

(U) On the afternoon of Thursday, 15 June, newsmen and photographers were given a rigidly controlled tour of *Liberty's* topside area plus several compartments on the lower decks, near the point of impact, from which all classified equipment had been removed. Later that afternoon, Task Force 100 was officially dissolved. Some task force personnel remained with the *Liberty*, however, to help wind up administrative, public affairs, and supply matters. The Sixth Fleet Maintenance Officer also remained to supervise *Liberty's* repairs.<sup>31</sup>

### Damage Survey at Malta (U)

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(e) With the exception of the TRSSCOM system antenna, all antennas were either destroyed, damaged, or burned to some degree; almost complete replacement of the antenna system would be required.

) equipment not completely destroyed by the torpedo explosion had been totally submerged in heavy oil and salt water for six days, rendering it beyond salvage.

maintenance shop and were severely damaged; all equipment was either destroyed by the explosion or

removed from the spaces at Malta because of extensive damage. In the

and development areas on the second deck, very little outward damage was noticeable. However, the shifting of the racks and breaks in the air conditioning ducts indicated considerable shock damage; each and every piece of gear would require complete checks. Additionally, internal wiring and patching facilities between all research spaces would have to be checked. From the initial inspection, it was obvious that considerable replacement of internal wiring would be required. Preliminary, informal estimates made by the engineers inspecting the *Liberty* indicated that the cost to reconfigure the platform would range between dollars.<sup>33</sup>

### JCS Fact Finding Team's Interviews (U)

(U) While the *Liberty* was being cleansed and surveyed in the Malta shipyard, the Navy and JCS investigative bodies were busily interviewing appropriate personnel aboard the *Liberty* and at various European command headquarters.

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(U) On 15 June, the team spent two hours visiting Vice Admiral William L Martin, Commander-in-Chief, Sixth Fleet, and staff aboard his flagship, the U.S.S. *Little Rock*. The team arrived in Malta at 1815 hours on the 15th and departed for London at

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0700 hours the next morning. At Malta, Major General Russ and his team visited the *Liberty* and also spoke with Rear Admiral I. C. Kidd, President of the Naval Court of Inquiry. The JCS team returned to Washington in the early evening of 18 June.

### Accounting for Classified Material (U)

~~C~~ Though activities aboard the *Liberty* immediately upon arrival at Malta had centered on readying the ship for repair, the requirement to account for all on-board classified material had not been overlooked. Not only had many classified documents been lost, but the records and inventories of sensitive materials and registered publications carried aboard ship had also been destroyed. To reconstruct *Liberty's* list of holdings, the :

to compile

detailed lists of all technical support materials that had been forwarded to the *Liberty*.<sup>35</sup>

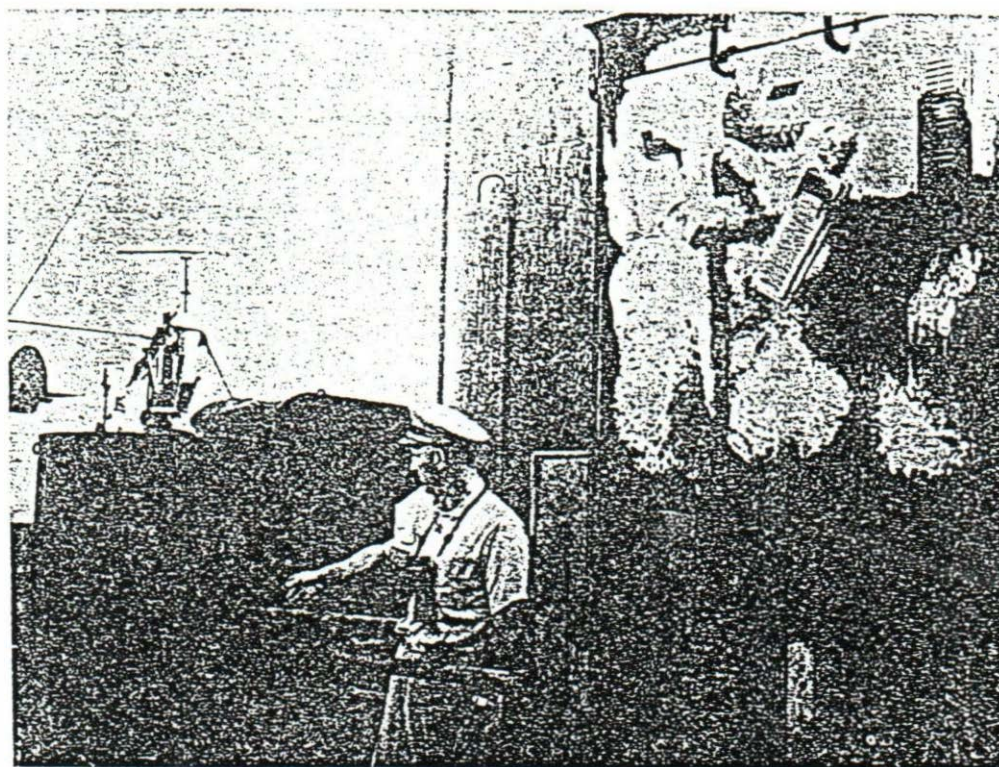
(U)

In Malta, *Liberty* personnel attempted to make an inventory of registered publications but found it to be fragmentary at best. The registered publications vault and cryptospaces were completely destroyed by the torpedo attack. In spite of the fact that, just before the attack, most registered publications had been put in weighted canvas bags, it was discovered that these bags were torn apart by the blast of the torpedo explosion; no bags remained intact. Further, those publications that were recovered were unusable: they were either soaked in oil and salt water or damaged by the blast. None could be page checked for completeness. All paper and metal residue from the damaged area were placed in canvas bags and secured in locked spaces aboard ship under twenty-four-hour guard.<sup>36</sup>

(Photograph courtesy of the

(Figure is ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~)





(U) The Captain of the *Liberty*, CDR William L. McGonagle, surveys the damage done below the bridge from the rockets fired by the Israeli aircraft.

(Photograph courtesy of the Department of the Navy.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

(U) After *Liberty* personnel had completed this action, Captain Carl M. Smith (who had been TG 100.4 commander) informed the Director, Naval Security Group that

despite [the] fact that all classified material cannot be accurately accounted for and loss at scene [is] unknown, [am] confident that possibility of compromise is reasonably unlikely while *Liberty* [was] en route [to] Malta and zero thereafter. It was a time-consuming task under difficult conditions but thoroughness of all has resulted in maintenance of highest degree of security integrity. All can take justifiable pride in dedication, willingness, and high morale of those participating in the salvage operation.<sup>37</sup>

### Joint Survey at Norfolk (U)

(U) Recognizing that the *Liberty* had had extensive reserve,

that might require replacement Navy-wide and DoD-wide, the Chief of Naval Operations proposed that a joint survey team meet the *Liberty* when she returned to Norfolk and take a sampling of the residue

to determine whether a sorting operation was possible, and to make recommendations for further actions or disposition of material. The survey team membership would be drawn from the Naval Security Group, Naval Intelligence Center, and NSA.<sup>38</sup>

NSA representatives to this team were: Billy Durham.

and Lieutenant John T. McTighe, USN,

On 31 July, these three traveled to Norfolk, Virginia, and boarded the *Liberty*, just returned from Malta. There they were joined by other members of the survey team, principally NSG personnel. Following a brief tour of the ship, the team was taken below decks to the

where the canvas bags of residue were piled. Sailors from the *Liberty's*, dressed in rubber overalls and gloves, selected about at random from the grimy, oily total and, one by one, opened each and dumped its

contents on the floor in front of the survey team. It was not a pretty sight and had malodorous qualities resulting from the combination of oil, brackish sea water, burned metal, paper, and pieces of human flesh. The team immediately agreed that it would be impossible to make a page-by-page check of the bags' contents. From looking at this sampling, the survey team concluded that:

1. Eighty percent of the material was unidentifiable;
2. Some of the material was definitely discernible, readable, and classified; and
3. Some of the classified material was identifiable, in part, by short titles and cover markings or name-plate designations; e.g., large bound volumes or books.

The team recommended that:

1. No attempt be made to conduct a detailed bag-by-bag search for the sole purpose of identifying classified material;
2. The Commanding Officer of the *Liberty* be authorized to destroy the bagged material held on board; and
3. Prior to the process of burning, an effort be made to empty each bag at the incinerator to determine the possible existence of identifiable registered publications and that each such complete publication be accounted for prior to its destruction.<sup>39</sup>

(U) CNO concurred with the survey team's recommendations and authorized destruction as requested. At the Director, NSA's request, all remaining Comsec material (excluding that in canvas bags) aboard the *Liberty* at the time of attack was segregated and forwarded to NSA for inspection.<sup>40</sup>

(C) With this command approval, *Liberty's* CO arranged for appropriately cleared personnel to \_\_\_\_\_ and burn it at the Norfolk incinerator. A list of documents identified in the burning process was forwarded to CNO. At NSA, \_\_\_\_\_ determined that there was only minimal security damage and no compromise had occurred.

Notes

Source documents are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the NSA History Collection.

- <sup>1</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 090513Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>2</sup>(U) Commander, Task Group (CTG) 60.5 msg 090758Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>3</sup>(U) Commander, Task Group 60.5 msg 092119Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>4</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 100025Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>5</sup>(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg 0923-7Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>6</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 091058Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>7</sup>(U) msg 091355Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>8</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 091459Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>9</sup>(U) CTG 60.5 msg 092119Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>10</sup>(U) 1 msg 191358Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>11</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg 101105Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>12</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 091345Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>13</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 101718Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>14</sup>(U) CTG 60.5 msg 101750Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>15</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.
- <sup>16</sup>(U) Joint Chiefs of Staff msg cite no. 7642, 102140Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>17</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg 101045Z Jun 1967, and CINCUSNAVEUR msg 111311Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>18</sup>(U) U.S. Defense Attache' Office, Tel Aviv msg 131335Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>19</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 111031Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>20</sup>(U) Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 111931Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>22</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 091814Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>23</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 111442Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>24</sup>(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 120950Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>25</sup>(U) Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>(U) Commander, Task Force (CTF) 100 msg 130934Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>27</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRU msg 131706Z Jun 1967 and NSAEUR msg 140829Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>28</sup>(U) CTF 100 msg 150200Z Jun 1967 and NSAEUR msg 161530Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>29</sup>(U) \_\_\_\_\_, oral interview transcript, 6 May 1980.
- <sup>30</sup>(U) msg 191326Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>31</sup>(U) CTF 100 msg 150200Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>32</sup>(U) NAVSHIPENGCTR msg 141551Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>33</sup>(U) Eugene Sheck and Lt. Deprey), 27 Jun 1967.
- <sup>34</sup>(U) NSA; \_\_\_\_\_ msg for Gen. Carter through NSA Rep NORAD, circa 21 Jun 1967.
- <sup>35</sup>(U) \_\_\_\_\_
- <sup>36</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 200735Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>37</sup>(U) DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 191326Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>38</sup>(U) CNO msg 142272Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>39</sup>(U) U.S.S. *Liberty* msg 021630Z Aug 1967 and \_\_\_\_\_ oral interview transcript, 9 May 1980.
- <sup>40</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg 081648Z Aug 1967 and CNO msg 102136Z Aug 1967.

## Chapter VII

### The Incident under Review (U)

(U) Following the attack on the *Liberty*, both the Executive and the Legislative Branches set about ascertaining the basic facts surrounding the incident. Other than the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry and the cursory Israeli Board of Inquiry immediately after the event, reviews went forward under the auspices of the House Appropriations Committee, the JCS, and NSA. In addition, a Special Committee of the National Security Council elicited information to answer the Administration's questions on the incident.

prepared to recommend all necessary action to insure the security of the technical material and equipment, should the ship go under but, in discussions with the JRC, ruled out the deliberate scuttling of the ship since its presence in shallow water made compromise of materials and equipment a distinct possibility.

#### The NSA Review and Reaction (U)

(U) The eighth of June proved to be a busy day for NSA's directorate. Having received a Critic message on the *Liberty's* dilemma, Brigadier General John Morrison of NSA's Production Organization, notified the directorate of the event at about 0900 hours, Washington time. Some 45 minutes later, the directorate learned that the attack had been by the Israelis.

(C) Immediate concern was for the safety of the personnel and the security of the materials on board. During the day urgent requests went out from NSA to the National Military Command Center (NMCC), other offices in the Pentagon, and the Bureau of Naval Personnel to ascertain if the names of NSA civilians on board appeared on the casualty list. Both General Marshall S. Carter and Dr. Louis W. Tordella became aware that the ship was in shallow water, 35-40 fathoms. And they knew, of course, that the ship held

Accordingly, Dr. Tordella asked JRC's Captain Merriwell W. Vineyard, USN, to have all documents on board the *Liberty* burned and all equipment saved, if possible. General Carter was

quality of the report. NSA was then in a position to give copies of this comprehensive report to the JCS Fact Finding Team and to the Special Committee of the National Security Council (NSC).

~~(S)~~ Directed as it was to develop a core of information on the event, the NSA group did not seek to identify remedies for faulty procedures or, for that matter, to make any recommendations at all. Major responsibility for that fell to the JCS and others. The group did have to field searching questions being asked the Agency by others.

~~(S)~~ The JCS Fact Finding Team was asking specific questions such as these:

As was its custom, NSA's staff worked closely with the Pentagon's Public Information Office and referred all public queries NSA received to that Pentagon Office.

~~(S)~~ There was, finally, on that long day of 8 June, the need to establish quickly a core of information on the incident to prepare for the many questions being asked and decisions to be made. A ready the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, had called General Carter asking for "precise information" on the ship's complement, the number of civilians, the meaning of "AGTR" which appeared on the ship's hull, and other matters which he felt would be needed for a public release. Discussions also took place with White House staff members Patrick Coyne and Bromley Smith, who elicited details on the incident.

~~(S)~~

The main function of this group was to gather information on the event and to anticipate the numerous questions to be directed to NSA over the coming weeks.

~~(S)~~ With timely help from agency components, the group assembled basic data on the ship itself, on

responsibilities, and on the

it also compiled a chronology of events and a compendium of key documents and messages. Assembling the information in a large red notebook entitled "Report to the Director NSA - U.S.S. Liberty (AGTR-5), 23 May-8 June 1967," the group presented the completed report to the Director on 12 June — rather respectable staff work in view of the timeliness and

(U) Although questions remained which would require answers, the work of the NSA group was essentially complete by the middle of June 1967.<sup>1</sup>

### The JCS Review (U)

(U) On 9 June, immediately after the Liberty incident the JCS fielded a five-man team from its organization, all with the necessary clearances, to examine communications and control aspects of the event. Senior member of the JCS team was Major General Joseph R. Russ, USA. Other team members were Rear Admiral Francis J. Fitzpatrick, USN; Colonel William A. Garrett, USAF; Captain William D. Owen, USN; and Major Harlan E. Priddle, USAF.

(U) In spelling out the terms of reference for the team, Lieutenant General B. E. Spivy, Director of the Joint Staff, asked the team to examine the

means employed in issuing operational directives of the JCS to the U.S.S. *Liberty* and the specific orders to the *Liberty* between 1 June and 8 June 1967, and to identify and develop information on conflicting directives, delays in message traffic, and nonreceipt of orders. The team was to report its findings, along with recommendations, to the JCS.

recommendations dealing with emphasis on dedicated command-and-control circuitry rather than on common-user circuitry, with measures to improve fleet control communications via communications satellite technology, and with the amalgamation of NATO and U.S. military communications.

Other than the three recommendations on which it participated as an action agency, NSA was concerned about some of the other findings in the report. One recommendation was, for example, that

(U) As the work of the fact-finding team was drawing to a close, General Russ provided on 18 June a preliminary report to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle Wheeler, USA. He apprised the Chairman of the four messages from higher headquarters on 7/8 June to subordinate commands designed to change the *Liberty's* CPA, receipt of which by *Liberty* "would undoubtedly have resulted in the ship's being a greater distance from the scene of action...." Despite the *Liberty's* having been either an action or an information addressee on each of these messages, General Russ's team found no evidence that the ship received any one of them. Nor did his team find, for that matter, any evidence of conflicting directives governing the *Liberty's* operation. General Russ also made note of the irregular procedure JCS itself had adopted in bypassing Commander-in-Chief, Europe when it passed verbal instructions to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, and he recounted the reasons for delays at NAVEUR and Sixth Fleet in translating the JCS directive into action.

(U) By 20 June the JCS Fact Finding Team had completed its work, had prepared its report, and had made its recommendations to the JCS. Of the 17 recommendations made, 9 concerned the missions, functions, operational responsibilities, and operational control/technical tasking and guidance matters; the other 8 related to communications, traffic management, methods, facilities, and availability of trained personnel. In reviewing and commenting on the report's recommendations for the JCS, the J3 and J6/JCS reserved follow-on action for the first category of recommendations to the Joint Staff but assigned responsibilities to various other agencies for study and implementation actions in the second category of recommendations. NSA drew assignments on three

Insofar as NSA was concerned, this recommendation was off the mark since

NSA commented formally on this point in a letter to Major General G.B. Pickett, Vice Director for Operations (J-3); in its commentary on the Russ report for the JCS, the J-3 discounted this recommendation.

(U) When copies of the JCS Fact Finding Team's report reached NSA at the end of June, General Carter instructed the chief of his telecommunications organization, Colonel Leslie J. Bolstridge, USAF, to review the report in minute detail with a view to "correcting our procedures wherever we can profit from this debacle of military communications." Since the Russ report primarily dealt with command-and-control communications, the Russ recommendations had only marginal pertinence to NSA's own communications.<sup>2</sup>

### Congressional Review (U)

(U) Following a hearing focusing on the JCS messages which failed to reach the *Liberty*, the House Appropriations Committee on 14 August 1967 directed its Surveys and Investigations staff to examine the effectiveness of the DoD worldwide communications system. The staff studied the delays and nondelivery of messages originated on 7 and 8 June directing the withdrawal of the *Liberty* as a springboard to its broader review of DoD's worldwide communications. The staff produced a two-volume report for the chairman of the congressional committee. Volume I reviewed the communications problems in the *Liberty* incident, volume II the worldwide communications systems and networks of the DoD.

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(U) In its work, the Surveys and Investigations staff interviewed JCS, NSA, Naval Communications Command, Department of Army Communications Center, and JCS Message Center personnel in the Washington area and most of the military commands and communications centers in the Pacific and European regions which had been involved with *Liberty's* communications in one way or another.

(U) Essentially the staff covered the same ground that General Russ's team plowed earlier. They worked their way through all the communications errors made during the attempts to withdraw the *Liberty* on 7/8 June. The staff was somewhat more critical than the JCS Fact Finding Team of the failure to deliver to the *Liberty* the information copies of the JCS and CINCEUR messages directing withdrawal (JCS 080110Z June 67 and CINCEUR 080625Z June 67). Specifically, they wanted to know if a typical commander would take action on an information copy of this kind from a higher command before receiving the implementing message of his immediate superior. They tested the matter with unnamed U.S. Navy officials who had commanded both large and small naval vessels and learned, according to the report, that there would have been no question that if the *Liberty* had received the information copies, "the Captain of the *Liberty* would have moved within minutes without waiting for an implementing order."

(U) In its volume II, the congressional staff took full note of the breakdown of the precedence system in communications and drew upon DoD-provided information for the Middle East crisis. Of some 452 high-precedence, (Flash and Immediate) crisis-related DoD messages, only 22 percent of the Flash and 30 percent of the Immediate messages actually met established precedence criteria.

(U) Part of the delay in transmitting the Immediate-precedence Sixth Fleet withdrawal message to the *Liberty*, it will be recalled, was owing to the urgency of equal or higher precedence (that is, Flash) messages. During the crisis, originators assigned Immediate precedence to messages on subjects such as these: enlisted men reassignments, hospital-patient reports unrelated to the crisis, friendly ship locations and movements, setting up of press conferences,

changes in reporting formats, U.S. military sales policies, and reorganization of Army Reserve units. In contrast, actual instructions called for assignment of Immediate precedence to "situations which gravely affect the security of national/allied forces or populace, and which require immediate delivery to the addressees" — for example, amplifying reports of initial enemy contact, reports of unusual major movements of military forces of foreign powers during peacetime or during strained relations, attack orders, and urgent intelligence messages.

(U) While the congressional staff directed most of its attention to DoD command communications, it also took note of Criticomm which, they found functioned throughout the crisis relatively free of problems. The staff was aware of steps NSA took to keep Criticomm free of the overburdening traffic common in crisis situations, particularly an 8 June action in which NSA directed the curtailment of electrical forwarding of all routine reports so that crisis-related traffic could flow expeditiously.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

Source documents are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the NSA History Collection.

<sup>1</sup>(U) LTG Marshall S. Carter, Memorandum for the Record, 8 June 1967; Dr. Louis W. Tordella, Memorandum, "Directorate's \_\_\_\_\_," 8 June 1967; \_\_\_\_\_, Memorandum for the D/DIR, "U.S.S. *Liberty*," 14 June 1967; NSA Staff, "Report to the Director, NSA," 12 June 1967; and DIRNSA letter to MG J. R. Russ, (JCS Fact Finding Team), 12 June 1967.

<sup>2</sup>(U) The Russ Report; NSA Director, handwritten notes, 8 and 10 June 1967; JCS/J-3, "Note by the Secretaries to the JCS on U.S.S. *Liberty* Incident," JCS no. 2308/378, 24 June 1967; Joint Command and Control Requirements Group, Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Fact Finding Team," 18 June 1967; Walter G. Deeley, letter to Vice Director for Operations (J-3), 29 June 1967.

<sup>3</sup>(U) House Appropriations Committee Surveys and Investigations Staff, *A Report to the Committee on Appropriations - U.S. House of Representatives on the Effectiveness of the Worldwide Communications Systems and Networks of the DoD, U.S.S. Liberty Incident*, vol. I pp. 48-50. vol. II, pp. 75-76.

### Chapter VIII

## A Final Look (U)

(S) Perhaps the *Liberty* has undergone scrutiny long enough. First the Israeli Court of Inquiry examined the event, exculpation of Israeli nationals apparently not being hindmost in the court's calculations. Then the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry studied the incident. The JCS review actively sought to identify faulty procedures and practices for corrective action. The NSA review was essentially fact-finding in nature. And the House Appropriations Committee review, made as it was without all the information available to the JCS team, nonetheless reconstructed many of the basic findings of that team and sought to use them as a mirror in which to observe problem areas in DoD's worldwide communications. Despite the official scrutiny, it is still necessary to comment briefly on a few subjects of interest and concern to

the [redacted] and were, JCS/JRC believed, in the best position to evaluate safety factors.'

(S) In the *Liberty* incident, the Commander, Sixth Fleet, was responsible for the safety of the ship. But Vice Admiral Martin was not in a

(S) [redacted] told Dr. Tordella in mid-June that he believed NSA could not really absolve itself totally from the safety considerations. He believed that NSA may have to demonstrate

(U) JCS/JRC looked to the unified and specified commands to provide for the safety of the [redacted] The regional commands were in close touch with political and military conditions in which

In reflecting on the  
in an oral history interview, General Marshall S. Carter said

(U)

as a result of both of those traumatic experiences, we have reviewed our procedures and found there was little change needed in NSA-JCS relationships, but there were some changes needed in the chain of command supervision and monitoring... of just where the ship is, and what it is doing, and was it necessary.

### Communications Problems (U)

(U) Errors made in the handling of communications accounted, in some measure, for the *Liberty* tragedy. Studied in great detail by the JCS Fact Finding Team and reviewed by the staff of the House Appropriations Committee, the communications problems posed a challenge for the JCS and for DoD agencies in the immediate post-*Liberty* period.

(U) NSA should not yield or should yield grudgingly to others, this review would suggest, in safety evaluations of missions

(U) NSA was not the DoD action office for correcting faulty communications procedures, but it was indeed a very interested party to corrective actions stimulated by the Russ Report. Doing what he could, General Carter called Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, about the considerable number of mishandled messages in the Department of Army's communications center in the Pentagon, particularly those coming to NSA, and on 3 July provided General Johnson's staff with examples of message mishandling during the *Liberty* incident. Department of Army's response was positive, and soon thereafter its Communications Staff added page monitors on its circuits to NSA to check assignment of address groups. Errors diminished from some 40 to 7 a day out of an average daily total of 1,000 transmissions. General Carter also insisted, as noted earlier, that his staff examine the Russ Report recommendations relating to DoD communications for any possible application to NSA's Criticomm network.<sup>7</sup>

### File Reduction for

(U)

~~(TS)~~ ~~(S)~~ The Six Day War and the *Liberty* incident created conditions



The report stated:

Technical documents, operational aids, etc., should be limited to those required to carry out the mission; files held and containing information that may or may not be needed at some future date should be eliminated. The library of training manuals ought to be limited to those covering items of equipment in use at the detachment; anyone who cannot read a

(C) The *Liberty's* experience, together with ; led to some emphasis on file reduction and on measures to facilitate destruction of equipment. The incidents pointed up, as no others had done before, the need for scaling the distribution of technical documentation to specific and minimal levels necessary for execution of tasks, and following the incidents some moderation in the supply of documentation was in evidence.

(U) In the 1970s NSA initiated two projects to examine the use of technical-support materials

~~(C)~~ Speculation as to Israeli motivation varied. Some believed that Israel expected that the complete destruction of the ship and killing of the personnel would lead the U.S. to blame the U.A.R. for the incident and bring the U.S. into the war on the side of Israel. Ironically, even though the *Liberty* had others felt Israeli forces wanted the ship and men out of the way

initiated by the Department of State. In May 1963, Israel paid the U.S. Government \$3,323,500 as full payment on behalf of the families of the 34 men killed in the attack.<sup>13</sup> Eleven months later, Israel paid \$3,566,457 in compensation to the men who had been wounded.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. claim of \$7,644,146 for material damage to the *Liberty* itself was not settled until 15 December 1980 when Israel agreed to pay \$6 million. (U) After returning to Norfolk in July 1967, the *Liberty* languished there while.

When this effort failed, the *Liberty* was decommissioned on 28 June 1968. In 1970 the ship was turned over to the Maritime Administration and sold for scrap for \$101,666.66. In 1973 the ship came to an ignominious end as she was cut up in Baltimore's Curtis Bay shipyard.

(U) There was one aspect of the *Liberty* tragedy which should not go unnoted. This was its adverse and lingering affect on the *Liberty's* survivors. Oral interviews with some 13 years after the event, show that time has not healed all the scars.<sup>15</sup> Apart from bitterness toward the Israeli Government, there still remains dismay that the U.S. Government or Sixth Fleet did not come to *Liberty's* aid in timely fashion.

(U) The contributions of

~~(C)~~ In part because of the press speculation at the time, President Johnson directed the Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, to prepare a report by 13 June, five days after the attack, assessing the Israeli intentions. The CIA assessment drew heavily

### Denouement (U)

(U) On 11 June 1968, exactly one year and three days after the attack on the *Liberty*, her commanding officer, Captain William Loren McGonagle (promoted after the attack), was presented the Congressional Medal of Honor by the Secretary of the Navy for gallantry and courage displayed during *Liberty's* hours of trial. Following that award, the Presidential Unit Citation was conferred upon the *Liberty* and crew on 14 June 1968 at Portsmouth, Virginia.

~~(C)~~ Scores of individual decorations (Bronze Star, Silver Star., etc.) were given to crew members, and 170 Purple Hearts were earned by *Liberty's* complement, including two NSA civilians, Donald L. Blalock and Allen M. Blue (the latter, posthumously).

(U) Claims against the government of Israel for compensation concerning deaths and injuries of U.S. personnel and damage to the *Liberty* were

... but rather for budgetary considerations by the Department of Defense.

### Notes

Source documents are in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the NSA History Collection.

- <sup>1</sup>(U) The Russ Report, pp 9-10; Richard Harvey interview, 16 Jul 1980.
- <sup>2</sup>(U) Memorandum for the D/DIR - "U.S.S. *Liberty*," 14 Jun 1967.
- <sup>3</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg to JCS/JRC, 081503Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>4</sup>(U) CINCLANT msg to JCS, 121414Z Jun 1967.
- <sup>5</sup>(U) Interview with Gene Sheck, 11 Aug 1980.
- ~~(C)~~ NSA Staff, pp. 24, 29.
- <sup>6</sup>(U) NSA Staff, Memorandum for the Record, "Telephone Conversation with Mr. Morton A. Brill, OCCE, 5 Jul 1967; NSA, " 14 Jul 1967.

~~(S)~~ U.S. Army Communications Support Unit, *Annual History Report, FY 1967*, vol. I, 1 Oct 1967.

<sup>9</sup>(U) NSA Staff Memorandum to DIRNSA, "Classified Material Aboard U.S.S. *Liberty*" 11 Jun 1967. Enclosures to the memorandum consist of a

<sup>10</sup>(U) Interview with Paddy E. Rhodes, 13 Jun 1980.

<sup>11</sup>(U) ADC Memorandum to DIRNSA, 2 Oct 1967; DIRNSA memo-

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<sup>12</sup>(U) Interview with Richmond D. Snow, 21 Aug 1980.

<sup>13</sup>(U) U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 17 Jun 1968, p. 799.

<sup>14</sup>(U) U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 2 Jun 1969, p. 473.

<sup>15</sup>(U) The *Liberty's* Captain, William L. McGonagle, now retired, was invited to be interviewed but declined, stating he had refused all other such requests.

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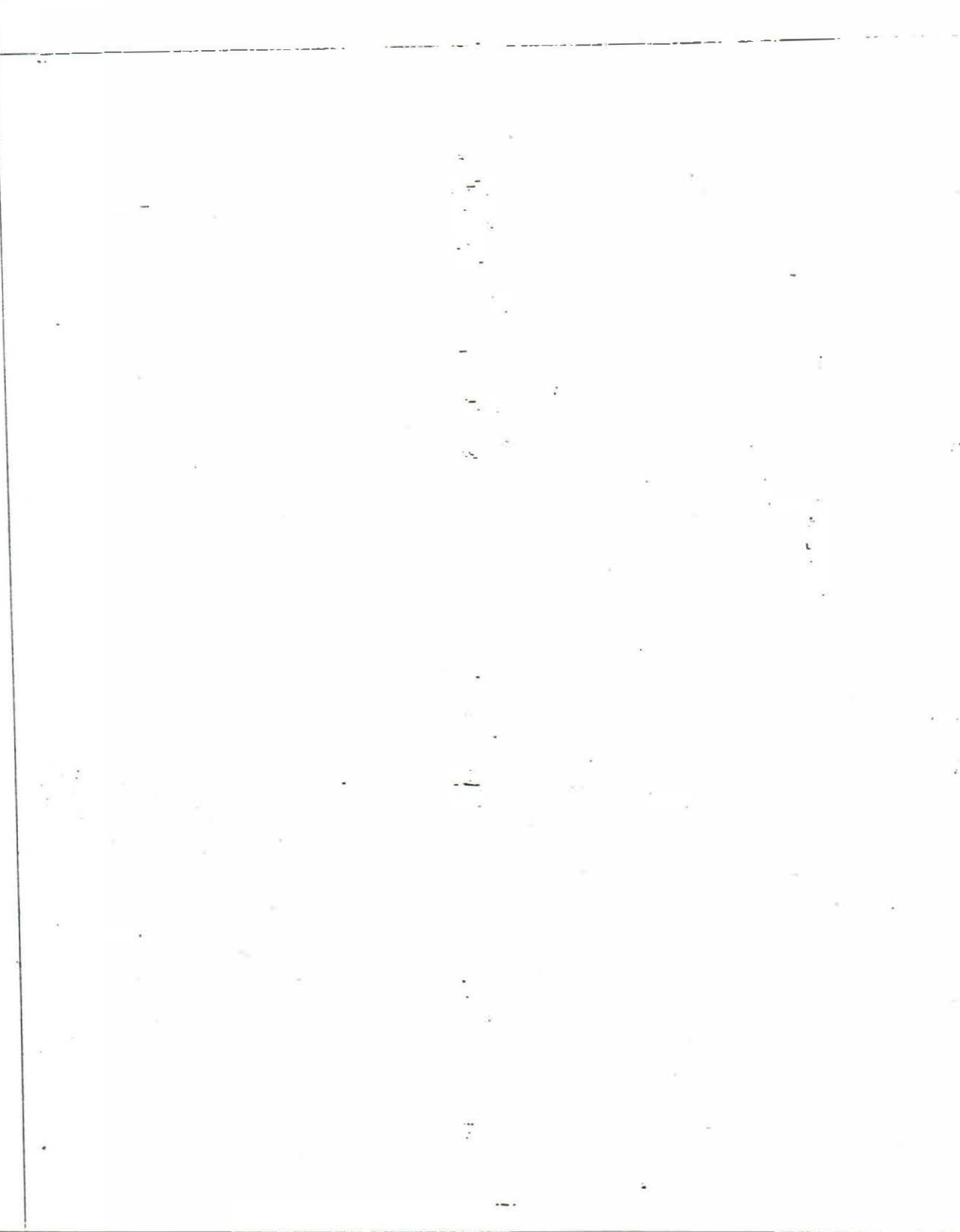
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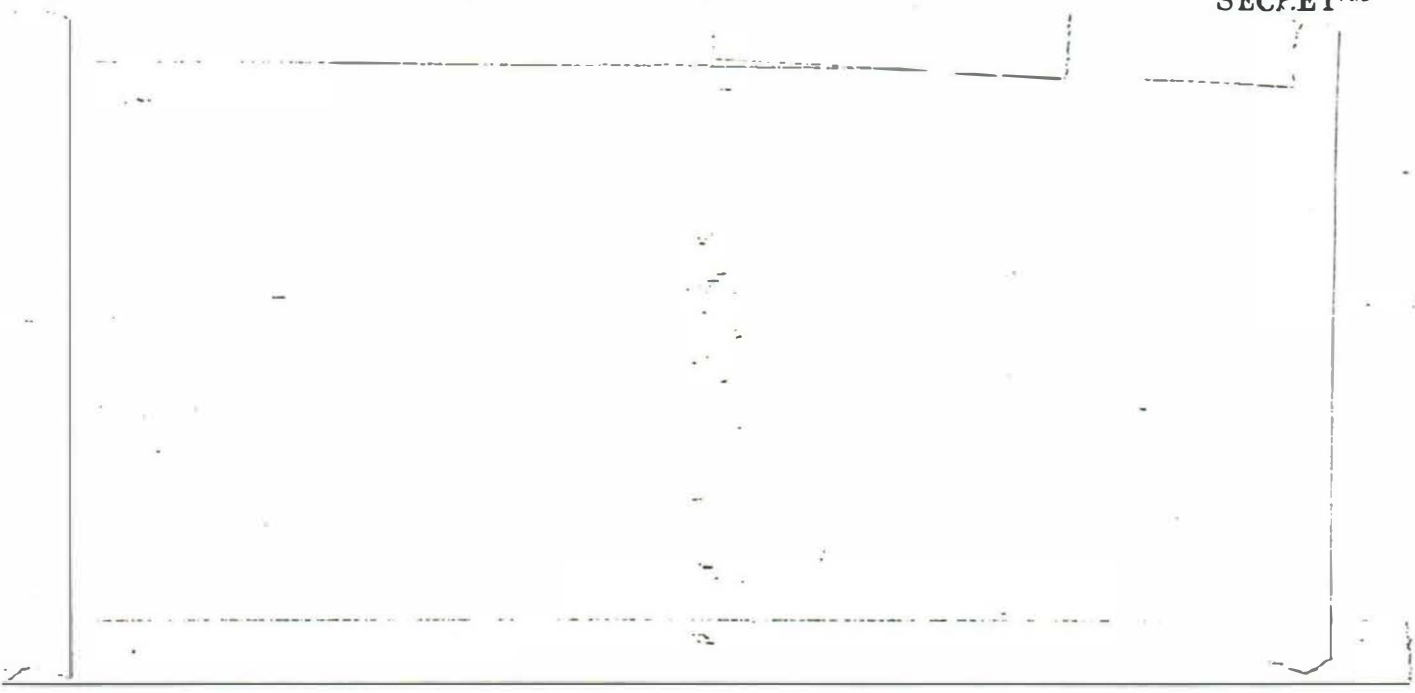


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