

# Stabbed in the Back: The Saga of the *USS Liberty*

## PART I

The following (two-part) article is inspired by and dedicated to the incessant effort of a group of individuals, some historians, some journalists and many others who were participants in a tragic event, all trying to bring to light the hellish truth lived by some of them, the truth that the U.S. government and other parties want to be kept away from the word. The story presented here is one of ever-increasing controversy in the recent history of the United States, and it is, indeed, very little known. And you will see why.

BY ROMEO STANA

It turns out that Israel's unprovoked and murderous attack on the *USS Liberty* was watched by a U.S. submarine and a U.S. surveillance plane. For different reasons—most often some special interests—many events get very little publicity, and, as a result, they remain largely unknown outside a small group of insiders.

Fortunately, recently, largely due to the Internet, the task of the history manipulators has become increasingly difficult: one can get access to various opinions (obviously labeled by the "official" historians as "non-conformist" or, even worse, "Revisionist") presenting facts and arguing versions in contradiction with the ones *à la mode*.

I do not believe in blind faith. History is not a dogma. Any argument must be heard irrespective of the fact that trying to find the truth may bode ill for some group or another.

It happened in the month of June, some 36 years ago. I remember it, watching recently on the *History Channel* a rebroadcast of a documentary produced two years ago by *CBS News*. The movie was shown on TV in spite of the opposition of Israel's embassy and the strident protests of various pro-Israel groups culminating with that of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, a powerful Israeli arm in Washington that accused the individuals depicted in the movie and *CBS News* of producing a "propaganda-laden bogus history," deliberately distorted and anti-Semitic. And all this because the documentary presents the point of view of participants in that tragedy and not the watered-down version embraced by the U.S. and Israeli governments and given for public consumption

(and even that in small portions). The truth can be hurtful.

### Blitzkrieg June 5, 1967

"The spirit of Israeli heroes accompanies us to battle. . . . From Joshua Bin-Nun [to] King David, the Maccabees and the fighters of 1948 and 1956, we shall draw the strength and courage to strike the Egyptians who threaten our safety, our independence and our future. Fly, soar at the enemy, destroy him and scatter him throughout the desert so that Israel may live, secure in its land, for generations."<sup>1</sup>\*

With those words of encouragement from Maj. Gen. Motti Hod, commander-in-chief of the Israeli Air Force (IAF), what would be known as the Six Day War commenced.

**7:10 a.m.**—The air attack against Egypt starts.

**7:50 a.m.**—Operation "Red Sheet" is launched. Gen. Tal's *Ugadah* (an expanded division, for special operations) crosses the Egyptian border in two places: Nahal Oz and Khan (Yumis).

**12:30 p.m.**—Jordan is attacked. IAF launches an air raid on airports in Mafraq and Amman, followed by another one at 1:10 pm.

**2:24 p.m.**—The 161st battalion of the Jerusalem brigade, under Lt. Col. Asher Dreifin, attacks the West Bank, Palestine.

*USS Liberty* is south of Sicily heading east at 17 knots, almost the maximum speed, toward her destination. . . .

### June 6, 1967

**2:10 p.m.**—The 66th battalion, under Maj. Yosef "Yossi" Yoffe, attacks East Jerusalem. The occupation of the Sinai Peninsula continues.

*USS Liberty* continues her inexorable journey in the eastern Mediterranean, toward Port Said.

**June 7, 1967**

**9:45 a.m.**—The final assault against East Jerusalem begins. In a short time it is occupied.

The only Israeli enemy relatively unscathed is Syria; she can launch an attack using the Golan Heights as a spearhead, so Israel is poised to attack her. This has to be done quickly because both the United States and the Soviet Union exert pressure in the UN for the signing of a cease-fire on June 9.

The attack on Syria is planned for the fateful day of June 8 at 11:30 a.m.

*USS Liberty* is less than 10 hours away from the conflict zone.

**June 8, 1967**

**9:00 a.m.**—The attack on Syria is postponed: Israel will invade Syria at 11:30 a.m., June 9.

## **The Road to Perdition**

**May 1967**

*USS Liberty* is sailing at a snail's pace of four knots back and forth, north-south, off the west coast of Africa, eavesdropping on the bloody war in the Congo.

Of the famous *Liberty* ship class, the *USS Liberty* saw action in World War II as a transport in Pacific. During the Korean War she crossed the Pacific Ocean 18 times as a transport and support vessel. Rusty and tired, *Liberty* was mothballed in 1958, only to be brought back into action during the Cold War: in 1964, repaired and refitted, she returns as *USS Liberty GTR-5* (auxiliary General Technological Research vessel). She is 455 feet long and has a displacement of 10,400 tons, with two masts. The only weapons on deck are four .50-caliber machineguns, two at stern and two at bow, able to fire less than two miles away. The "GTR-5" designation is painted in 10-foot white letters on both sides at the bow, and the name *Liberty* on both sides at the stern. She is flying a standard American flag, five feet by eight feet.

The declared scope of her activity was "scientific research," a nice euphemism for electronic espionage, SIGINT (SIGnal INTelligence). Formally, in the Mediterranean, *Liberty* belongs to the Sixth Fleet, but practically she is under direct orders of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) under the National Security Agency (NSA), an organization so secret that the insiders used to joke about it as *No Such Agency*. For this reason *USS Liberty*, code named *Rockstar*, was a phantom ship: only a handful of people outside the NSA knew her location and destination. Of the 294 crewmembers, several dozen were from the Naval Security Group and were working under the deck, in quarters that were off limits for anybody else, including the Navy skipper, Cmdr. William L. McGonagle.

If, as stated, her armament was not much, *Liberty's* electronic equipment was top notch. The deck was full with over 45 antennae of all types. At the stern, on an elevated platform, it had an 18-foot dish antenna, the *moon-bounce dish* with which *Liberty* could communicate directly, using a signal bounced off the lunar surface, with NSA HQ in Fort Meade, Maryland. This forest of antennae gave *Liberty* a unique silhouette, making her unmistakable for any other ship. In Adm. Thomas Moorer's words: "I have spent a large part of my life flying over the oceans and identifying ships, and this ship was perhaps the easiest ship

to identify of any that was listed in the U.S. Navy. Equipped with antennae from bow to stern, pointing in every direction, it reminded one of a large, vigorous lobster and had a 'look' that made it extremely easy to recognize. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

On May 23, 1967, *Liberty* is at anchor in Abidjan, the capital of Ivory Coast in West Africa. At 8:20 p.m. the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) send a flash message to the *Liberty*: "Make immediate preparations to get under way. When ready for sea ASAP depart port Abidjan and proceed best possible speed to Rota, Spain to load technical support material and supplies. When ready for sea proceed to operating area off Port Said. Specific orders will follow."<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the "operating area" was well over 100 miles from the Israel-Egypt border. But on May 30 new orders from JCS established the "operating area" in the eastern Mediterranean and ordered *Liberty* to patrol back-and-forth at only 13 miles off the Gaza Strip, Palestine.

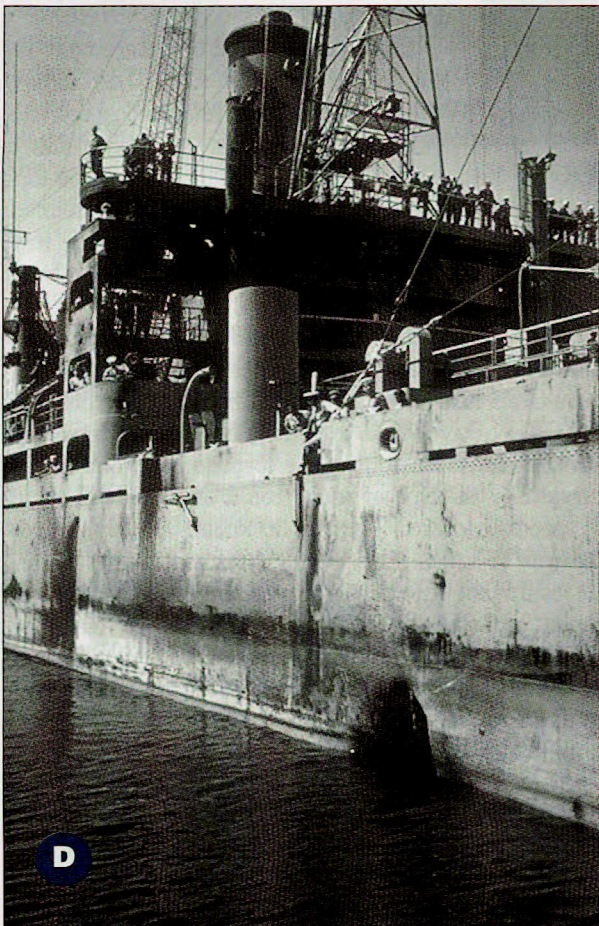
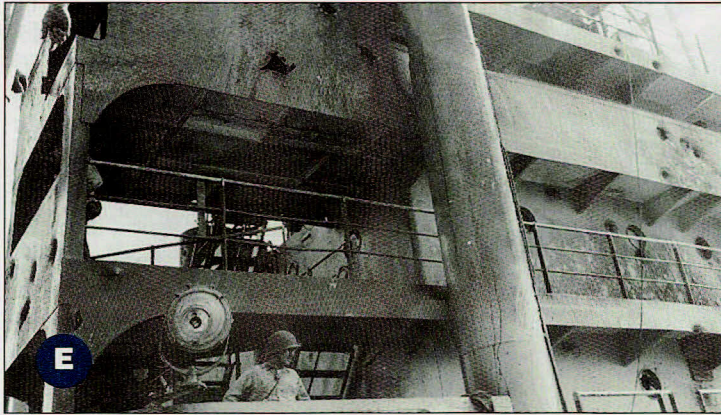
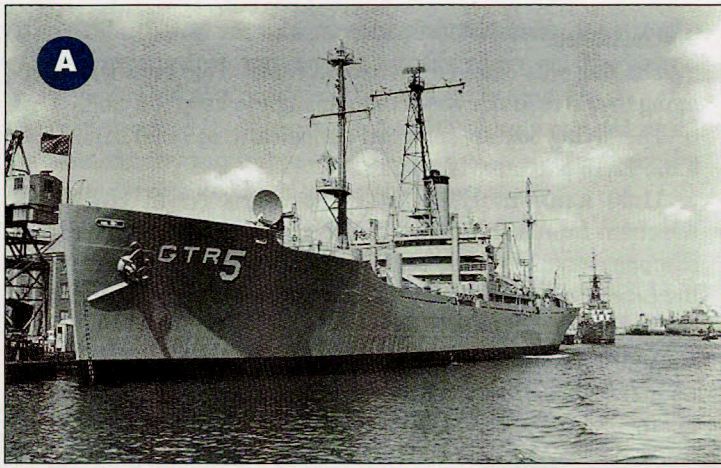
Steaming at full speed, *Liberty* reaches Rota on the first of June. She was readied quickly, and the next day she rushed toward her date with destiny. *Liberty* sailed at 17 knots through the Strait of Gibraltar. From here she pushed east, paralleling the North African coastline no closer than 13 miles from the shore.

On June 5 *Liberty* is south of Sicily when Israel attacks Egypt. For the *Liberty* crew the news is hardly a surprise, only an extra reason for concern. McGonagle sends a message to Vice Admiral William I. Martin, the commander of the Sixth Fleet (COMSIXTHFLT) in the Mediterranean (as mentioned, theoretically *Liberty* was under the command of the fleet), asking for a destroyer as an escort. The answer arrives the next day, June 6, uncharacteristically fast, one might say: "*Liberty* is a clearly marked U.S. ship in international waters, not a participant in the conflict and not a reasonable subject for attack by any nation."<sup>4</sup> In the unlikely event of an inadvertent attack, he promised, jet fighters from the Sixth Fleet carrier force could be overhead in less than 10 minutes. Besides, he concluded, every commanding officer had authority to withdraw from danger. Request for escort denied.<sup>5</sup>

June 7 is a sunny and clear day with a calm sea under a light breeze. *Liberty* is less than 10 hours from her destination, rushing east. The few vessels in sight were running in the opposite direction. A hilarious moment was when the crew heard a radio commentator quoting an official assuring the mass media that "no American ship is within 300 miles of the fighting."<sup>6</sup>

Capt. McGonagle, concerned about the proximity to the conflict, considers the possibility of exercising his prerogatives to move the ship out of danger. He asks the opinion of the chief of the electronic interceptions, Lt. Cmdr. Dave Lewis, who tells him that the interceptions in the UHF band (ultrahigh frequency, the one mostly used by the combatants) has to be done in line-of-sight mode. If the ship moves over the horizon line the mission will be compromised 80 percent. McGonagle considered the matter for several minutes. "OK," he said. "We'll go all the way in."<sup>7</sup>

JCS, on the other hand, decides it is too dangerous to place the vessel so close to the conflict zone. Three messages are sent by JCS and COMSIXTHFLT repositioning *Liberty*, first at over



**Clockwise from upper left:** (A) The USS Liberty at dock, Portsmouth Naval Station, October, 1966. (B) The strewn wreckage in Liberty's engine room made it near impossible for crewmen to move about, let alone keep the engines running. (C) Almost all of Liberty's surviving crewmembers required medical attention of some type or another—134 were wounded; 57 died from the attack. (D) The huge hole from an Israeli torpedo is displayed. It was amazing Liberty did not sink—a testament to the bravery and sheer willpower of her crew. (E) The holes in the bridge area made from 50 mm Israeli cannon fire can clearly be seen. The Israeli brass wanted Liberty's bridge officers dead. In the end, napalm, torpedoes and cannon fire failed to send the lightly armed Liberty to the bottom of the sea.

20 miles and then at over 100 miles from the shore (at 11:30 p.m. on June 7, 1:10 a.m. and 9:17 a.m. on June 8). All three are misrouted and will not reach *Liberty*.<sup>8</sup> The messages will reach her on June 9, one day too late.

In the night of June 7 the radar on *Liberty* detects overhead a reconnaissance jet plane with radar and probably infrared cameras on board, circling the ship several times.

#### Thursday, June 8, 1967

**5:55 a.m.**—Clear sky, a constant eight knots wind. *Liberty* is passing the town of El Arish in the Sinai Desert. At 4,000 feet above, it is overflown by an IAF reconnaissance plane. From it, Comm. Uri Meretz, a naval observer, reports to *Stella Maris*, the Naval Control Center in Haifa: "What we could see were the letters written on that ship, and we gave these letters to ground control." The letters were "GTR-5," *Liberty*'s identification code.<sup>9</sup>

At naval headquarters the location of the ship is marked with a red peg, meaning "unidentified," on the control board. Research in *Jane's Fighting Ships* reveals the ship's identity as "the electromagnetic audio-surveillance ship of the United States, the *Liberty*." The marker was changed to green for "neutral."<sup>10</sup>

During the morning, *Liberty* was "visited" at about 30-minute intervals. Once an IAF *Noratlant Nord* 2501 "flying boxcar" circles the ship and heads for Sinai. "It had a big star of David on it, and it was flying just a little bit above our mast," recalled crew member Larry Weaver. "They had seen the ship's markings and the American flag. There's no question about it."<sup>11</sup>

**8:50 a.m.**—*Liberty* reaches Point Alpha (the easternmost point of her patrol), makes a sharp turn west toward Port Said and takes a course paralleling the coast at 13 miles off it (the territorial waters are 12 miles for Egypt and 6 miles for Israel) and slows down to five knots. Shortly after that a jet plane flew a semicircle over her and headed for Gaza. As the plane passed, the third officer checked the flag making sure that it was flying clear.<sup>12</sup>

**9:30 a.m.**—*Liberty* is off El Arish. The minaret is visible with the naked eye. Unbeknownst to its crew, *Liberty* was witnessing a horrifying crime. Near the minaret, Israeli soldiers were involved in a bestial slaughter.<sup>13</sup>

**10:00 a.m.**—Two Mirage III fighters, without identifying marks, circled the ship close enough for the rockets on their pylons to be counted and to see the pilots in the cockpits. They were heard by the technicians on the *Liberty* reporting to their headquarters that the ship was flying the U.S. flag.<sup>14</sup>

**10:30 a.m.**—The "flying boxcar" returned, circled the ship and made a masthead height pass over the ship. It was so low the camera ports were visible. McGonagle remarked: "It's good they're checking us out this carefully. This way there won't be

any mistakes."<sup>15</sup>

The flag was checked numerous times. The wind was averaging over five knots, more than enough to keep it flying.

The "flying boxcar" returned periodically, at 11:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 12:15 p.m. and 12:45 p.m.

**11:00 a.m.**—In Haifa, at *Stella Maris* Naval HQ, Capt. Avraham Luntz's shift ends. In accordance with the procedures [Emphasis mine.—RS.], he removes the green marker identifying *Liberty* as neutral from the map because it was five hours old and no longer accurate [Emphasis mine.—RS.].<sup>16</sup>

And we are to believe this. In wartime a senior officer picks up his "toys" and leaves without telling anything to his replacement.



**CMDR. BILL MCGONAGLE**

Wounded, he remained at his station and continued to command his foundering ship for more than 17 hours.

**11:24 a.m.**—*USS Liberty* is again right off El Arish, heading east at the same snail's pace of five knots. An explosion takes place in El Arish of unclear causes. The blast is heard on board the *Liberty*, which soon reaches Point Alpha, and makes a 238-degree turn heading toward Port Said.

An army commander sent a dispatch to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) General Staff Headquarters in Tel Aviv reporting a naval bombardment on El Arish. The General Staff sent a note to the naval headquarters: "The coast is being shelled and you—the navy—have done nothing."<sup>17</sup>

**12:05 p.m.**—Luntz's replacement in the operations room, Capt. Izzy Rahov (the one who wasn't informed about the "red" and then "green" markers) didn't hesitate any longer. He dispatched three torpedo boats of the 914th squadron, code named Pagoda, to find the culprit and destroy it.<sup>18</sup> The torpedo boats left at full speed from Ashdod, some 50 miles from *Liberty*.

**1:41 p.m.**—On board *T-204*, the flagship of the formation, Ensign Aharon Yifrah, the combat officer, tells his skipper, Cmdr. Moshe Oren, he sighted an unidentified ship, northeast of El Arish, 22 miles away [this is extremely interesting, considering that, at the reduced height of the torpedo boat, due to the Earth's curvature, his type of radar could only "reach" 15-18 miles, RS] speeding toward Egypt at 30 knots. [*Liberty*'s maximum speed was 18 knots.—RS.] Under this condition, the torpedo boats could not intercept the running vessel before it reached Egypt, and Rahov asked the Israeli Air Force (IAF) for help. Miraj III fighters were diverted north from the Suez Canal zone. They found a ship "gray with two guns [sic] in the forecandle, a mast and a funnel."<sup>19</sup>

**1:58 p.m.**—The planes received the order to attack [the ship].

#### The Assassination

On board *Liberty* there is normal activity. Many crewmembers finished their shifts and were sunbathing on deck.

The fighter planes struck without any warning. The ship is

sprayed with rockets and 30 mm armor-piercing gun shells, which turn the deck and the hull into Swiss cheese. The second plane destroyed practically all the ship's antennae. On deck, Lt. Painter observed that the planes had "absolutely no markings," so their identity was unknown.<sup>20</sup> This is a war crime and not the only one perpetrated by Israel against the *Liberty*.

Blood, dead, wounded (including McGonagle) all over. The deck is engulfed in flames. This frenzied carnage is joined in by slower *Super-Mistère* fighters returning from the Mitla Pass carrying 1,000-lb. bombs and canisters with napalm. The burning jellied gasoline sticks to the skin like a stamp to an envelope, and it trickles down below deck through the holes punctured by the armor-piercing projectiles, transforming the ship's belly into a crematorium.

Above, the Israeli pilots have a field day: "Great! Wonderful! She's burning, she's burning!" exults one of them.<sup>21</sup> Partial transcripts of the discussions between pilots, recently declassified, show that they didn't bother to try to identify the target (they didn't have to, knowing too well who they are attacking) but tried their best to send the ship, with all her crew, to the bottom of the Mediterranean before the arrival of the torpedo boats so they wouldn't have to share the "glory" with the Israeli navy. "It would be a *mitzvah* (blessing) if we can get a flight with iron bombs," the flight leader radioed to the headquarters. "Otherwise, the navy's going to get here, and they're going to do the shooting,"<sup>22</sup> he continued, sorry that he could not apply the *coup de grace*.

Radio operators James Halman and Joseph Ward improvised an antenna and tried to signal their desperate situation. Five of the six frequencies used by *Liberty* were jammed by the Israeli planes. Besides this being clear proof of malice—IAF knew exactly that the ship was *Liberty* (in the six hours in which they had *Liberty* under surveillance they have learned almost all the frequencies)—the jamming of the distress frequency of a ship burning and in danger of sinking is another war crime.

Eventually they find an unjammed frequency (because it was not used before), and at 2:09 p.m., *Liberty* transmitted in clear a voice message: "Any station, this is Rockstar [*Liberty's* voice call sign]. We are under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and require immediate assistance."<sup>23</sup>

The carrier *Saratoga*, operating near Crete, acknowledged the message and promised help. The carrier *America* intercepted the transmission too, launched four Phantom F-4 jets and promised: "Help is on the way."<sup>24</sup>

A flash message is sent to the Pentagon, State Department and White House: "USS *Liberty* reports under attack by unidentified jet aircraft. Have launched strike aircraft to defend ship."<sup>25</sup> The answer came back very quickly and from the mouth of the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, no less.: "Tell Sixth Fleet to get those aircraft back immediately, and give me a status report."<sup>26</sup>

There were speculations that the planes from *USS America* were armed with nuclear bombs and, not knowing who the

attacker was (possibly the Soviets), McNamara didn't want to risk a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union.

Adm. David L. McDonald, chief of naval operations, recalled the planes from a mission that would have saved 25 from death and scores from being wounded.

At 2:25 p.m. after exhausting their ordnance (and most likely intercepting the exchange of messages about "help being on the way") the jets leave the carnage regretting only that they could not sink the *Liberty*.

They left behind nine dead and dozens of wounded.

Unknown to *USS Liberty* and to the Israeli pilots rejoicing after the hecatomb they inflicted, high above them, there were witnesses to the crime.

For all these years NSA has kept the secret that during the attack one of its planes was 18,000 feet overhead and was listening to what was happening below. The secret NSA documents

cannot be obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Only Congress and the White House have access to them, and neither is in a hurry to ask for them.

Two hours before the attack a radio intercept plane, *EC-121*, took off from Athens toward the eastern Mediterranean to patrol back and forth between Crete and El Arish. A couple of hours later a Hebrew linguist on board brings to the chief officer Marvin Nowiki's attention that he "got really odd activity on UHF. They mentioned an American flag."

Nowiki tuned his receiver on the proper frequency. "Sure as the devil," said Nowiki, "Israeli aircraft were completing an attack on some object."<sup>27</sup>

On *Liberty* the survivors were fighting frantically to tend to the wounded and put out the fires. Realizing that the Israeli planes destroyed the flag, McGonagle ordered the signalman to hoist the only one left, a huge holiday ensign flag measuring 13 feet by seven feet.

The relative peace does not last long. *Pagoda* is almost in position to fulfill its mission. The three 62-ton torpedo boats are closing in on *Liberty*, at 40 knots, in an attack formation. Each had a crew of 15 and is armed with a 40 mm cannon, four 20 mm cannons and two torpedoes.

As I said, *USS Liberty*, with her forest of antennae pointing in all directions, was practically unmistakable, being, in Adm. Thomas H. Moorer's words, "the ugliest ship in all [the] Navy." Nevertheless, after consulting the *Jane's Fighting Ship* manual, the divisional commander and the commander of a second torpedo boat, came, independently, to the conclusion that the ship in front of them was an Egyptian transport—*El Kasir*.

And we are to believe this too. *El Kasir* has a quarter of *Liberty's* displacement, it's about half her length, with no antennae or other distinctive signs on deck. Not to mention that Israeli intelligence (which, after the war, bragged that it knew all about everything moving, or not, in Egypt) most assuredly knew (and informed the navy of) the positions of the Egyptian ships, including the fact that *El Kasir* was rusting at a dock in Alexandria, not being seaworthy.

*Realizing that the Israeli planes destroyed the ship's American flag, McGonagle ordered the signalman to hoist the only one left, a huge holiday ensign flag measuring 13 feet by seven feet.*

And what about the 30 knots speed, at which, allegedly, the ship was running? Where the Israeli officers such idiots as to believe that *El Kasir* (with a maximum speed of 14 knots) could possibly run at 30? It is either *El Kasir* or 30 knots, *tertium non datur*.

Somebody on the *Liberty's* deck opened fire toward the torpedo boats but is stopped immediately by McGonagle. Once in position, the torpedo boats open fire with the cannons using piercing shells to cause damage inside the ship.

Above, in the *EC-121*, Nowiki is again told of activity below and that the American flag was mentioned again. Listening together, they realize that it is another Israeli attack from a naval platform, and the American flag is mentioned several times.

"Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side," announced McGonagle. The Israelis were ready for the *coup de grace*. At 2:37 p.m. the torpedo boat 203 launched the first torpedo. Four more followed. Had all of them hit, *Liberty* would have been "history." Only one struck, but with devastating effects. Many crew members are killed instantly, many other, drowned in the flooded compartments beneath the deck.

*USS Liberty* transmits desperate "help" messages, rebroadcast by *USS Saratoga*: "Gunboats are approaching now," followed by, "Hit by torpedo starboard side. Listing badly. Need assistance immediately."<sup>28</sup>

After that—silence.

The torpedo boats are circling the wounded ship, without power or rudder, listing nine degrees to starboard, at leisure. They are strafing everything in sight: people, life rafts in their racks, the fire hoses.

**3:15 p.m.**—McGonagle announced: "Prepare to abandon ship." The life rafts on deck are all destroyed, burned or punctured. The crew put into the water the last three intact rubber rafts tied together. "I watched with horror as the floating life rafts were riddled with holes," said Lt. Lloyd Painter, in charge of evacuation. "No survivors were planned for this day."<sup>29</sup> What does one more war crime matter? Two boats are machine-gunned, the third one is picked up by one of the torpedo boats. It is hard to pretend you don't know who you are attacking when having on board a life raft with the *USS Liberty* markings. The torpedo boats leave the scene.

Two Hornet helicopters, full with armed soldiers, show up, circle the ship, come in for a closer look and then depart.

At last, at 3:45 p.m., the Sixth Fleet launched the second flight in defense of *Liberty*.

Israel realizes that it is about to be caught with its hand in the cookie jar and tries desperately to do damage control. The U.S. naval attaché in Tel Aviv is urgently summoned and is told that an *unidentified* ship [Emphasis mine.—RS.], possibly belonging to the U.S. Navy, was attacked—by mistake.

At 4:14 the U.S. Embassy conveys Israel's apologies to all interested parties.

At 4:32 the torpedo boats returned to *Liberty* and, signaling

in English, asked if any help is needed. If this is not beyond *chutzpah* I don't know what else could be. McGonagle signals, short and profane, what they can do with their "help."

At the express order of Lyndon Johnson, Vice Adm. William I. Martin recalls ALL [Emphasis mine.—RS.] planes. Not even one is left to check the ship's status.

*Liberty*, like a wounded animal, with 32 of the crewmembers killed (two more will die later) and two-thirds wounded, with the executive officer killed and the skipper seriously wounded, is heading slowly north in the night.

**June 9, 1967**

Sunrise. At 420 miles ESE of Soudha Gulf, Crete, *USS Liberty* meets up with the U.S. destroyers *Davis* and *Massey*.

### Epilogue to Part I

On June 8, 1967, Israel committed, in cold blood, a calculated act of war against the United States of America and lived to brag about it. Our "ally" killed 34 and wounded 171 American men. Those are facts. They cannot be challenged. By a miracle the Jewish mini-state did not succeed in sending *Liberty* with all her hands to the bottom of the Mediterranean—getting rid of all witnesses—although she tried her best to do so.

Why did she do it? We will discuss this in Part II. There we will also see the fol-

low-up of this tragic act where the U.S. plays a sinister role.

How many of you knew about this event in American history? And the ones who never heard of it, ask yourselves: why didn't we hear? *Qui prodest* this veil of silence and secrecy surrounding even today the truth about *USS Liberty*? How come Hollywood didn't make a movie with this goldmine subject (regardless of the way you spin it)?

Fortunately, as I said in the beginning, there are enough of those who will not let this subject die, the way 34 of their family died, the family of *USS Liberty*. ❖

### ENDNOTES:

- 1 Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*, Oxford, University Press, 2002, 170.
- 2 *American Free Press*, June 23, 2003, B-2.
- 3 James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, First Anchor Books, 2002, 188.
- 4 James M. Ennes, Jr., *Assault on Liberty*, Reintree Press, 2002, 38.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 44-45.
- 8 THE BARNES REVIEW, Vol. I, No. 1, October 1994, 17.
- 9 *The Guardian*, Aug. 8, 2001 (Internet).
- 10 Michael B. Oren, *The "USS Liberty": Case Closed*, Azure, 2000 (Internet).
- 11 *The Guardian*, August 8, 2001 (Internet). 1994
- 12, 13, 14, 15 THE BARNES REVIEW, No. 1., October 1994, 18.
- 16 Michael B. Oren, *The "USS Liberty": Case Closed*, Azure, 2000 (Internet).
- 17, 18, 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, First Anchor Books, 2002, 188.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 214.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 24 James M. Ennes, Jr., *Assault on Liberty*, Reintree Press, 2002, 38.
- 25, 26 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 27 James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, First Anchor Books, 2002, 213.
- 28 James M. Ennes, Jr., *Assault on Liberty*, Reintree Press, 2002, 92.
- 29 James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, First Anchor Books, 2002, 219.

# The Knife Twists: The Saga of the *USS Liberty*

## PART II

This is the second part of the Romeo Stana exposé on the *USS Liberty*. We publish this as two separate sections so as to make it easier on the reader, as well as to preserve the natural division at this point. TBR thinks that this piece will become the new Revisionist standard on the brutal, unprovoked and censored attack on the *USS Liberty* and its implications.

BY ROMEO STANA

**O**n June 8, 1967, the fourth day of the Six Day War, air and naval forces of the Israeli army attacked, in international waters in the eastern Mediterranean, the American radio interception ship *USS Liberty*, which was practically unarmed, killing 34 crew members and wounding another 171 of them.

Those are uncontestable facts. And, indeed, they are not contested by any participant in this conflict: the *Liberty* survivors, the Israeli government or the U.S. government.

Unfortunately, these are the only things the three participants agree upon.

The cardinal point, around which the whole problem is revolving, is disarmingly simple: was this attack a tragic mistake due to an erroneous identification of *Liberty* or a deliberate attack upon a ship that was known to belong to the Navy of the United States, a neutral country in this conflict and, arguably, the "most allied" of Israel's allies?

The Israeli government insisted that it was an error caused primarily by the United States itself, sent condolences to the families of the victims, paid them and the U.S. government reparations (we will see under what conditions) and desires that the "incident" be closed and forgotten.

The U.S. government accepts the Israeli version, conducts for the public eye a selective and biased inquiry whose watered down conclusion is presented as the official U.S. position and does everything for the "incident" to be closed and forgotten:

intimidates the witnesses before, during and after the Naval court of inquiry, classifies all important documents as "top secret" putting them away from indiscreet eyes and refuses with obstinacy to clarify some aspects.

The *USS Liberty* survivors do not believe the Israeli version and do not accept the position of the U.S. government. They are convinced the attack was deliberate, executed in cold blood, with ferocity and with the firm determination to sink an American vessel in international waters. They are convinced, also, that the American government has tried, by all means, to cover up the facts, and they are fighting for the "incident" not to be closed or forgotten.

It seems to me that Israel and her knee-jerk supporters are bending backward to hide the truth, and that endeavor not being easy, they came up with different versions of the "incident," varying in time and form from author to author.

It seems to me, considering the pro-Israel-at-any-cost lobby (less strong in '67 than today, but strong nevertheless) that the U.S. government tries to muffle the affair, grabbing, as a blind man onto his cane, on the court of inquiry conclusion and taking a no comment, case closed attitude.

But it is beyond my understanding what possible reason could motivate the *Liberty* survivors to lie, *in corpore* and coherently (with the notable exception of McGonagle, easily understandable and in the end repudiated) as claimed by Israel and her cohorts.

I am entirely on the survivors' side in the struggle against this conspiracy of the coalition abhorrent to nature between the aggressor and the governments in Washington, strongly influ-

\* Surely out of our own Aid money!

enced by the aggressor's acolytes. A conspiracy, unbelievably begun already during the attack, between the criminal intention of Israel to sink the American ship and the criminal indifference of the American administration toward the lives of its young sailors on that ship, deliberately abandoned without defense in front of the Jewish mini-state's fury.

## Abandoned

June 8, 1967

**2:09 p.m.**—"Any station, this is Rockstar. We are under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and require immediate assistance."<sup>1</sup>

Four hundred miles away (30 minutes flight time), off Crete, the Sixth Fleet deployed its Carrier Group 60, comprised of cruiser *Little Rock*, the group's flagship, eight destroyers and carriers *America* and *Saratoga*, having, together, over 160 planes. On board *Little Rock* were Vice Adm. William I. Martin, the commander of the Sixth Fleet and his helper, Rear Adm. Lawrence Geis.

The radio operators on *Saratoga* intercept the message but it is jammed. "Rockstar, this is Schematic [*Saratoga's* code name—RS]," said the *Saratoga* operator. "Say again. You are garbled."<sup>2</sup> Eventually, *Saratoga* received the message, confirmed it and promised assistance. *Saratoga's* captain, Joe Tully, turned the bow into the wind, relayed the *Liberty's* message to Vice Adm. Martin and informed him that "I am sending help at once unless otherwise instructed." Martin signaled that he approves the mission and that he'll order *America* to launch help too.<sup>3</sup>

**2:24 p.m.**—Twelve fighter-bomber jets and four tankers (for in-flight refueling) took off from *Saratoga*.

A minute or so later, with the planes still in sight, Tully received an order from Geis to recall the planes. Although puzzled by Geis's decision to cancel the order of Martin—his superior officer—Tully couldn't do anything and recalled the planes. Martin (or Geis?) sends a message for both carriers to launch another rescue flight after 90 minutes.<sup>4</sup>

**3:45 p.m.**—Both carriers launched planes. Again, several minutes later Geis sent a message ordering the planes recalled. The planes returned to the carriers.<sup>5</sup>

**4:00 p.m.**—*Liberty's* crew is asking, desperately, for help: "Flash, flash, flash!" yells Joe Ward, radioman on the ship, frantically into the microphone. "I pass in the blind [meaning he did not know who was picking up the transmission]. We are under attack by aircraft and high-speed surface craft. I say again, flash, flash, flash!"<sup>6</sup> His agonized cry falls on deaf American ears.

Paradoxically, those desperate messages sent "in the blind," obviously intercepted by the Israelis, who knew that help was sent but didn't know (and it was hard to imagine) about the recalls, contributed to Israel's decision not to try to finalize the crime with a new attack and to recognize, willy-nilly, their dirty deed.

As you can see, the Sixth Fleet had all the possibilities to defend *Liberty* and tries to do that twice (if the second launch couldn't do much—the torpedo-boats attack ended at 3:15 p.m., the first one would have been over the *Liberty* in time to stop their massacre). Both attempts were killed in their infancy.

By who? Why?

Ennes's hypothesis was that the planes of the first flight were armed with nuclear weapons (it will be proven later that this was not the case) and that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara recalled them being afraid that the attacker might be the Soviet Union and not willing to risk a nuclear confrontation with it (we will see that both McNamara and president Johnson knew from the very beginning that the attacker was Israel). *Both new traitors.*

The second flight was recalled because Israel admitted that it attacked the ship "by mistake."<sup>7</sup>

The truth was quite different. And much more disgusting.

On June 9 *USS Liberty* rendezvoused with the Sixth Fleet, and the badly wounded are transported in the hospitals on the carriers. Between them, the highest in rank was Lt. Cmdr.

David Lewis, the NSA group chief. Rear Adm. Geis paid him a visit and told him what happened.

The first rescue flight was recalled by direct orders, via radio, from McNamara, who ordered the postponement of a new launch by 90 minutes. When this was launched, Geis informed McNamara, who, immediately, ordered again its cancellation.

Any officer who has doubts about the sanity of an order has the prerogative to ask that the order be confirmed by a high-

er-ranking officer than the one who gave it first, and Geis did that. As he was questioning an order coming from the secretary of defense, the only one higher in rank was . . . the president. President Johnson came and personally gave, over the radio, the order to recall the plane because "we are not to embarrass an ally."<sup>8</sup> The second flight was recalled.

It seems that Johnson's choice of words was much more cynical: "I don't give a damn if every man drowns and the ship sinks. I don't want to embarrass our allies."<sup>9</sup> After telling the story, Rear Adm. Geis asked Lewis to keep it secret until his death. It was a promise Lewis kept.<sup>10</sup>

*Nota bene:* I wish you to pay attention to the chronology, the "timing" of the events, because it is, as we will see, in conflict with the official version.

At 8:38 a.m., several minutes after the first flight was recalled, McNamara called Johnson at the White House.<sup>11</sup> And we are to believe that the secretary of defense of the United States didn't tell the president of the United States that a ship of the U.S. Navy was attacked in international waters (an act equivalent to a declaration of war). And if he did tell (as it was his duty), why is Johnson keeping mum, playing naïve until he's officially announced? I want to mention the fact that even today, after numerous requests and probes, the executive branch refuses to discuss the recalling of the rescue flights.

*A minute or so later, with the planes still in sight, Tully received an order from his superior officer—Geis—to recall the planes. Tully couldn't do anything and recalled the planes.*



I think it is the time to take a look at what is stated in the official documents. . . .

### Between Washington & Tel Aviv

A CRITIC [Extreme priority.—RS.] sent by either *America* or *Saratoga* arrives at the NSA Command Center at 9:00 a.m. on June 8, announcing that *Liberty* was torpedoed in the Mediterranean at approximate 32N, 33E. At 9:11 a.m. the Pentagon (i.e., McNamara) received a call about the attack from the European Command Headquarters.<sup>12</sup>

Only at 9:49 a.m., Walt Rostow, national security advisor, called Johnson and informed him about the attack. The president looked very concerned. In the opinion of George Christian, Johnson's press secretary: "His first thought was that the Russians had done it; said something like 'if they did it we're in a war.'" <sup>13</sup>

After he "found out" about the attack, Johnson minded his business as usual, not looking too preoccupied by the perspective of a conflict with the Soviet Union.

At 4:00 p.m., in Tel Aviv, the U.S. naval attaché, Cmdr. E.C. Castle, is summoned to the External Relations Office of the Israeli army to be informed that Israeli air and naval forces attacked *USS Liberty* by mistake. Right away a question pops in ones mind: the attack ended at 3:15 p.m. because, by the Israeli declarations, the torpedo boats realized, at last, that they are attacking a U.S. ship. Why then, did it take Israeli authorities almost an hour before telling this to Castle? The most probable explanation is the disagreement between Moshe Dayan, the defense minister and some of his generals and admirals about continuing or not the attack.

At 4:14 p.m. Castle sent a FLASH message, which arrived in Washington at 10:45 a.m. At 11 a.m. Rostow informed Johnson that the attacker was Israel. After "finding" this "news," Johnson had a meeting in the Situation Room with his advisers (between them Dean Rusk, secretary of state, McNamara, Clark Clifford, chief of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, McGeorge Bundy, special adviser) about the attack.

The accounts of the participants vary. Rusk and Clifford say that at first the participants speculated for a while about who might be the aggressor until, *during the meeting* [emphasis mine, RS], came the information that Israel did it.<sup>14</sup>

"Finding this out," Johnson was relieved: "Thank God it wasn't the Russians."<sup>15</sup>

Why did Johnson "forget" to inform his advisers that Israel was the culprit and why is he playing the "pleasant surprise" charade? And, speaking of that, how come Johnson and McNamara were sure that it was, indeed, Israel (see Johnson comments about "embarrassing an ally" when he recalled the planes)?

In the evening of June 7, the U.S. military attaché in Tel Aviv sent a secret message informing the CIA that Israel intends to sink *Liberty* if she comes close to the coast (Marshall Carter, a CIA representative, testified about this message before a Congressional Commission investigating the attack). This information triggered the frantic NSA and JCS activity to reposition *Liberty*. As we know, the order to move at more than 100 miles from shore didn't reach *USS Liberty*.



## Why Civilizations Self-Destruct

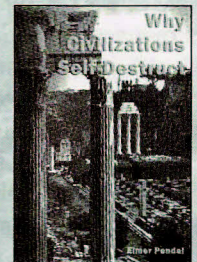
This thought-provoking book might explain some of the paradoxes of modern Western societies, such as that of an increasing burden of tax being paid by a diminishing number of productive people, for less apparent benefit.

Those who can, do. Those who cannot, become employees of the state and local governments. They become an ever-increasing burden on the diminishing number of productive people. They tend to vote for parties of high taxation in order to provide themselves with employment and inflation-proof pensions. The "mob" votes for its bread and circuses.

Inevitably this situation will lead to the collapse of society as we know it. As the ancient Greeks observed, democracy inevitably degenerates into tyranny.

In this, his latest and most significant book, Dr. Elmer Pendell examines the most crucial demographic phenomenon of our age—the accelerating decline of our institutions and our way of life caused by the higher reproduction rates of those who should reproduce least. Perhaps Pendell's most important contribution to modern thought—a contribution which comes through strongly in this volume—is his linkage of the inherited social drives of individuals to the almost universal tolerance extended to socially intolerable birthrate differences.

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Obviously Johnson and McNamara knew about the message and about the repositioning order, so, in the morning of June 8, when they heard that *Liberty* was attacked, they didn't have too many doubts that Israel was the perpetrator.

McNamara recalled the first flight and postponed for 90 minutes the second to gain some time to discuss with Johnson what to do.

Those 90 minutes weren't calm in Tel Aviv either. A CIA report describes a hot confrontation between Moshe Dayan, the secretary of defense, and some of the military leaders, as to continue or to stop the attack: "(deleted) [The informers.—RS.] . . . commented on the sinking of the U.S. communications ship, *Liberty*. They said that Dayan had personally ordered the attack on the ship and that one of his generals violently opposed this action and said: 'This is pure murder.' One of the Israeli admirals who was present also disapproved the action, and it was he who ordered it stopped and not Dayan. Believe that the attack against the U.S. vessel is not incidental to any political ambitions Dayan may have."<sup>16</sup>

During the day letters of apology arrived at the White House from the culprits: Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Foreign Minister Abba Eban and from the Israeli Ambassador Abraham Harman (after he was dressed down on the matter by Dean Rusk, who never believed that the attack was unintentional).

Press secretary George Christian held a news conference at 4:35 p.m. at the White House, which didn't stir much interest, resulting in only several questions.

At the surface things seemed to wind down that tumultuous June 8, 1967. Underground though, the machinations toward control and manipulations had begun. Don't forget one thing: Johnson planned to seek presidential nomination next year, and he badly needed the pro-Israel votes.

### Inquiries, Commissions, Reports

If one listens to *Liberty* survivors, for all practical purposes, a serious investigation of the attack never took place (and, a singular exception, until today there never was a congressional hearing, despite the numerous calls for it from politicians to say nothing about from the *Liberty* survivors).

In some Israel apologists' opinions, like A. Jay Cristol's,<sup>17</sup> who insists that Israel was without reproach and the attack was rather *Liberty's* fault, there were too many inquiries and reports.

At 2:50 p.m., on June 9, Lt. Col. Michael Bloch of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) summoned Cmdr. Castle at the Foreign Ministry and dictated the so-called "Bloch Report" which, in a typical example of chutzpah, put the blame practically on the *USS Liberty*:

- *The ship's presence in a war zone is contrary to the international usage.*
- *The region was not commonly used for navigation.*
- *Egypt declared the zone closed to neutrals.*
- *Liberty resembled the Egyptian ship El-Quiseir.*
- *Israel received reports of a naval bombardment of El Arish, where Liberty was spotted [Liberty, without any cannons, couldn't do that, and the Israelis knew it.—RS.]*
- *Liberty didn't fly a flag when found. [That's incorrect.—RS.]*

• *Liberty was heading at great speed toward Egypt. [Liberty's maximum speed was a mere 18 knots, and Bloch knew this.—RS.]*

Next day, June 10, Israel issued a formal apology, with "sincere expression of deep regret for the tragic accident" and promised that Israel was "prepared to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage."<sup>18</sup>

Also on June 10, Adm. John S. McCain Jr., commander-in-chief of the U.S. naval forces, Europe (CINCUSNAVEUR), ordered Rear Adm. Isaac Kidd to convene a naval court of inquiry composed by Kidd and two Navy captains. The court arrived on *Liberty* on June 11 and started unofficial discussions with the crewmembers. Phil Tourney, one of the survivors remembers that Kidd "took his stars off and said 'talk to me like I'm not an admiral.' We told him what happened and how we felt. Then he put his stars back on and said 'If you ever breathe a word of this, you go to the penitentiary, or worse.'" The survivors were threatened with court-martial in no uncertain terms if they ever spoke of the attack again.<sup>19</sup> On June 14, 1967, *Liberty* reached Malta and the official inquiry started, lasting till June 16. The naval court dwelt only with the ship's performance during the attack, didn't refer to the reason *Liberty* was there, didn't consider why Israel attacked and didn't touch the subject of Sixth Fleet plane recalls. The witnesses were practically forced to answer along the line imposed by Washington, and any attempts to stray from this line were not taken into consideration. The court returned to London and, on June 18, Adm. McCain approved its findings. Between June 18 and June 28, the Department of State worked diligently to condense the 707 pages of depositions in a 28-page summary, a summary that was supposed to be the official position of the administration concerning the attack on *Liberty*.

The original 707 pages were classified "top secret" and on June 28 the summary is made public, exculpating Israel of a deliberate attack and declaring the attack a mistake. This position, not shared by the vast portion of the administration, by many congressmen, by practically all intelligence agencies, by all of the survivors, obviously, will not change to this day, witness statements notwithstanding, in spite of new evidence.

During the naval court session, Israel ordered its own court of inquiry, headed by Col. Ram Ron, ex-military attaché in Washington. Its conclusions, handed to Castle on June 18, reiterated the Bloch Report's accusations with one notable difference: Israel admits that *Liberty* flew a "small flag."

Several secret reports are presented between June and November 1967. The first one was made by Clark Clifford, Johnson's consultant, at the president's request. Johnson told Clifford to base his report on information gathered by the naval court of inquiry rather than conducting his own investigation. Obviously Clifford studied all the documents (it took him a month to prepare the report) not only the summary. What conclusion did he reach? This is a mystery; his report was not declassified until now. I can't stop myself from assuming that if it had sustained the official position it wouldn't be kept as secret. In fact, quite the opposite would have happened.

Meanwhile, Israel began an inquiry led by military judge Sgan-Aluf Yerushalmi. Its purpose was not to establish if the

attack was deliberate or accidental (the presumption that it was an accident wasn't questioned but accepted as a fact) but to find any guilt—or lack of it—in the ranks of Israeli navy personnel.

The report was finished on “the 13th day of Tamuz, 5727 (July 21, 1967) and, indeed, great surprise, its result was that “my conclusion is that in all the circumstances of the case, the conduct of any one of the naval officers concerned in this incident cannot be considered unreasonable, to an extent which justified committal (*sic*) for trial.”<sup>20</sup>

I don't plan to get into the details of this report, which is difficult to read, confusing and deliberately vague. I only wish to comment on a rather strange fact described in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report. The torpedo-boats spotted *Liberty* at 1:41 p.m. “A few minutes later, the division commander reported that the target, now 17 miles from him, was moving at a speed of 28 knots, and since he could not overtake it before reaching Egypt, he requested the dispatch of aircraft toward it. . . .”

As a result of the request of the Navy HQ through its representatives with the Air Force, aircraft were dispatched to the target.”<sup>21</sup>

If you remember, the aerial attack started at 2:00 p.m. *Liberty* is spotted by the torpedo-boats' radar at 1:41 p.m. (“spotted” at a distance at which their radar couldn't possibly reach, but this is another mystery). “A few minutes later” the commander asked for aerial support. How many minutes later? Let's say four. This allows only a maximum of 15 minutes in which: Navy Headquarters, *Stella Maris*, in Haifa, after receiving the request, calls Lt. Cmdr. Pinchasy, naval liaison officer at Air Force General Headquarters, *Kiryat*, in Tel Aviv, and tells him about the torpedo-boats' request. Pinchasy calls Maj. Gen. Mordechai “Moti” Hod, commander in chief of the air force asking for an air attack. Hod refuses. Pinchasy calls back *Stella Maris* with Hod's refusal and is told to insist. Pinchasy walks up a floor to Hod and repeats his request. Hod, finally, accepts and orders Col. Shmuel Kislev, chief air controller, to solve the problem. Kislev finds an air patrol and dispatches it to attack *Liberty*.<sup>22</sup> The planes find *Liberty* and attack. And all this in a maximum of 15 minutes.

I beg pardon, but I don't buy it. The *Liberty* attack was a combined action of the air force and the navy, perfectly coordinated. The jets were heading toward *Liberty* long before being “solicited” by the torpedo boats, which “discovered” the target. The fact that the attack was a combined action of two services of the Israeli armed forces implies the conclusion that it was ordered by somebody very high in Israeli hierarchy and excludes the “tragic accident” version.

The last report is done for Dean Rusk, the secretary of state, and for Eugen Rostow, sub-secretary for political affairs, by Carl Salan, legal advisor for the Department of State. Salan compared the Yerushalmi Report with the findings of the naval court of inquiry and found a lot of discrepancies. Rostow received the Salan Report on September 21, 1967, and it is classified immediately “top secret.” Despite the fact that the report

demolished Israeli inventions, it wasn't used by the U.S. government to contest Israel's version of the attack. For Rostow, a great admirer of Israel, the Jewish mini-state's prestige was more important than the truth.

### Adding Insult to Injury

The *USS Liberty* survivors had to endure—besides the indignity of the official position of the United States—scores of insults and persecution from authorities and groups and organizations for whom Israel is more important than the fate of some young American heroes.

They were accused of all kinds of ulterior motives in their quest to present the truth of this crime, from material gain to anti-Semitism.

Immediately after the naval court of inquiry they were relocated all over the world and were forbidden, under threats, to tell their opinion.

The dead were buried, scattered in Arlington Cemetery. The unidentified remains of three of them were buried in a common

grave; and on the headstone was engraved: “Died in the Eastern Mediterranean” as if, in Adm. Thomas Moorer's words, “they died of pneumonia, not killed.” Under pressure from the *Liberty* survivors, in 1982, the inscription was changed to “Killed *USS Liberty*.”<sup>23</sup>

Not only were the assassins of the young Americans on *Liberty* exonerated—none was even admonished—but adding insult to injury, Israel decided to honor her “heroes”: the wheel and the bell of torpedo boat 203, the one that launched the

deadly torpedo which struck *Liberty*, are displayed in the naval museum.

In 1968 McGonagle received the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in saving the ship and bringing her to safety. Because this decoration, the highest national honor, is rarely awarded, it is almost always presented by the president in an imposing ceremony at the White House. McGonagle's was handed to him by the secretary of the Navy in an improvised gathering at the Washington Navy Yard. And this only after the administration contacted Israel's ambassador and got the assurance that this was “approved” by the Jewish mini-state.

Immediately after the attack, Israel announced her readiness to make financial reparations for loss of life and material damages.

In 1968 Israel paid \$100,000 to each family of the killed ones. On April 28, 1969, almost two years after the attack, the government of Israel paid about \$20,000 to each of the wounded survivors, but that only after they had to hire lawyers who took a substantial cut of the sum.<sup>24</sup> *Probably Jew lawyers!*

The U.S. government asked for a meager \$7.6 million for the destruction of the ship (after it spent \$20 million to transform her and another \$10 million for the electronic equipment). For 13 years Israel stubbornly refused to pay, under the pretext that *Liberty* had no business being there, in international waters. In 1980 the interest alone climbed to \$10 million. In 1980, Ennes,

*The USS Liberty survivors had to endure scores of insults and persecution from authorities and groups for whom Israel is more important than the fate of some young American heroes.*

being in Washington to promote his book, *Assault on the Liberty*, got in touch with members of Congress. Sen. Adlai Stevenson (D-Ill.) announced that he'd start auditing the *USS Liberty* case. All of a sudden Israel accepted to pay \$6 million if the U.S. government forfeits the interest. Jimmy Carter, with one leg out of the White House already, accepted the deal, under an agreement by which the United States consented "not to address the issue or motive or reopen the case FOR ANY REASON [emphasis mine, RS]."<sup>25</sup> The auditing promised by the senator never took place.

## Revelations

Despite obstinate efforts from Israel and American administrations in portraying the attack as a tragic mistake, new facts punching holes in the lie surfaced.

In 1991, the well-known columnists Rowland Evans and (Robert Novak) published an article following an interview with Dwight Porter, the U.S. ambassador in Lebanon in 1967. He told them that during the attack the American embassy in Beirut intercepted an exchange of messages between an Israeli pilot and *Kiryat*, the air force headquarters in Tel Aviv. The pilot reported before the attack: "It's an American ship." The Tel Aviv answer was: "Attack." Again the pilot reported that the ship was American, and again Tel Aviv gave the order to attack.<sup>26</sup>

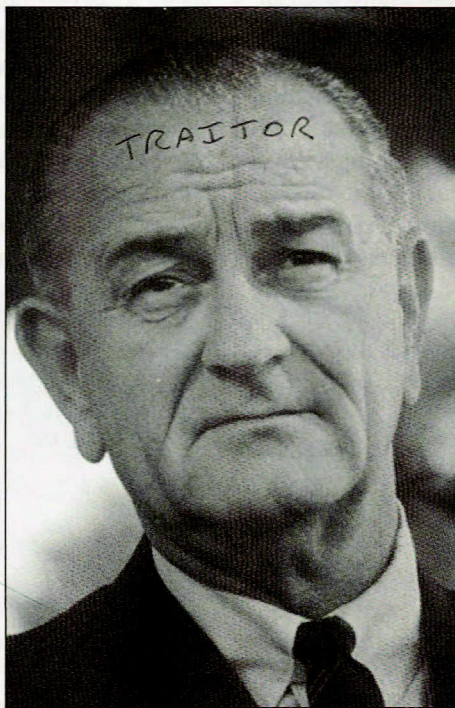
For the headquarters personnel the fact that the ship was American was no surprise. The message, if you remember, was intercepted also by the radio intercept plane *EC-121*, 18,000 feet above *Liberty*.

Fifteen years after the incident, Amon Even-Tov, the lead pilot of the attack, contacted *USS Liberty* survivors and former congressman Paul N. McCloskey and told them that "he immediately recognized the *Liberty* as an American vessel and radioed that information to his headquarters, but was told to ignore the American flag and continue his attack. He refused to do so and returned to base, where he was arrested."<sup>27</sup>

Between June 7 and 9, 1991, a reunion of the *Liberty* Veterans Association took place in Washington. Present was Seth Mintz, who, in June 8, 1967, as a major in the Israeli army, was in the war room in Ashdod during the attack on *Liberty*. In a videotaped interview in front of 12 *Liberty* veterans he declared: "There was no confusion. . . they knew. . . pilots in the *Mirage* attack were saying that it was an American ship. You could read the numbers on the side of the ship. It was no big secret. . . There are a lot of things about this business you don't realize. . . A lot of Israelis, two in particular, spent 18 years at hard labor because they refused to attack the ship."<sup>28</sup>

Another thing which could prove that the attack was deliberate and took place the way it is described by the survivors is the presence of a "witness": some crewmembers of the *USS*

*Lumberjack SS 522* declared that their submarine was very close to *Liberty* during the attack. Apparently, as commented by the investigator Tito Howard in a broadcast aired August 2, 2003, in Washington on radio station WFAX, *Lumberjack's* mission was to "tend"—accompany and monitor—the *Liberty*.<sup>29</sup> *Lumberjack* was equipped to photograph—and it did so—through the periscope, the photographs being classified "top secret." If unclassified, as asked by the *Liberty* survivors, they surely could puncture the conspiracy between Israel and the U.S. government.



LYNDON JOHNSON

*Denied help for Liberty and her valiant crew.*

## Why?

The answer to this question, ladies and gentleman, requires a crystal ball. Even if one is convinced—as I am—that the attack was deliberate and ordered at the highest levels of Israeli government, it still is not easy to comprehend such an action of a state at war, with plenty of enemies and very few allies, against the best one by far. There are several scenarios to explain why Israel bit the hand feeding her.

The oldest, and most circulated—mentioned in Part I—is that Israel, preparing to attack the Golan Heights, didn't want the United States to find out about the attack before it became a *fait accompli*, knowing that Johnson administration vehemently opposed such a move and fearing an American ultimatum forcing an armistice with Syria.

A much more sinister reason is presented by the investigative writer James Bamford in *Body of Secrets* in which the author presents, as declared by the subtitle, "Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National

Security Agency."

**June 8, 1967, 9:30 a.m.**—*Liberty* is off the Sinai coast, at 13 miles from the town of El Arish. The visibility is excellent; the minaret can be seen with naked eyes; and through binoculars one can see buildings and people. Three days after Israel started the war, the multitude of Egyptian prisoners of war starts to be a logistical problem for the Israeli invading forces in Sinai: no places to hold them, not enough troops to guard them and no vehicles to move them to prison camps. Enterprising, the kindly hearted Israeli soldiers found a different solution. They gathered together near the minaret in El Arish some 60 Egyptian prisoners, hands tied behind their backs, and gunned them down with machine guns "until the pale desert sand turned red." Then they forced other prisoners to dig a mass grave, in which they buried the dead.<sup>30</sup>

Israeli historian and journalist Gabby Bron wrote in *Yediot Ahronot* that he saw about 150 Egyptian prisoners sitting together on the ground with their hands behind their necks. "The Egyptian prisoners of war were ordered to dig pits, and then army police shot them to death. I witnessed the executions with my own eyes on the morning of June 8, in the airport area

of El Arish.”<sup>31</sup>

An Israeli military historian, Aryeh Yitzhaki, who, after the war, worked for the army’s history department, said that he and other officers gathered testimonies from scores of Israeli soldiers who said that they killed Egyptian prisoners. Yitzhaki said that Israeli troops killed, in cold blood, more than 1,000 POWs in Sinai, some 400 of them in El Arish.<sup>32</sup> About this practice, Yitzhaki said: “The whole army leadership, including Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin and the generals, knew about this thing.”<sup>33</sup>

It is quite possible that Israel feared that *Liberty* discovered those massacres, if not visually then by intercepting the Israeli radio messages about them, and didn’t want it to be known what methods are employed by Israel.

There are also some ideologists who advance the idea that the attack was indeed deliberate but well deserved by *Liberty*, who was there with the mission to spy on Israel (the fact that she didn’t have on board any Hebrew linguist notwithstanding) for Egypt. “All of our sources agree that, if the *Liberty* had continued to support the Arabs, there would have been a longer conflict involving greater Jewish casualties instead of a quick Israeli victory.”<sup>34</sup> “It came down to a choice between 25,000 of their own [Israeli, RS] dead or attacking one American ship.”<sup>35</sup> “A plan to put the ship out of commission with A MINIMUM LOSS OF LIFE WAS REQUESTED [emphasis mine, RS].”<sup>36</sup> Mind boggling.

Another possibility is that Israel tried—as she did in many other occasions—to fix the blame on Egypt in the hope of tricking the United States into entering the conflict on Israel’s side. This explains the ferocity of the attack and the determination to send *Liberty*, with every man aboard, to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

I leave you, ladies and gentlemen, to pick up the Jewish mini-state’s reason. I only want to bring to your attention that for those killed, for those left behind by them, for the wounded and their families the reason behind this premeditated crime pales when compared with the sheer acts committed by Israel with the impunity granted to it by the repugnant power of the pro-Israel lobby, increasingly pervading Washington, and the impotence of the executive branch visiting the White House.

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### The End?

There is not a shadow of a doubt that Israel is criminally guilty in this attack. But I want to point out that the United States, my country, is too, legally culpable.

In this act, equivalent to a declaration of war, Israel committed war crimes. Attacking a ship in international waters is, in itself, an act of aggression according to the UN Charter. According to the Geneva Conventions, the use of unmarked aircrafts, jamming the international distress frequencies, destroying life-rafts in water are all war crimes. The Jewish mini-state didn’t give a damn.

But the *Liberty* survivors asked unnumbered times—and

they will not tire of asking—the United States to investigate those alleged war crimes, fact not only refused but not even acknowledged by her successive governments. This continuous refusal is a crime. The United States is a signatory of the Geneva Conventions. According to those, any signatory member is obliged to “seek persons accused of committing or gave orders to be committed” violations of the conventions and to do everything possible to bring those persons to justice.

It is hard to say if history is rather a science or an art. I think that what is pushing it toward an exact discipline is the truth’s bad habit of trying to pop up. Sometimes it surfaces soon, sometimes after years, tens of years, generations. Sometimes never.

What will happen with the truth about the *Liberty*? Don’t you think, ladies and gentlemen, that it is the time for it to be known? And don’t you think, ladies and gentlemen, that we can help?

Until then . . . God bless the family of *USS Liberty*.

*An independent commission of inquiry produced an affidavit stating that LBJ and McNamara ordered the court to cover up the attack, presenting it as a mistake.*

### Light at the End of the Tunnel

The following news (not published in the Romanian version of this article) brings some hope in the quest for the truth.

A report released by the newspaper *American Free Press* on October 22, 2003, citing the highest level former military and government officials, found that Israel “committed acts of murder against U.S. servicemen and an act of war against the United States” when it *deliberately* [Emphasis mine.—RS.] attacked the

*Liberty* on June 8, 1967.<sup>37</sup>

Every congressman was informed about the impending release of the report in the Rayburn House Office Building. Only one of them, John Conyers (D-Mich.), sent an aide, Mathew Thome.

An independent commission of inquiry produced on October 9, 2003, an affidavit from Capt. Ward Boston, counsel to the original Navy court of inquiry, stating that President Lyndon Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara ordered the court to cover up the attack, presenting it as a mistake.<sup>38</sup>

In his sworn testimony Boston says the attack was deliberate but the court was ordered to cover it up by the Johnson administration.

“For more than 30 years I have remained silent on the topic of the *USS Liberty*,” Boston states. “I am a military man, and when orders come in from the secretary of defense and the president of the United States, I follow them.”<sup>39</sup> *though illegal*

“Our own independent commission of inquiry findings have grave implications for our national security and for the American people,” said Adm. Thomas Moorer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “In order to overcome this problem, the American people and our elected officers need to overcome their fear of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States.”<sup>40</sup>

Hallelujah. ❖

*Endnotes to this article found on the following page . . .*

14th August 04

ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> James M. Ennes Jr., *Assault on the Liberty*, Reintree Press, 2002, 74.  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.  
<sup>3</sup> John E. Borne, *The USS Liberty*, Reconsideration Press, 1996, 37.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>6</sup> James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, Anchor Books, 2002, 224.  
<sup>7</sup> Ennes, *op. cit.*, 76, 91, 98, 237.  
<sup>8</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 38.  
<sup>9</sup> *American Free Press*, June 23, 2003, B-3.  
<sup>10</sup> Bamford, *op. cit.*, 226.  
<sup>11</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 39.  
<sup>12</sup> Bamford, *op. cit.*, 222.  
<sup>13</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 44.  
<sup>14</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 45.  
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>16</sup> CIA Intelligence Information Cable, 11.6.67, Liberty File, LBJ Library.  
<sup>17</sup> A. Jay Cristol, *The Liberty Incident*, Brassey's, Inc., 2002.  
<sup>18</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 48.  
<sup>19</sup> *The Barnes Review*, No. 2., November 1994, 17.  
<sup>20</sup> William Gerhard, *Attack on the USS Liberty*, Aegean Park Press, 1980, 61.  
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.  
<sup>22</sup> Cristol, *op. cit.* 41-42.  
<sup>23</sup> *The Barnes Review*, No. 2., November 1994, *op. cit.*, 18.  
<sup>24</sup> Bamford, *op. cit.*, 228.

<sup>25</sup> Michael B. Oren, *The USS Liberty: Case Closed*, Azure, 2000 (internet).  
<sup>26</sup> R. Evans, R. Novak, "The Liberty Fallout," *The New York Post*, Nov. 11, 1991, 19.  
<sup>27</sup> *American Free Press*, June 23, 2003, B-4.  
<sup>28</sup> Borne, *op. cit.*, 256.  
<sup>29</sup> *American Free Press*, August 18, 2003, 11.  
<sup>30</sup> Bamford, *op. cit.*, 202.  
<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.  
<sup>34</sup> J. Loftus, M. Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*, St. Martin's Griffin, 2000, 273.  
<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.  
<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>37</sup> *American Free Press*, *op. cit.*, Nov. 3, 2003.  
<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

**ROMEO STANA** is a Romanian linguist and scholar and the publisher of *FOAIE* magazine, a journal of politics, poetry and history published in the Romanian language.

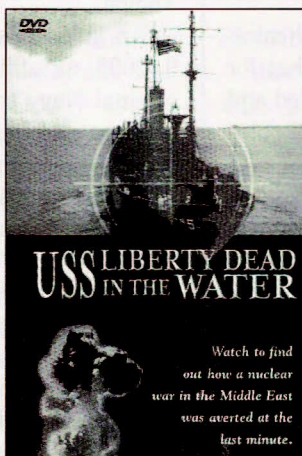
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