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UNITED  
STATES  
CRYPTOLOGIC  
HISTORY

Attack on a Sigint Collector,  
the U.S.S. *Liberty* ~~(S-CCO)~~

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**UNITED STATES CRYPTOLOGIC HISTORY**

*Special Series  
Crisis Collection*

*Volume 1*

**Attack on a Sigint Collector,  
the U.S.S. *Liberty* (S-CIO)**

William D. Gerhard  
Henry W. Millington

**NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY/CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE  
1981**

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 (b) (3)-18 USC 798  
 (b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

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## Foreword

~~(S-COO)~~ The Israeli attack on the U.S.S. *Liberty* some 14 years ago was, indeed, a wrenching experience for U.S. Sigint agencies. The loss, particularly in the case of those Sigint specialists 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-COO)~~ 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 and of attempts to minimize the compromise of cryptologic materials, and the lessons to be learned from the event.

~~(C-COO)~~ Finally, this is also an account of the way the U.S. Sigint agencies organized their response to requirements brought on by a crisis situation. As such, it has much to offer the student of U.S. cryptologic operations.

~~(C-COO)~~ 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 headed the NSA-SCA Task Force that produced the Southeast Asia History Series, as well as the Special Research Element that produced studies of Sigint crisis situations ~~(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36~~ 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, Cryptologic History and Publications Staff

### **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; Henry Schorreck, Historian [b] (3)-P.L. 86-36 Editor; an [b] (3)-P.L. 86-36 Secretary. Robert D. Farley, of the History Staff, spent many hours arranging for and conducting interviews of personnel intimately associated with the *Liberty* incident. In turn, [b] (3)-P.L. 86-36 painstakingly transcribed the interview tapes.

To [b] (3)-P.L. 86-36 Cryptologic 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

[b] (3)-P.L. 86-36

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.

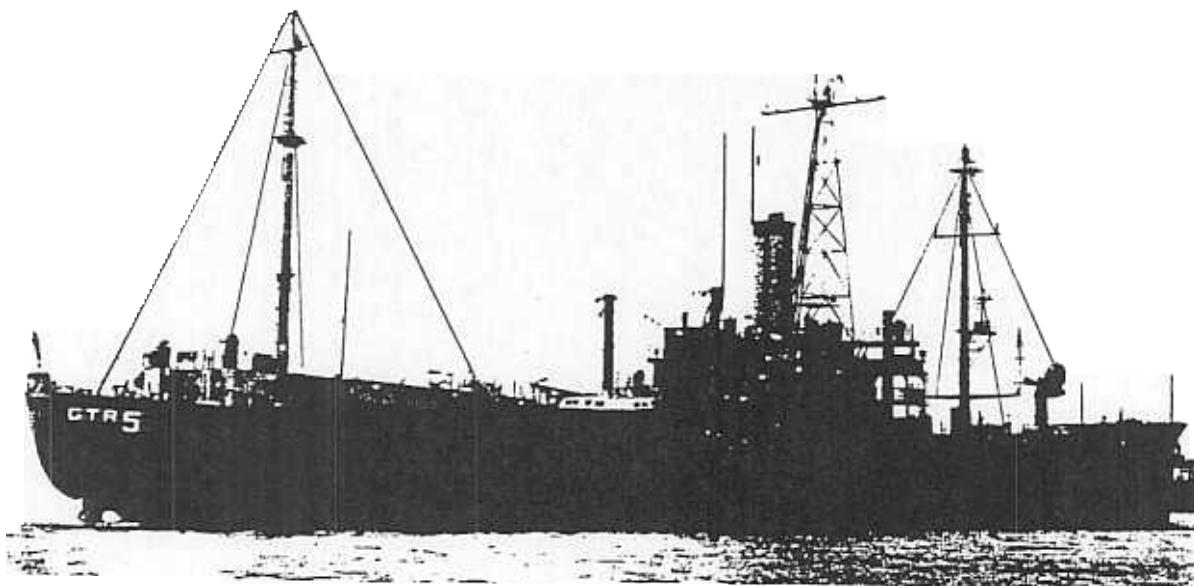
(U) Between January and April 1967, the Syrian-Israeli frontier was the scene of a series of escalating clashes ranging from potshots at tractors to exchanges of fire between tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Both sides refused, at different times, to permit the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission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

~~(S-CIO)~~ 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. This event triggered a Sigint Readiness "Alfa" called by NSA for Middle East targets. The Alfa was terminated three days later.<sup>6</sup>

~~(S-CIO)~~ 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 Develop-

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(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 6 officers and 128 enlisted men from the Naval Security Group.

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

opment (AID), [redacted]

(S CCO) From 11-14 May, U.A.R. aircraft attacked towns in Saudi Arabia [redacted]

(S CCO) When on 14 May the U.A.R. placed its air defense units on full alert and deployed its tactical naval units, NSA expanded its Alfa to embrace all Middle East targets.<sup>9</sup>

(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 CCO) 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, NSA raised its Alfa to a Sigin Readiness "Bravo Crayon" for all Middle East communications.<sup>11</sup>

(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 Dardanelles.<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 CCO) 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, NSA instituted a Sigin Readiness Alfa [redacted]<sup>14</sup>

(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 Qantarah in the north; through Abu 'Uwayjilah along the central route toward Imaillia; 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 Sharrah 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.

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~~(S-COO)~~ 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, NSA extended Bravo "Crayon"

~~[redacted]~~<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 "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.

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

<sup>2</sup>(U) Hal Kostut, 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.

~~(C-COO)~~ NSA (P2), "Sigint Readiness Bravo Crayon Critique," ~~(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36~~ 1968, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>(U) Ibid.

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

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

<sup>9</sup>(U) Charles W. Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War; How It Began," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Jan 1968), p. 319.

~~(C-COO)~~ NSA (P2), "Sigint Readiness Bravo Crayon Critique," ~~(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36~~ 1968, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>(U) Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>(U) Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>(U) Ibid.

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

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

<sup>15</sup>(U) Ibid.

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## Chapter II

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

(S-COO) Looking back upon the *Liberty* incident today, Americans might well question why the U.S. introduced an intelligence ship 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 NSA consideration of customer requirements for intelligence from this troubled region, of technical factors which would govern the collection of Middle East communications, and of the need to develop technical Sigint data in the event future U.S. involvement in Middle East hostilities should bring a requirement to support U.S. forces. The NSA decision to request the *Liberty*'s deployment on 23 May, the day it raised its Sigint readiness condition to Bravo-Crayon, was, moreover, only one of many actions taken to improve Sigint collection, processing, and reporting in the critical weeks before the Six Day War as the NSA action office, G6, began a round-the-clock Sigint operation at Fort Meade.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Requirements for Intelligence (U)

(S-COO) The long-standing Middle East tension had produced a growing requirement from U.S. intelligence users for information on a number of military

[REDACTED]

(S-COO) [REDACTED]

(TS-COO) In late May-early June 1967, [REDACTED] the intelligence requirements took on a sense of urgency.

[REDACTED]

(SC) Intelligence users define, of course, the categories of information they need from Sigint, and it is up to the Sigint specialists to translate their requirements into meaningful, responsive collection and processing actions [REDACTED]

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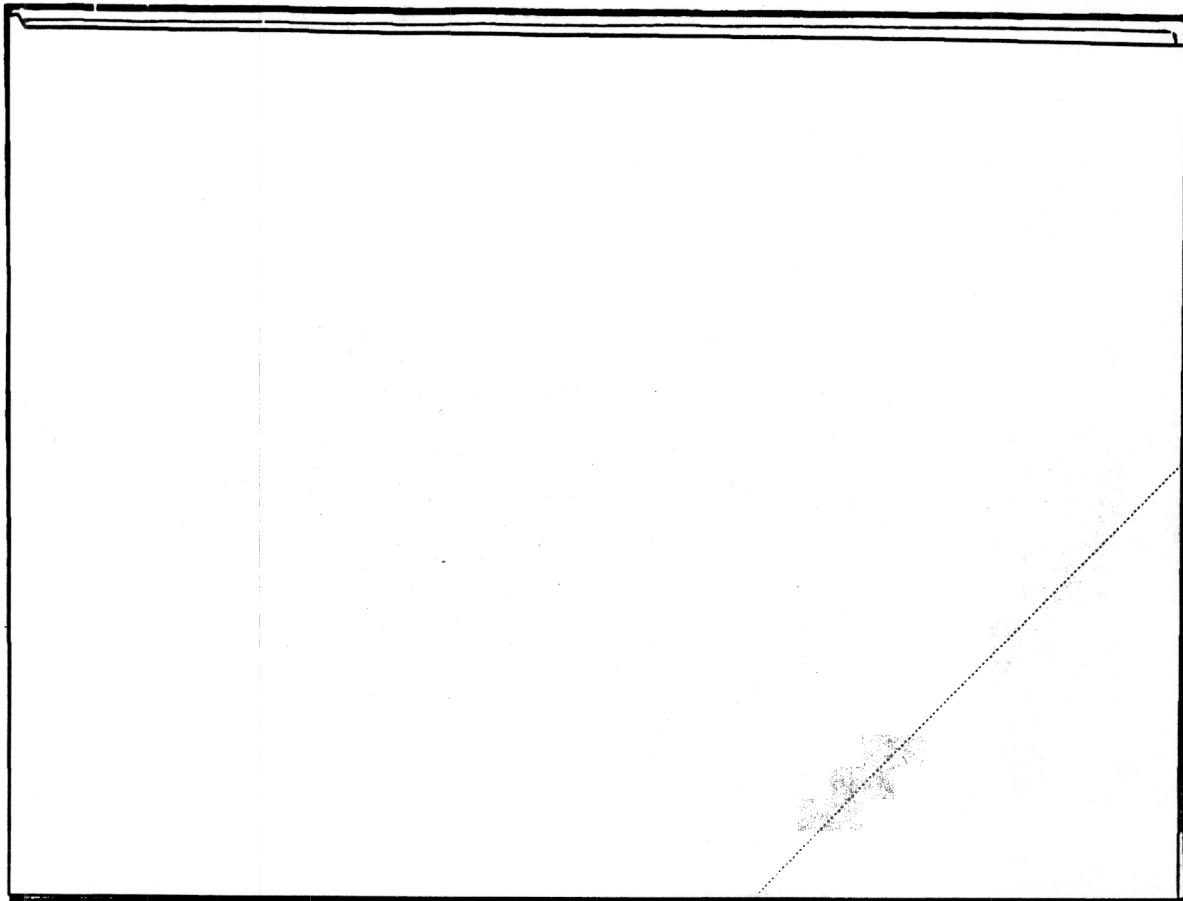
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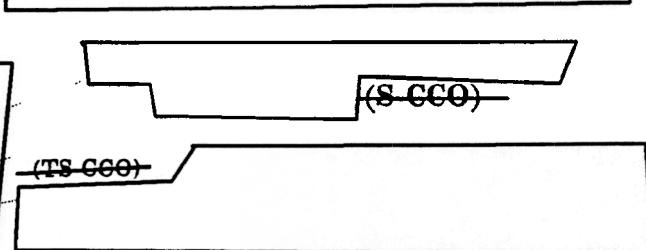
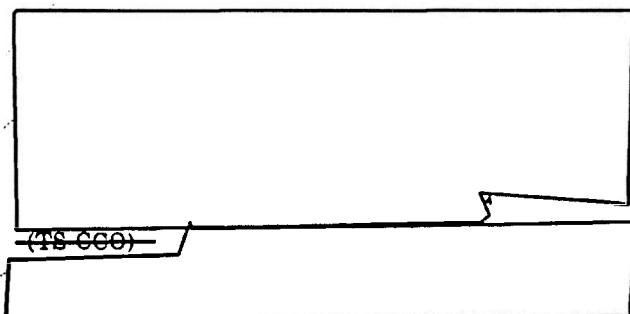
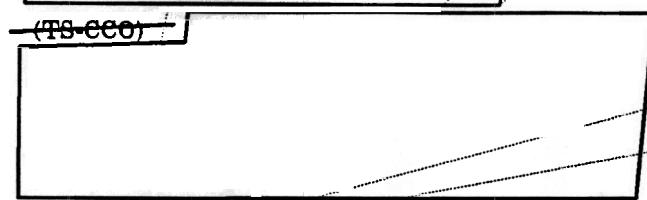
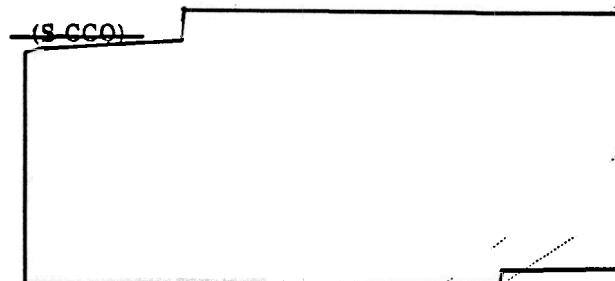
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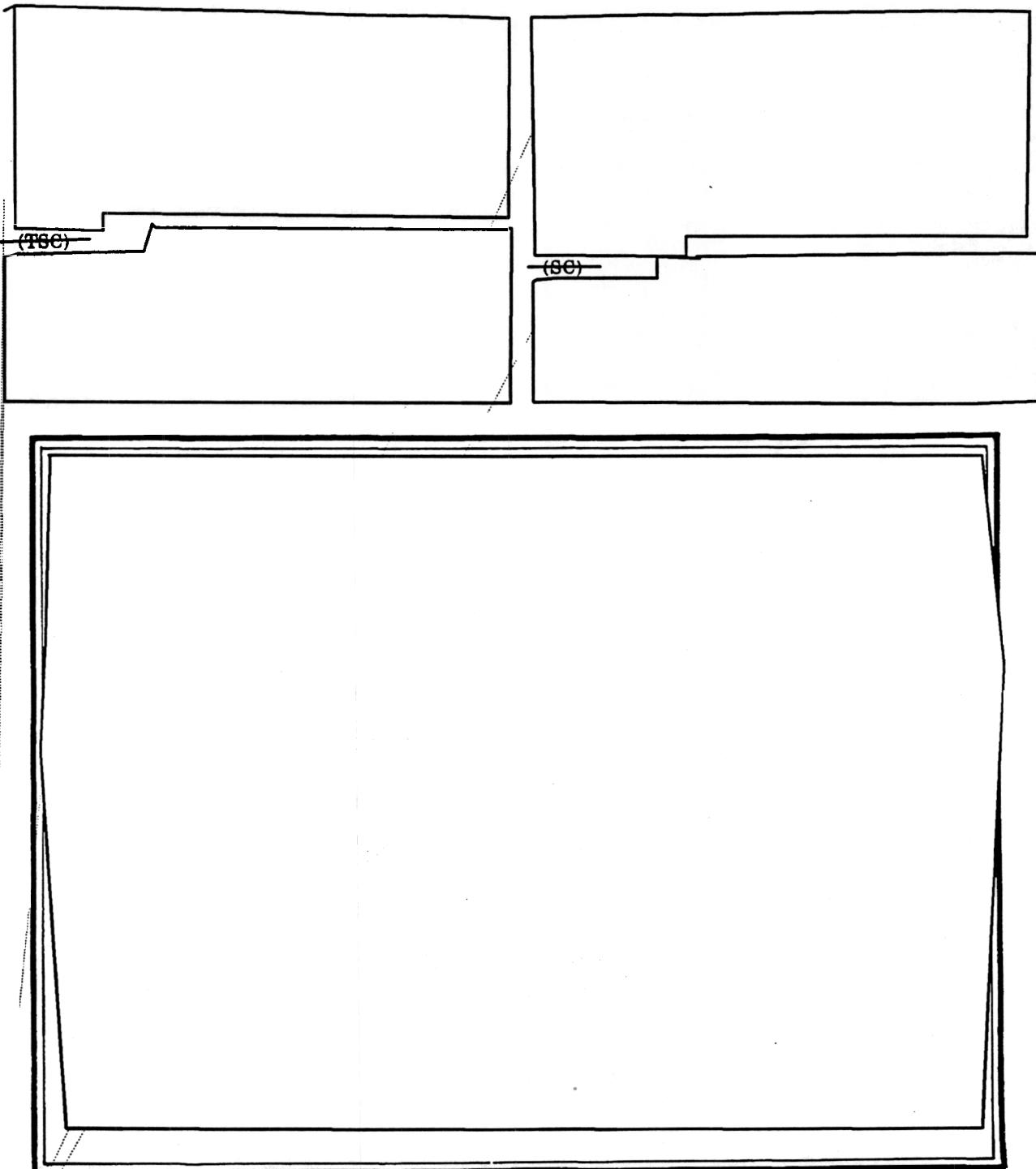
### Technical Collection Factors (U)



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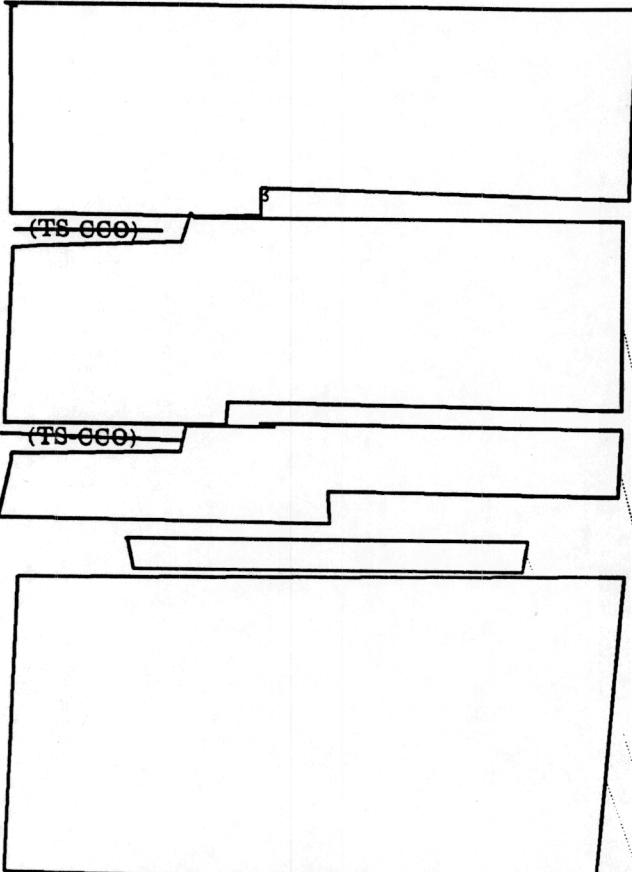
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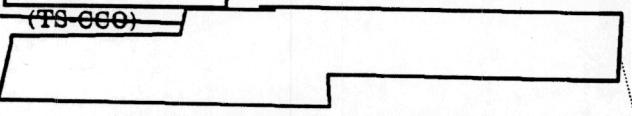
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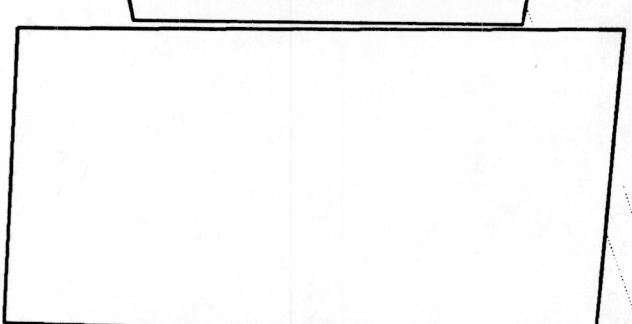
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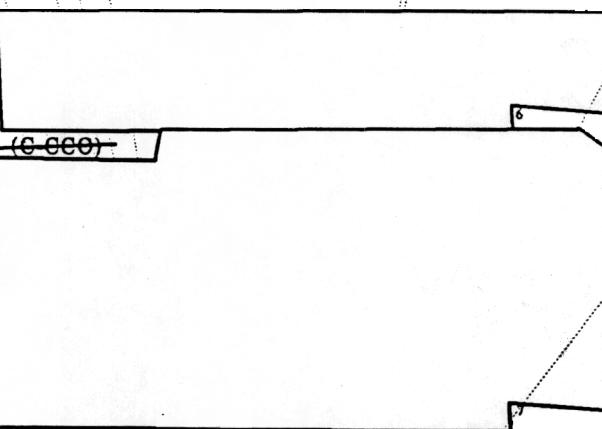
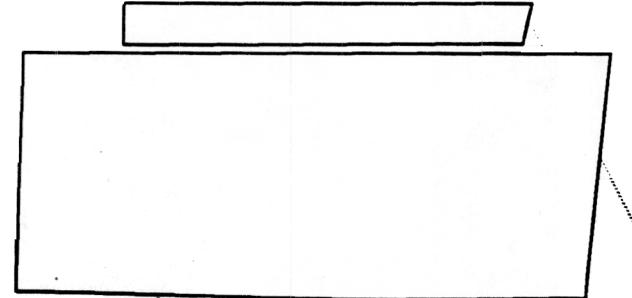


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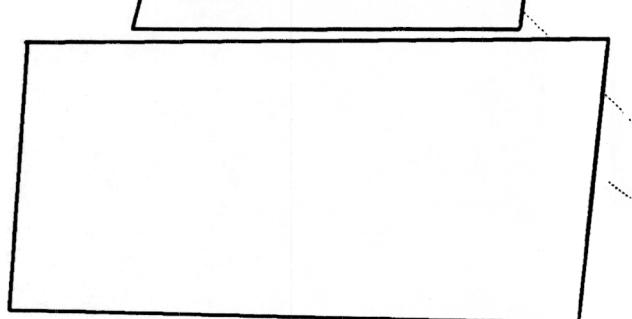


~~(C CCO) Intelligence and Security Command  
(INSCOM) manual-morse positions~~

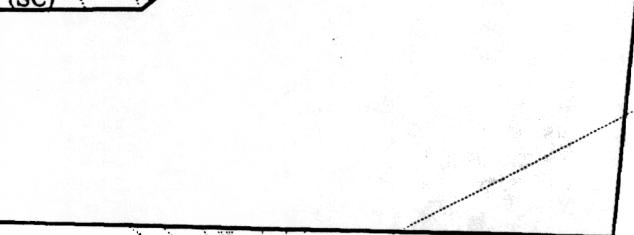
~~(Photograph courtesy of INSCOM.)  
(Figure is CONFIDENTIAL CCO)~~



~~(C CCO)~~



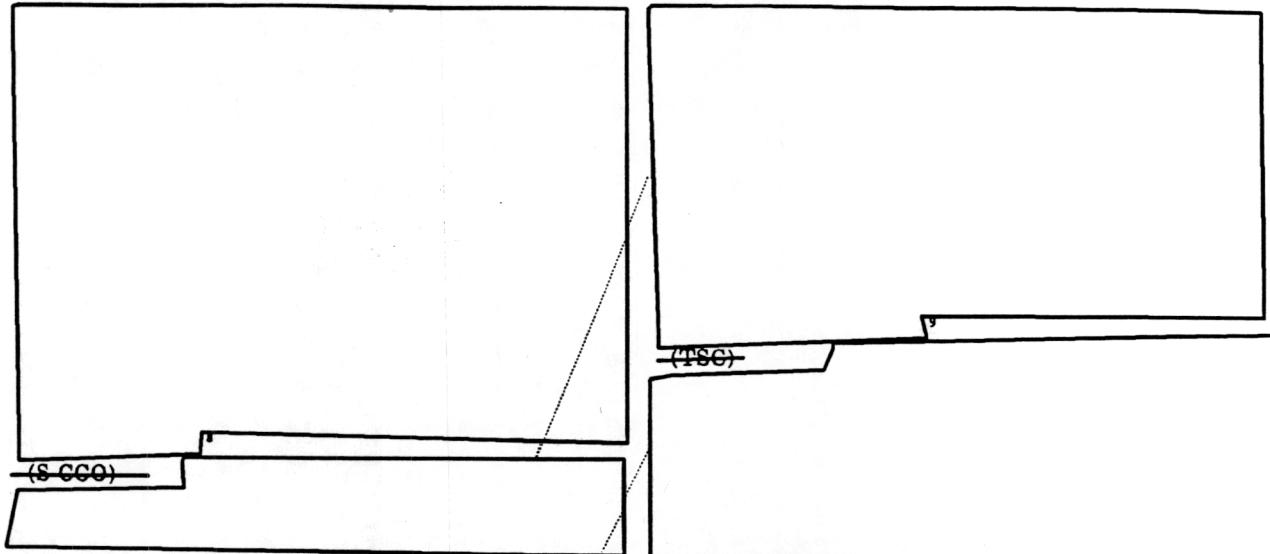
~~(S)~~



~~8 TOP SECRET~~

~~HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY~~

~~(b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36~~



~~(C CCO) U.S. Army Sigint analysts at [redacted]~~

(Photograph courtesy of INSCOM.)

(Figure is CONFIDENTIAL CCO)

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

(b) (3) -50 USC 403  
(b) (3) -18 USC 798  
(b) (3) -P.L. 86-36

**U.S. Intercept of VHF/UHF Communications (U)**

~~(S-CCO)~~ Since normal reception of VHF/UHF communications depends on a line-of-sight relationship between receiver and transmitter [redacted]

[redacted] successful collection of VHF/UHF communications depended on intercept by [redacted] sites located near the transmitters and by airborne collectors which could fly orbits in their vicinity. Close-in intercept facilities located preferably within ground-wave distance of transmitters were also a prerequisite to effective intercept of low-powered HF communications.

~~(SC)~~ Sigint collectors had gradually increased their knowledge of Middle East VHF/UHF communications. HF communications occasionally referred to other communications in the VHF/UHF modes. [redacted]

~~(SC)~~

~~(SC)~~

~~(S-CCO)~~

~~(TS-CCO-NF)~~

~~(C-CCO)~~

~~(TS-CCO-NF)~~

~~(TS-CCO)~~

10 ~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

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(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
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~~NOPORN~~

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(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

(C) Electrical communications between INSCOM detachments and their parent INSCOM organization, the U.S. Army Communications Support Unit, as well as their communications with NSA, were via U.S. Army Strategic Communications Command facilities, off-line, and encrypted on KL-7A equipment using the Adonis system (KAK-199).

(TS-GCO-NF)

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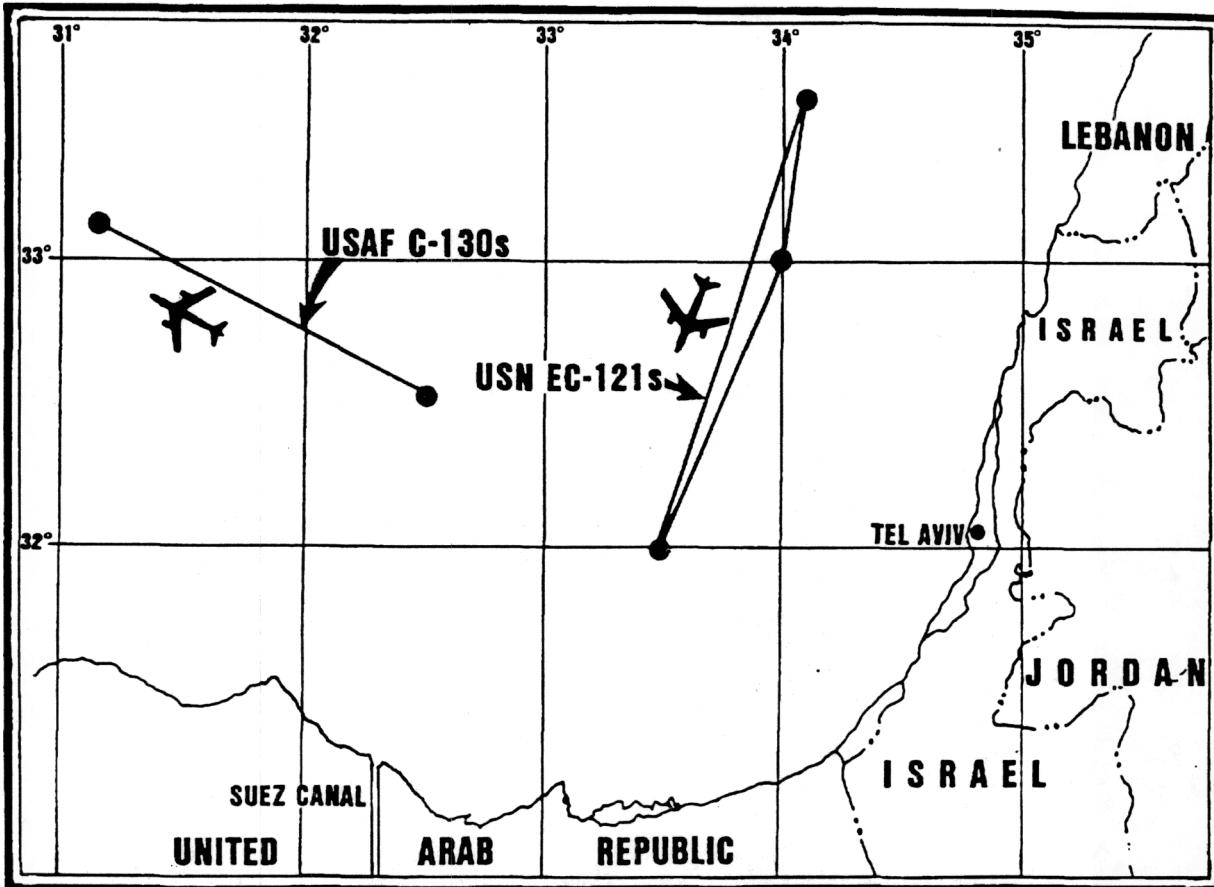
(TS-CCO)

### Airborne Collectors (U)

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

-NOFORN-

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~~(C-CCO)~~ After NSA declared a Sigint Readiness condition for the eastern Mediterranean, collection flights of the EC-121 and C-130 aircraft were increased to once daily instead of the usual eight flights a month.

*(Figure is CONFIDENTIAL CCO)*

producing Comint responsive to requirements, particularly those relating to the U.A.R. and to merchant shipping.

#### *The Decision to Deploy the Liberty (U)*

~~(TSC)~~ During May and early June 1967, the U.S. [redacted] Sigint organization performed moderately well with its existing ground and air collection in

**12** ~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

- (b) (1)  
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(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

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Arab countries would break diplomatic relations with the U.S. and that, [redacted]

(TSC-NF)

(TS CCO) NSA considered the categories of Middle East communications for which the existing collection organization was either inadequate or for which it offered small promise for sustained intercept.

Sigint collection managers concluded that the then existing collection organization would be able, at best, only to make a moderate response to many of the intelligence requirements in view of technical limitations in the collection of VHF/UHF communications.

(S CCO) In the case of the airborne collectors, the Sigint planners felt that the average orbit time of the C-130s and EC-121s — about five hours on station after allowing for time to and from orbit areas — was too short for the sustained collection desired.

(U) Expansion of airborne collection was a possibility, but additional aircraft in sufficient numbers would be difficult to obtain, and there was the consideration of downtime for maintenance which for aircraft was greater than for other platforms.<sup>15</sup>

(TS CCO-NF) In the case of the [redacted] sites, Sigint planners considered their fixed locations and the resulting confinement of their VHF/UHF intercept to line-of-sight distances from those locations. They also correctly anticipated that, in the event of war, certain

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(TS CCO) For consistent, close-in intercept, Sigint specialists decided that the assignment of a collection ship to work offshore from the U.A.R. was in order. It was natural that they would decide upon shipborne collection. A technical research ship (TRS) was, according to one estimate at the time, the equivalent of 13 airborne collectors and, besides that, was more economical to operate than the airborne collectors.<sup>17</sup> In addition to tasks such as sustained collection as in the case of U.S.N.S. Muller,

[redacted] the special ships were prepared by design for quick reaction to exigencies of one kind or another.<sup>18</sup>

(S CCO) Choice of a ship for the Mediterranean narrowed between the U.S.N.S. Valdez [redacted] then near Gibraltar, and the Liberty in port at Abidjan, Ivory Coast. NSA chose the Liberty because she had superior speed (18 knots vs. 8 knots for Valdez), because her VHF/UHF multichannel collection capability was better, and because she was, unlike Valdez, at the beginning of a deployment.<sup>19</sup> NSA accordingly requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff/Joint Reconnaissance Center (JCS/JRC) on 23 May 1967 to divert the Liberty to the Mediterranean.

#### Notes

Source documents are in the "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.

<sup>1</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Fact Sheet for DIRNSA," undated.

<sup>2</sup>(S CCO) NSA Staff, "Critique-Sigint Readiness Bravo Crayon," 10 July 1968, pp. 31-47, hereafter cited "Critique-SRB Crayon" and NSA Staff, "Report to the Director, NSA: U.S.S. Liberty (AGTR-5), 23 May-8 June 1967," 12 June 1967, pp. 1-4, hereafter cited "Report to the Director, NSA."

<sup>3</sup>(U) "Report to the Director, NSA," p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>(S CCO) Informal information from NSA Staff Officer, [redacted] (June 1980).

<sup>5</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Operations Staff Summary," ca. 16 Jun 1967.

<sup>6</sup>(U) NSA (G82), "Briefing on 1967 Middle East Crisis," undated document; "Report to the Director, NSA," Tab C.

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~ 13

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

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

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

<sup>9(U)</sup> NSA Staff, "Operations Staff Summary," ca. 16 Jun 1967; "Critique-SRB Crayon," pp. 20, 37.

<sup>10(U)</sup> Electronic Security Command, *History of the 6931st Security Group, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1967*, pp. 8-9, 16, 60-62, 78, 86, 92; "Critique-SRB Crayon," p. 21.

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

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

<sup>13(U)</sup> NSA Staff, "Airborne Collection in the Middle East," undated; NSA Staff, "Operations Staff Summary," ca. 16 Jun 1967; "Report to the Director, NSA," p. 2; "Critique-SRB Crayon," pp. 17-18.

<sup>14(U)</sup> NSA Staff, "Operations Staff Summary," ca. 16 Jun 1987.

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

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

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

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

<sup>19(U)</sup> "Critique-SRB Crayon," p. 18.

## Chapter III

### Deployment to the Mediterranean (U)

~~(SC)~~ With Sigint unit USN-855 on board, the U.S.S. *Liberty* had been in operation for two years and four months when NSA sent its message to the JCS asking for deployment of the *Liberty* to the Mediterranean. During this time it had undertaken five separate missions off the west coast of Africa to

[redacted]  
The ship had executed a number of difficult tasks — locating new communications.

~~(C-COO)~~ Other U.S. Sigint ships at this time included the U.S.S. *Oxford* and *Jamestown* in Southeast Asia, the U.S.S. *Georgetown* and *Belmont* in South America, the U.S.N.S. *Muller* off Cuba, and the U.S.N.S. *Valdez* enroute to the U.S. from the Mediterranean.

#### 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

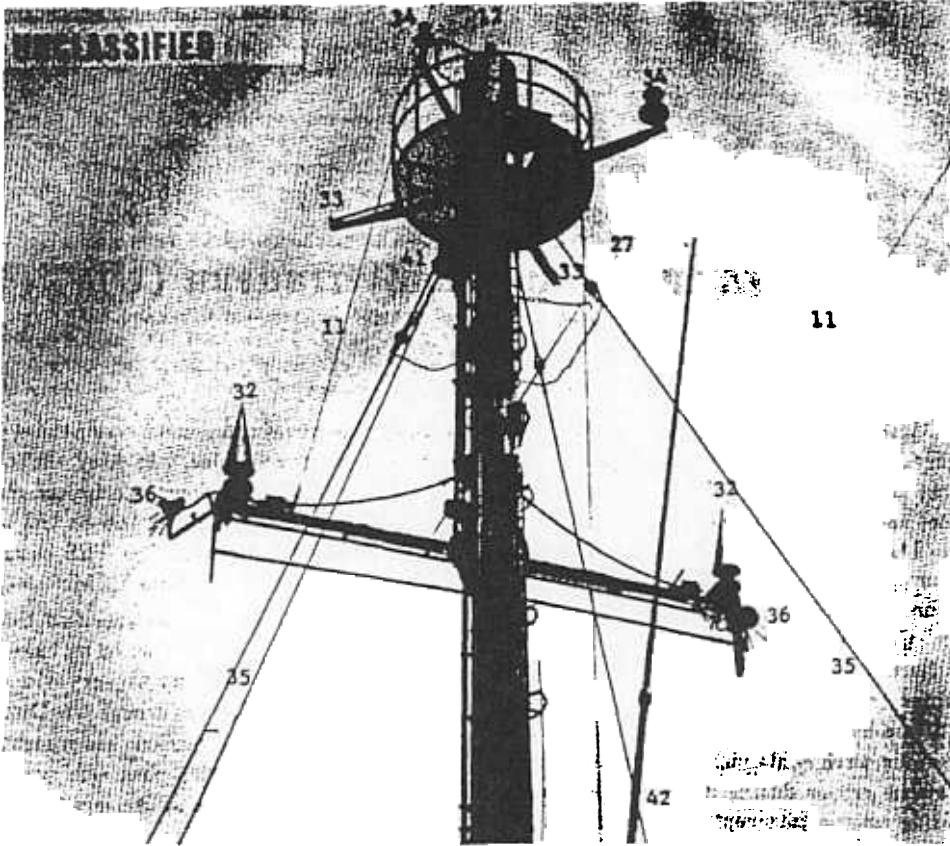
"through the naval component commander to a specific fleet or force commander." In May 1967, the U.S.S. *Liberty*, an auxiliary general technical research ship (AGTR) was operating under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic. The TRS commanding officer was Commander William L. McGonagle.

~~(C-COO)~~ The JCS also specified that technical control of Sigint activities was to be exercised by the Director, National Security Agency via direct communication to the ships or through the Director, Naval Security Group. A collection assignment, the JCS stated further in its 1965 message, would take into account technical factors as determined by NSA and safety factors as determined by military operational commanders.

~~(C-COO)~~ *Liberty's* Sigint detachment, USN-855, therefore, came under the technical control of the Director, NSA and under the management control of the Director, Naval Security Group. On board the *Liberty*, the Sigint detachment was known as the "Research Department." Its space below decks was compartmented with access permitted only to staff having the proper clearances. Commanding officer of the Research Department was Lieutenant Commander David E. Lewis. The ship's Captain, Commander McGonagle, had the clearances needed for access to the Research Department, visited the department daily, received briefings, and reviewed the "special traffic" available there.

~~(C-COO)~~ Paddy E. Rhodes, during an interview, described the area of the *Liberty* which housed USN-855: "The research spaces had really three decks. On the lowest deck we had a training room and a fan room. The next deck was the R Branch (collection) spaces, the O Branch (communications) spaces, and processing and reporting. The one above it was T Branch (other than morse signals)."

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36



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

- |                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (11) Long-wire VLF/LF antenna | (34) Discone antenna     |
| (12) ECM antenna              | (35) Monocone antenna    |
| (27) 10' whip antenna         | (36) ECM antenna         |
| (32) ECM antenna              | (41) VHF-receive antenna |
| (33) ECM antenna              | (42) 35' whip antenna    |

*(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)*

~~(C)~~ Typical of communications arrangements of the AGTR class, the *Liberty* had circuits for the ship's command in one location and those for its Sigint detachment in a separate location. *Liberty*'s naval communications station, which served the command, had a "receive" terminal for fleet broadcasts, three circuits for on-line ship/shore radiotelephone and voice communications, and one additional orderwire full-duplex circuit. In a separate location, USN-855 had an on-line, full-duplex radiotelephone circuit, a secure one-channel moon-relay system — technical research ship special communications system (TRSSCOMM) — and a "receive-only" terminal for fleet broadcasts. In case of need several off-line encryption devices were also available.

~~(C CO)~~ Sigint collection positions included one for direction finding, 17 for radiotelephone, 20 for manual morse, 7 for automatic morse, 7 for electronic countermeasures, and 33 for nonmorse search and development, the latter for frequencies both above and below 30 Mhz.

(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)

(C-000) The TRS was at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, at the end of May on its fifth African cruise when, in response to NSA's message on 23 May, 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>

(C-000) 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. NSA also received the situation reports being required by Commander-in-Chief, Europe and Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe and used these, along with ship positions given in *Liberty*'s daily informal technical summaries, to plot on a routine basis the course of the *Liberty*.<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.

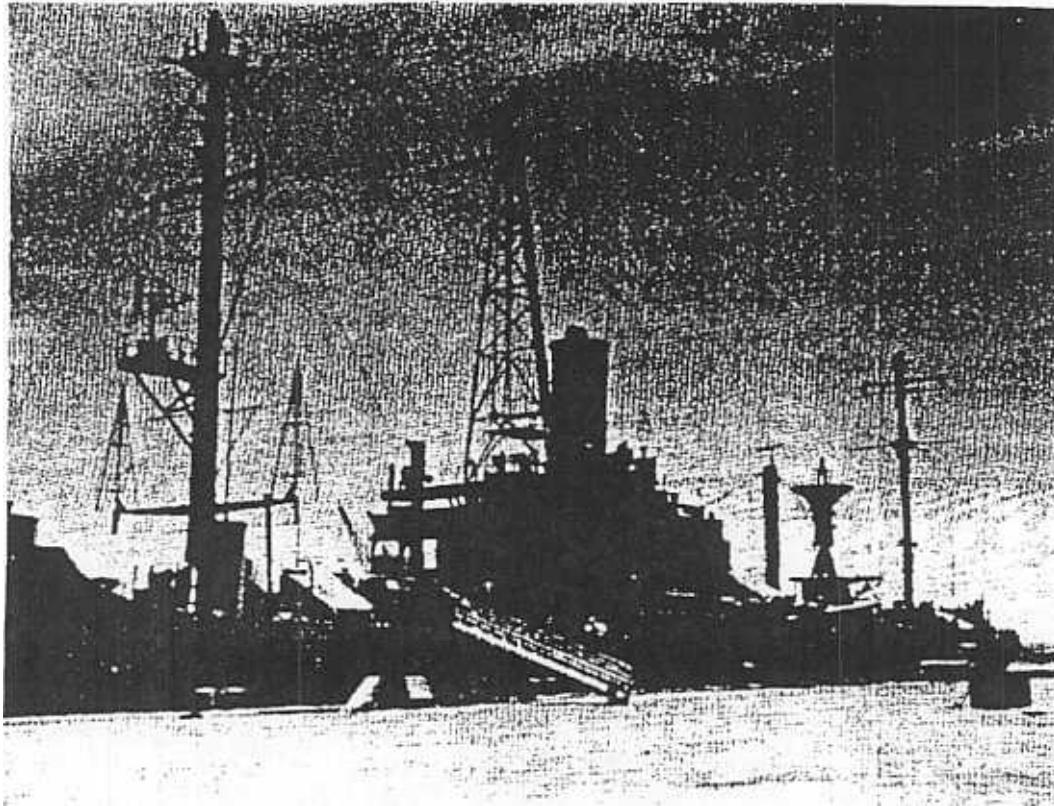
(S) Six Arabic [ ] linguists joined USN-855 for the expected work on U.A.R. and [ ] communications. Three of the Arab linguists, NSA civilians Allen M. Blue, Donald L. Blalock, and Robert L. Wilson, were among the specialists who came on board [ ] the remaining linguists being Naval Security Group specialists. The NSA linguists brought with them selected technical material, [ ] Assignment of civilian linguists to work on board a U.S. Navy ship was not unusual. On TRS deployments along the African [ ] civilian linguists had worked alongside the military linguists, who at times were not available in sufficient number for the missions at hand.

(C-000) NSA action officers established a tel-econ with USN-855 [ ]

[ ] 1 June in order to confirm the arrival of the personnel, special equipment, and technical materials needed in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> In order to assist USN-855's reporting and transcribing functions, NSA had previously arranged with [ ]

(S-000) To facilitate the planning for USN-855's collection mission, Sigin managers had designated five operational areas numbered west to east in the eastern Mediterranean near the coastline of the U.A.R., Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, each measuring about 50-by-50 miles. In proposing the five operational areas to the JCS, the Director, NSA had indicated his preference, based on wave propagation analysis of U.A.R. communications, for operational area three (32:00-33:00N to 34:00E) if operational and safety factors did not dictate otherwise.<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

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36



(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 Robert L. Wilson.)  
(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.

#### Air Force Security Service's Technical Processing Center (U)

~~(S-CCO)~~ While the *Liberty* was enroute to Rota from Abidjan, NSA was arranging with the Air Force Security Service (AFSS), now the Electronic Security Command, for more expeditious processing of Navy's VQ-2 EC-121 and Air Force's C-130 intercept, which had increased considerably from the now daily flights off the Israeli and U.A.R. coastline. The objective was to establish a technical processing center (TPC) for

the intercept acquired directly from the airborne collectors upon their return to base. At the time,

[redacted] was processing the intercept of the airborne collectors with NSA performing the backup processing on Arabic language materials and retaining full responsibility for processing of intercepted communications. Courier time for delivery of tapes to NSA [redacted] was 72 hours.

(S-CCO) [redacted]

(S CCO) [Redacted]

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 L 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>13</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>14</sup> The Commander, Sixth Fleet directed his units to comply later that day.<sup>15</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*.

(C CCO) *Liberty* was to the south of Italy when the Six Day War broke out. With the war's inception, the *Liberty* assumed a readiness condition, and USN-855 began to keep abreast of events from NSA and field site Sigint Readiness Crayon and other reports on the Middle East situation and, of course, from its own intercept.<sup>16</sup> Members of the USN-855 felt some apprehension as they approached what they now knew to be a war zone; they appreciated perhaps more than before the need for general quarters drills, but they took comfort from their noncombatant status and, of course, the visibility of the flag. One USN-855 survivor recalls being told that "...if anything were to happen we were within ten minutes of air strike and help. None of us were very worried..."<sup>17</sup>

(C CCO) While it was neither NSA's responsibility nor intention to adjudicate the safety factors of the *Liberty*'s mission, in view of the outbreak of hostilities, NSA's Gene Scheck and Dick Harvey did

~~HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY~~

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 (b) (3)-50 USC 403  
 (b) (3)-18 USC 798  
 (b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

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 during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis five years earlier the U.S.S. *Oxford* had been pulled back from the Havana area. The NSA concern was for the technical collection arrangements which would have to be adjusted if the *Liberty* was to be withdrawn. The NSA liaison officer discussed the matter with JRC's ship-movement officer and then advised Scheck and Harvey 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.

(SC) USN-855's communications on the 6th to NSA were normal — its 24-hour summary for 5 June, its informal technical summary no. 3, a Spot report, its follow-up to a [redacted] Critic, [redacted]

[redacted]  
and other reports all being received without communication difficulties. It was also in satisfactory communication with [redacted] in this period.<sup>23</sup>

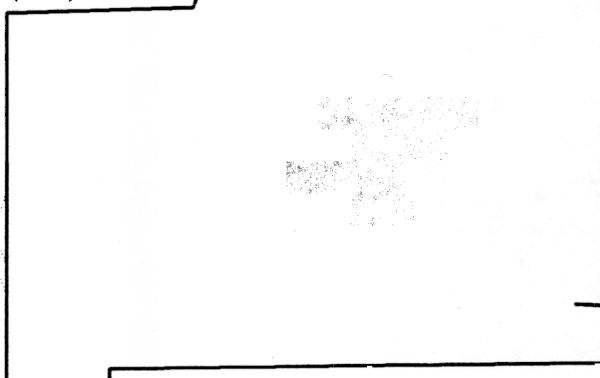
(U) On this same day, 6 June, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe told the Commander, Sixth Fleet that the *Liberty* was to come under his operational control at 0001Z, 7 June 1967 in order "to facilitate area command and control and any possible requirement for protection during the Middle East 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.

(TSC)



(C) In a message to the Commander, Sixth Fleet, the JCS took note of new U.A.R. allegations, possibly derived in JCS's opinion from the U.A.R.'s [redacted] to the effect that U.S. personnel were in communication with Israel and were possibly providing military assistance. Equally concerned about the earlier U.A.R. allegations that U.S. aircraft had participated in the Israeli air strikes against the U.A.R., the JCS asked for assurance from Vice Admiral Martin that his aircraft were not within 200 miles of the U.A.R., Syria, or Israel and that there were no Sixth Fleet communications or other contacts with Israel.<sup>28</sup> The Commander, Sixth Fleet replied negatively, observing only that radio voice circuits had been established with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv and that transmissions so far had only been for testing purposes.<sup>29</sup>

(CCC) Studying the successful Israeli drive into U.A.R. territory, the Director, NSA decided that the *Liberty*'s opportunity for effective collection of

U.A.R. communications might best take place in operational area two to the west of the originally specified area three. The Director, NSA asked at 2104Z that the JCS/JRC change the *Liberty*'s schedule "to satisfy technical requirements." Since this request reached the JCS/JRC as the latter was having second thoughts about the *Liberty*, no action would be taken on the NSA request.

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

(C CCO) In view of the sensitivity regarding the U.A.R. charges of U.S. complicity with Israel 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. After it learned from NSA the degree to which the collection mission would suffer if the ship's CPA was changed,<sup>32</sup> JRC decided to accept the mission degradation. At the time of these deliberations — 2300Z, 7 June — the *Liberty* arrived on station in operational area three.

(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 NAVFAC had resulted from its assumption, based on Breedlove's call from the JCS/JRC, that NAVFAC was already taking action.<sup>37</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 NAVFAC's information copy of JCS 080110Z, the confirming message, arrived in the NAVFAC 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 NAVFAC. Jorgensen then sent a confirming message: "From CINCNAVFAC 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 NAVFAC also was without a copy of the referenced message, despite both NAVFAC 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>38</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.

(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>39</sup>

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

~~(S-COO)~~ Once on station off Port Said in operational area three, USN-855 employed its collection positions primarily to develop U.A.R. [ ] communications

~~(SC)~~ The *Liberty* had no specific assignment to intercept Israeli communications while it was in operational area three. Omission of this tasking was, in part, owing to the lack of Hebrew linguists. But on the morning of 8 June its VHF search positions did produce three tapes of Israeli air traffic. The contents were, as determined later, routine operational messages. As a by-product of searching for U.A.R. communications in the Sinai, USN-855 also identified some 22 frequencies as Israeli, but again there was nothing relatable in any way to the forthcoming attack.<sup>40</sup>

- (b) (1)
- (b) (3)-50 USC 403
- (b) (3)-50 USC 403
- (b) (3)-18 USC 798
- (b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

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

~~(S-COO)~~ On station in operational area three, USN-855's processing and reporting constituted a complex undertaking. It was to provide daily technical summaries for use by other collectors and NSA, enabling them to remain up to date on the *Liberty*'s operation. Upon completion of its deployment, USN-855 was to provide traffic and unprocessed tapes to NSA [ ]

~~(C-COO)~~ [ ]

### Notes

Source documents are in the "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.

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

~~(C-COO)~~ Source documents used for information on *Liberty*'s mode of operation include: NSA Station Facilities Book - U.S.S. *Liberty* (USN-855); (U) NSA OPINS No. 2855, *Manual of U.S. Sigint Operations*, 12 Mar 1965; (U) JCS message cite no. 5838, 062235Z Nov 65; and (U) NSA oral history interview with Terry L. McFarland on 23 Jun 1980.

<sup>2</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 6499, 291602Z May 1967.  
<sup>3</sup>(U) COMSERVRON 8 msg, 240020Z May 1967.  
<sup>4</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg, 241732Z May 1967.  
<sup>5</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg, 300932Z May 1967.  
<sup>6</sup>(U) USCINCEUR msg 010035Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>7</sup>(U) NSA Staff, "Informal Paper on *Liberty*'s Communications," 22 Jun 1967; NSA oral history interview with Gene Scheck on 11 Aug 1980.

~~(C-COO)~~ Source documents relating to *Liberty*'s preparations at Rota include: DIRNSA msg to NSAEUR Office, Germany, 26 May 1967; DIRNSA msg to USN-855, 252317Z May 1967; and DIRNSA msg, 232133Z May 1967.

<sup>8</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg to JCS/JRC, 292013Z May 1967.  
<sup>9</sup>(U) JCS msg cite no. 6724, 011545Z Jun 1967.  
<sup>10</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg to CINCNAVEUR, 021132Z Jun 1967; CINCNAVEUR msg, 020717Z Jun 1967.

<sup>11</sup>(U) Source documents used in discussion of the Air Force's TPC include: ESC, *History of the 6931st Security Group*, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1967; NSA Staff, "Operations Staff Summary," ca. 16 Jun 1967; NSA Staff, "Airborne Collection in the Middle East," undated; NSA Staff (G62), "Briefing on the 1967 Middle East Crisis," undated.

<sup>12</sup>(U) DIRNSA msg to USN-855, 292201Z May 1967.  
<sup>13</sup>(U) *Liberty* msg, 022108Z Jun 1967.

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- "(U) NSA oral history interview, Terry L. McFarland, 23 Jun 1980.
- "(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msg 031016Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) CINCUSNAVEUR msgs, 061352 and 061850Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg, 062015 Jun 1967.
- "(U) NSA oral history interview, Robert L. Wilson, 6 May 1980; DIRNSA msg to USN-855, 252317Z May 1967.
- "(U) NSA oral history interview with Robert L. Wilson on 6 May 1980 and with Paddy E. Rhodes on 13 June 1980.
- "(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.
- "(U) NSA Staff, "Informal Paper on Liberty's Communications," 22 Jun 1967.
- "(U) CINCNAVEUR msg to Sixth Fleet, *Liberty*, and others, 061357Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg to *Liberty* and others, 062349Z Jun 1967.
- "(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.
- "(U) Russ Report, p. 18.
- "(U) NSA Staff (G62), "Briefing on the 1967 Middle East Crisis," undated.
- "(U) JCS msg cite no. 7239, 070259Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) COMSIXTHFLT msg to JCS, 070626Z and 071503Z Jun 1987.
- "(U) Russ Report, p. 19.
- "(U) NSA Staff, "Report to the Director," 12 Jun 1967, chronology section.
- "(U) JCS msg cite no. 7337 to CINC-EUR with information copy to *Liberty*, 072230Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) Russ Report, pp. 35, 36.
- "(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."
- "(U) Russ Report, p. 23 and Tab 2 to Annex D.
- "(U) Ibid, p. 24.
- "(U) Ibid, pp. 26-27.
- "(U) Detailed information on the communications delays is in the Russ Report and also in the House Appropriations Committee report cited in footnote 22.
- "(U) DIRNSA msg to USN-855, 022333Z Jun 1967.
- "(U) NSA Staff, "Note for the Director, Sigin Reflection of *Liberty* Incident," 27 Jun 1967; (U) NSA Staff, "Questions by Gen. Carroll, Director, DIA - Answers Provided by G Group/P04," 27 Jun 1967.
- "(C-GOO) DIRNSA msg to USN-855, 022333Z Jun 1967; NSA Staff, "Critique-SRB Crayon," 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.

(C) Though this plane was unidentified, the thoughts of Robert L. Wilson (one of three NSA civilians aboard the *Liberty*) must have been shared by his shipmates. Wilson 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 (e.g. crypto documents) 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



(b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

(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)

~~(S-GQ)~~ Amidships below deck, the *Liberty*'s Research Department (the Sigit collection, processing, and reporting area) resumed normal operations. Robert L. Wilson was in the analysis/reporting area together with the other civilians, Allen M. Blue and Donald L. Blalock, plus the Marine linguists. Things had been slow and Wilson considered going up on deck to do some sunbathing but changed his mind. Communications Technician (CT) Terry L. McFarland, seated at his manual-morse position, was [redacted]

[redacted] That far below deck it was difficult for anyone to hear much of what was happening topside.

(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 04 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.

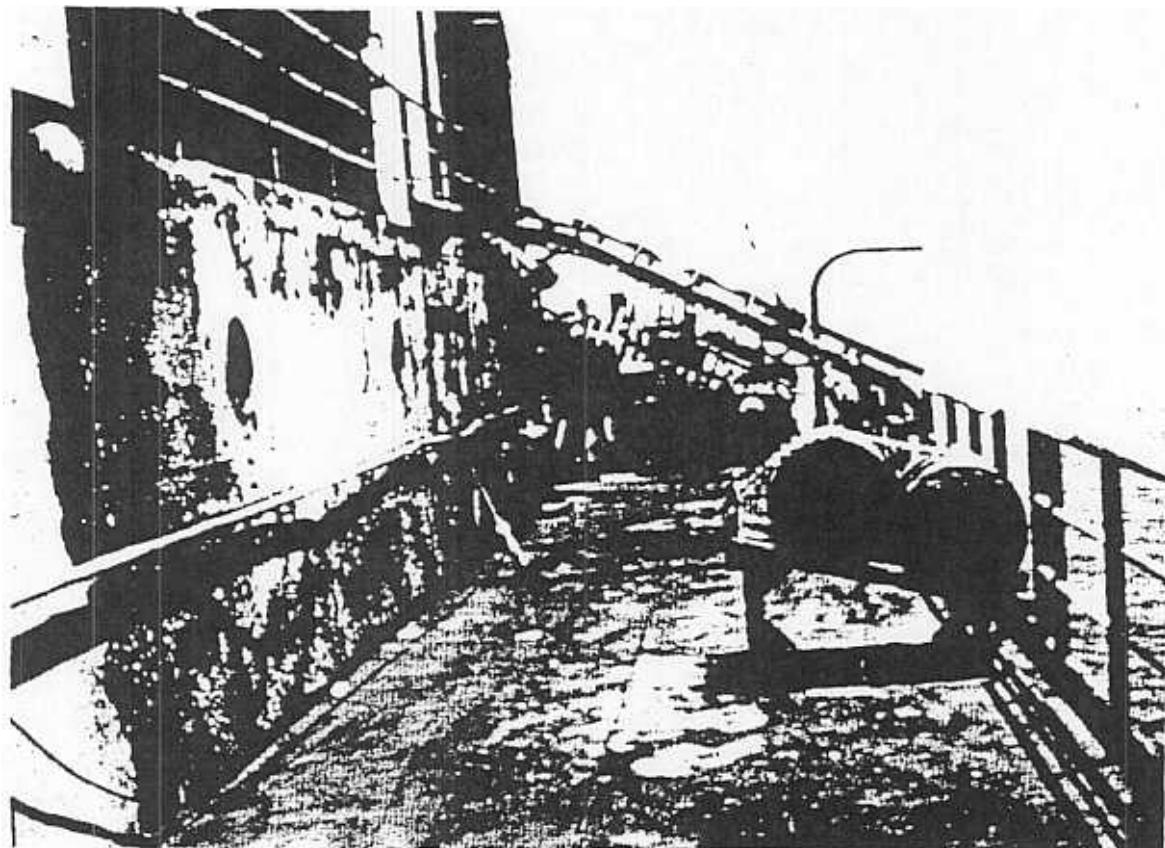
(U) CT3 Paddy E. (Dusty) Rhodes was headed below decks from his GQ station, damage control detail. At the end of the GQ drill, the Commander had ordered the whaleboat engine tested and, when Dusty heard a muffled explosion, he thought, "Those damned deck apes blew that boat up and I've got to go back 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 Research Department, 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. Robert

L. Wilson went up to the second deck from the processing and reporting (P&R) spaces to empty safes on that upper level.

~~(C-000)~~ Hearing the general quarters alarm, CT3 Clyde W. Way ran from the mess deck to his station in the T-Branch spaces one deck above the R Branch. Way plugged in his radio receivers and heard nothing; he called the R2 area only to learn that their reception had also gone dead.

(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 Robert L. Wilson 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 Research Department 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 T-Branch spaces above the processing and reporting area. With the explosion below, all equipment fell to the floor and smoke poured from the P&R 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 Research Department, 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.

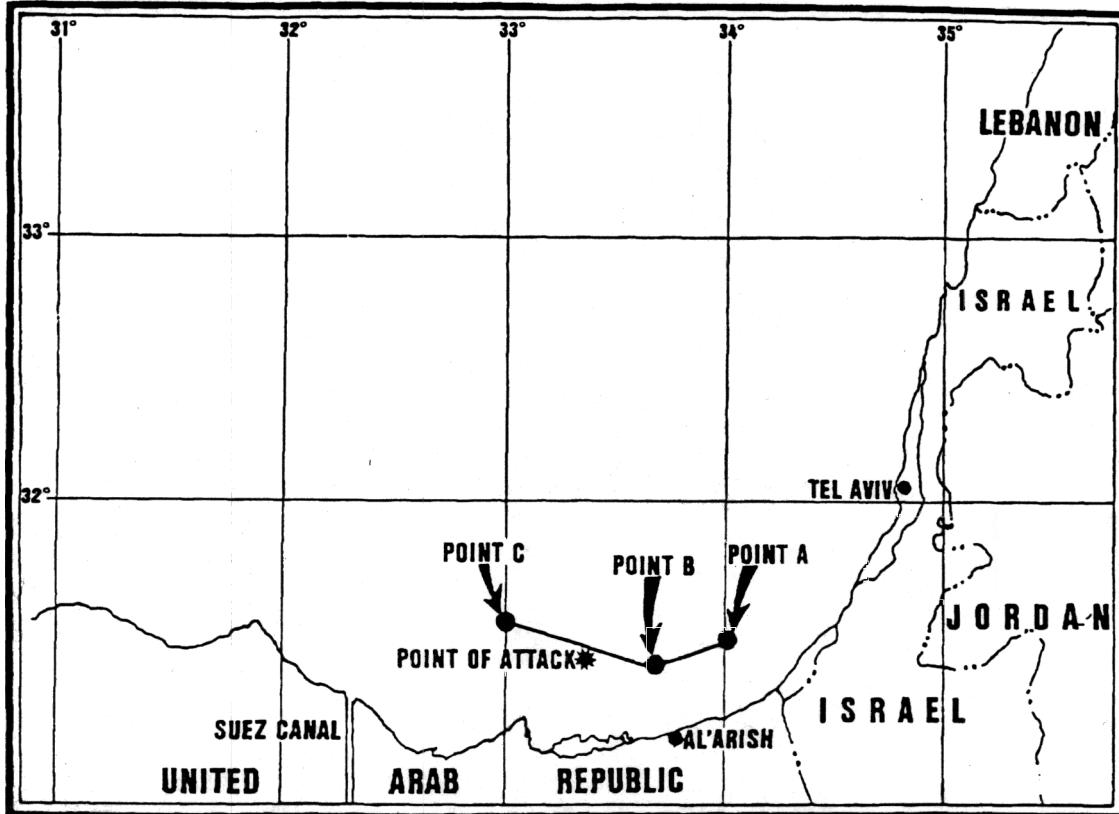
(U) The torpedo explosion had torn a hole in the side of the ship that extended from a few feet above the water line to below the turn of the bilge. It was shaped like a tear-drop, and was 39 feet across at its widest point. Its immediate effect was to flood all compartments on two decks below the water line, from frame 53 to frame 66. These frames supported watertight bulkheads, and marked the location of the *Liberty*'s Research Department 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.

~~(G-CIO)~~ Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, NSA.  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)



(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 torpedoes.

#### 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.

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.

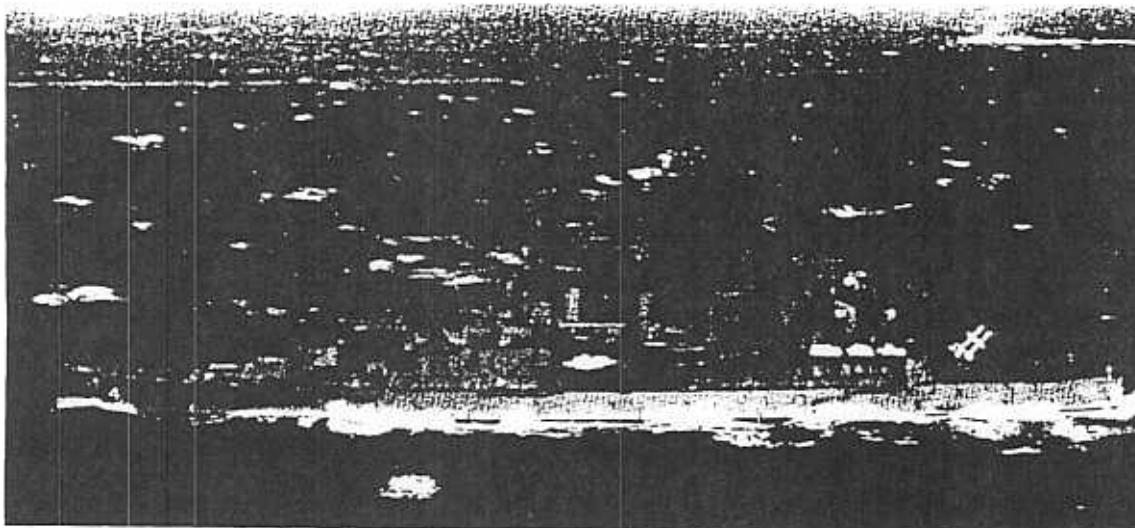
(U) Fifteen minutes later two unidentified jet aircraft approached the *Liberty* from the starboard side and reconnoitered from a distance before disappearing from the scene.

### 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)

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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 NSA Sigint Command Center 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>

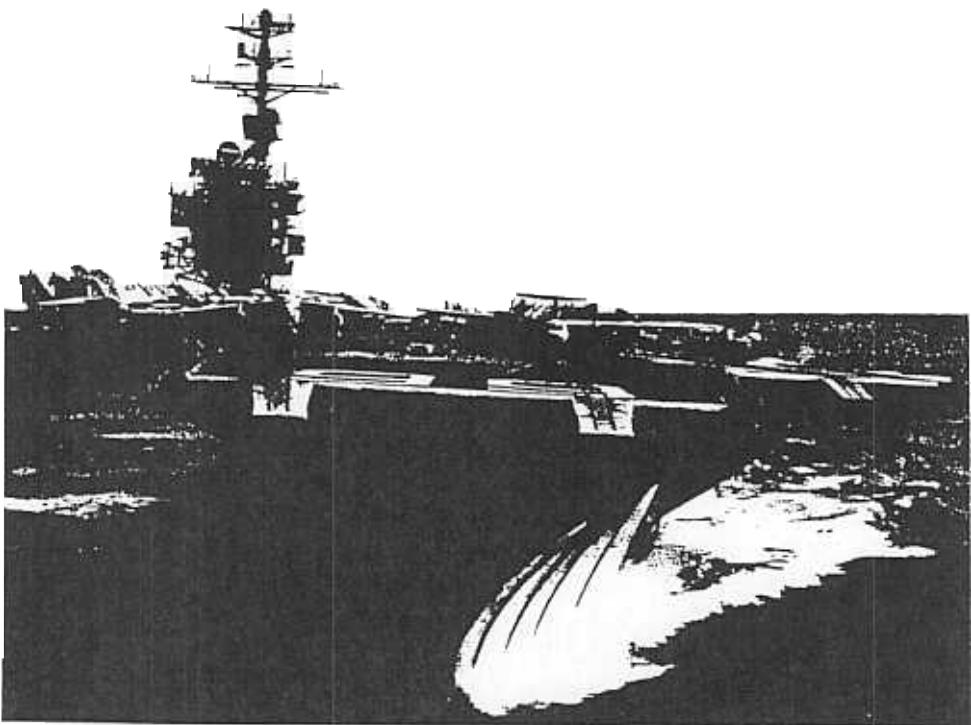
(U) Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance notified the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe, by phone at 1700 hours that all news releases on the *Liberty* affair would be made at the Washington level — no releases were to be made aboard ships. This information was relayed to the Commander, Sixth Fleet.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



(U) The U.S.S. *America* was ordered by the Commander, Sixth Fleet to launch four Skyhawks to defend the *Liberty*.

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

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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 Haas (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>

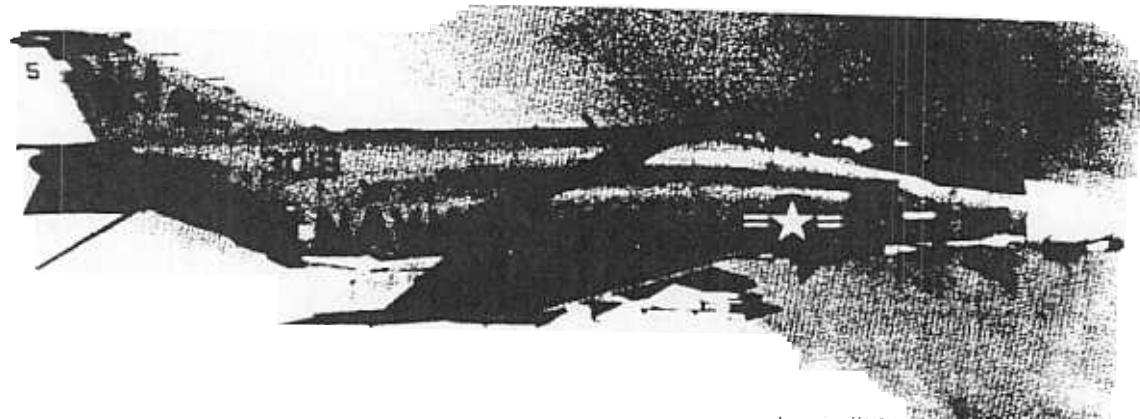
(U) Wearing civilian clothes, Commander Castle could not convey his identity to the bridge of *Liberty* but by visual means indicated that he wished to be lowered aboard the ship. At first, Commander McGonagle prepared to receive the attaché but, considering the obstructions in the forecastle area, sig-

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>

#### Israeli Helicopter Conversations (U)

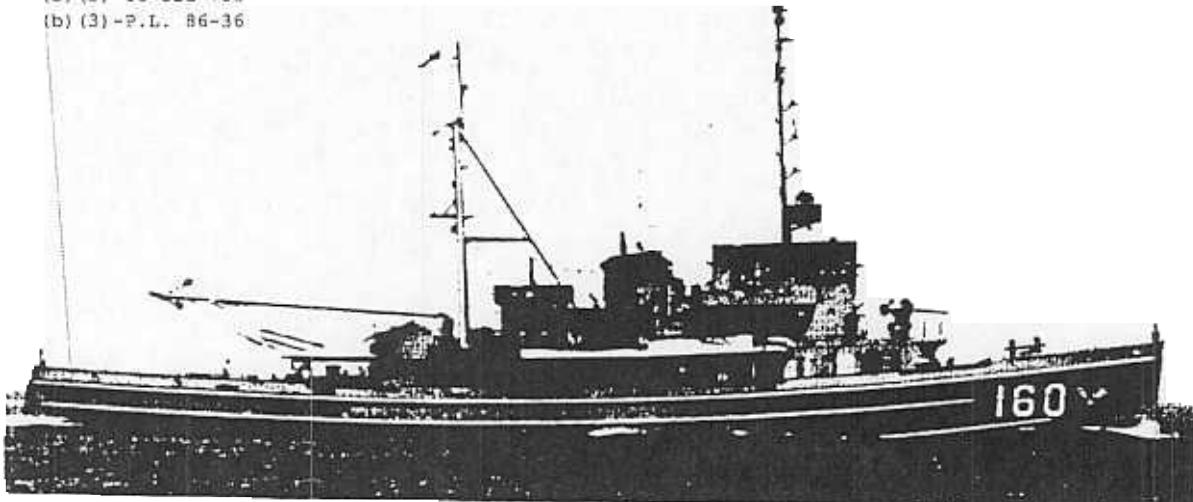
(SC) Back at NSA, within an hour of learning that the *Liberty* had been torpedoed, the Director, NSA sent a message to all [redacted] intercept sites requesting a special search of all communications that might reflect the attack or reaction.<sup>33</sup> No



(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)

(b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36



(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)

communications of the attacking aircraft or torpedo boats were available. However, one of the airborne platforms [redacted] had collected voice conversations between two Israeli helicopter pilots and the control tower at Hazor Airfield (near Tel Aviv). Control told helicopter 815 at 1431 hours that "there is a warship there which we attacked. The men jumped into the water from it. You will try to rescue them." Although there were other references to a search for the men in the water, no personnel from the *Liberty* had jumped overboard. At 1434 hours, the control tower told helicopter 815 that the ship was Egyptian and that he could return home. At 1510 hours, the controller asked 815 to identify the nationality of any survivors. Subsequently, the helicopter pilot reported seeing an American flag on the ship. In another portion of the conversation, the pilot of helicopter 815 reported that number GTR 5 was written on the ship's side and that behind the ship were several uninflated life boats. At 1521 hours the helicopters were instructed to return home.<sup>34</sup>

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

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

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.<sup>35</sup>

(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

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>16</sup>

NSA civilian, Robert L. Wilson, 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 "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.

<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) Robert L. Wilson, 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) Yurij 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) Sigint product reports: [ ] R23-67, 082015Z Jun 1967; [ ] R24-67, 090831Z Jun 1967; [ ] R27-67, 091422Z Jun 1967.

<sup>35</sup>(U) U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; *Liberty* Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings.

<sup>36</sup>(U) Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>(U) Oral interview transcripts: Robert L. Wilson, 6 May 1980; CTC Clyde W. Way, 6 Jun 1980; and CTC Terry L. McFarland, 23 June 1980.

(b) (1)

(b) (3) -50 USC 403

(b) (3) -18 USC 798

(b) (3) -P.L. 86-36

## Chapter V

## The Israeli Explanation (U)

*The classification of paragraphs in this chapter which derive from the statement of the Israeli Defence Forces Court of Inquiry results from a government of Israel request to the Department of State that the information "be treated on a restricted and confidential basis."*

~~(C)~~ The Israeli Defence Forces Court of Inquiry into the U.S.S. *Liberty* incident presented its findings to the Military Advocate General who recommended that a preliminary judicial inquiry be held to determine if there was any individual or individuals against whom any charges should be brought. The examining judge was Lieutenant Colonel Yishaya Verushalmi. He gave his decision under date of 21 July 1967. From the report of that decision comes the following Israeli account and explanation of the attack on the *Liberty*<sup>1</sup>.

### Chronology of Israeli Actions (U)

~~(C)~~ At 0600 hours (local time) on 8 June 1967, an Israeli aircraft, with a naval observer on board, located a ship 70 miles west of Tel Aviv. On the basis of this information, Israeli Navy Headquarters marked the object in red (meaning an unidentified target) on the combat information center plot table.

~~(C)~~ At about 0900 hours, another Israeli plane reported sighting a ship 20 miles north of Al 'Arish. The pilot reported that the ship was "coloured gray, very bulky, and the bridge amidships." The ship was then identified by the Israelis as a supply vessel of the American Navy; thereupon, the marking on the combat information center plot table was changed to green (a neutral ship).

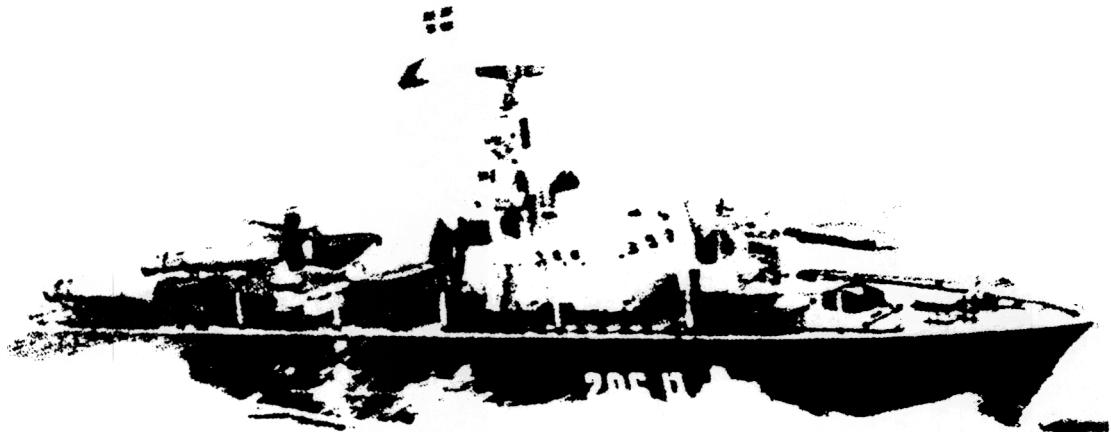
~~(C)~~ Later that morning at 1055 hours, the Naval Liaison Officer at Israeli Air Force Headquarters reported to the Acting Chief of Naval Operations at Navy Headquarters that the ship sighted earlier was "an electromagnetic audio-surveillance ship of the U.S. Navy, named *Liberty*, whose marking was G.T.R.-5." Upon receiving this data, the Acting Chief of

Naval Operations ordered the target erased from the combat information center plot table because he had no current information as to its location. Thus from this moment on (approximately 1100 hours) the *Liberty* no longer appeared on the combat information center plot table at Israeli Navy Headquarters.

~~(C)~~ Between 1100 and 1200 hours, Navy Headquarters received reports that Al 'Arish (occupied by Israeli ground troops) was being shelled from the sea. These reports came from two separate sources, the Air-Ground-Support Officer and the Israeli Southern Command. At 1205 hours, the Head of the Naval Department ordered three torpedo boats of the division at Ashdod to proceed toward Al 'Arish to locate the target. Air Force Headquarters was advised of this navy action and it was agreed that, when the torpedo boats located the target, aircraft would be dispatched. Accordingly, the commander of the torpedo boat division was ordered to establish radio contact with the aircraft as soon as they appeared over the target.

~~(U)~~ The torpedo boats located an unidentified target at 1341 hours 20 miles north of Al 'Arish and reported that it was moving toward Port Said at a speed of 30 knots. A few minutes later, the torpedo boat division commander reported that the target, then 17 miles from him, was moving at 28 knots, and since he could not overtake it, he requested the dispatch of aircraft towards it. This was done; the aircraft executed a run over the ship (*Liberty*) in an attempt to identify it but saw no flag or other identification mark. They did, however, report to headquarters that the ship was painted gray and two guns were situated in the bow. On the assumption that the ship was an enemy target, Air Force Headquarters gave the aircraft an order to attack.

~~(C)~~ During the first stage of the attack the aircraft strafed the ship with cannon and machine guns and during the second stage dropped bombs on it which caused fires and smoke aboard the ship. As



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

(Photograph courtesy of Jane's Fighting Ships.)

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

the torpedo boats drew near, the aircraft were ordered to leave the target. During the last run, a low-flying aircraft reported to headquarters that it saw the marking "CPR-5" on the ship's hull.

(C) Upon receipt of this information about the ship's marking, the Naval Operations Branch, at approximately 1420 hours, ordered the torpedo boat division commander not to attack inasmuch as the aircraft may have possibly identified the target incorrectly. The division commander was ordered to approach the ship in order to establish visual contact and to identify it. He reported that the ship appeared to be a merchant or supply vessel and that when he signalled the ship and requested its identification the ship replied with a signal meaning "identify yourself first." At the same time, the division commander was consulting a book on the identification of Arab Navies and making comparisons with the target before him. He concluded that the target was an Egyptian supply ship named *El-Kasir*. Simultaneously, the commander of another of the torpedo boats informed the division commander that he, too, thought the ship was the *El-Kasir*. Therefore, at 1436 hours, the division commander authorized the torpedo attack to begin. Only after a torpedo struck the ship and one of the torpedo boats approached it from the other side were the markings "CTR-5" noticed on the hull. Then the order was given to cease the attack.

(C) Throughout the contact, no Israeli plane or torpedo boat saw an American or any other flag on the ship. It was only an Israeli helicopter, sent after the attack to render assistance — if necessary — that noticed a small American flag flying over the ship. At this time, the vessel was finally identified "as an audio-surveillance ship of the U.S. Navy."

#### Israeli Prosecutor's Charges of Negligence (U)

(C) Based on the foregoing account, the Israeli Chief Military Prosecutor submitted a number of charges of negligence to the examining judge of the Preliminary Inquiry. The examining judge was then to decide whether or not there was sufficient *prima facie* evidence to justify bringing the accused to trial for negligence.

(C) Given below are the charges brought by the Chief Military Prosecutor together with the judge's findings.

(C) 1. Charge: The first charge related to the failure of the Acting Chief of Naval Operations to report to the Head of the Naval Department that the American ship, *Liberty*, was seen in the morning hours of the day of the incident sailing in the vicinity of the Israeli coast.

*Finding:* Though the Head of the Naval Department testified that he did not know of the *Liberty*'s presence in the area on the day of the incident, the Officer of the Watch at Navy Headquarters testified that the Head of the Naval Department was on the Navy Command Bridge when the Commanding Officer of the Navy ordered the marking (on the combat information center plot table) of the American supply ship changed to green (indicating a neutral vessel). Since the Acting Chief of Naval Operations was an eyewitness to the event, he concluded that the Head of the Naval Department *did* know about the presence of an American supply ship in the area. In view of this, the examining judge found no negligence on the part of the accused.

(C) 2. *Charge:* That the Acting Chief of Naval Operations failed to report to the Head of the Naval Department that the hull markings on the ship observed by one of the attacking aircraft were similar to those on the *Liberty*.

*Finding:* Witnesses testified that when the Naval Liaison Officer at the Air Force Headquarters telephoned the Naval Command Bridge about the hull markings and their similarity to those of the *Liberty*, the officer to whom he spoke repeated the message in a loud voice so that it was heard by all present on the Command Bridge including the Head of the Naval Department. The examining judge stated, therefore, that there was thus no reason to repeat to the Head of the Naval Department a fact that had been audibly announced to those present. The charge was dismissed.

(C) 3. *Charge:* That the Naval Liaison Officer at the Air Force Headquarters was negligent by not reporting to the Air Force the information about the presence of the *Liberty* in the area.

*Finding:* The examining judge considered this charge unfounded. The responsibility for the defense of Israel against enemy naval actions rests solely with the Navy. Even though Air Force Headquarters ordered the aircraft to attack, it was really an order issued by the Navy, passed on through Air Force Headquarters. The Naval Liaison Officer at the Air Force Headquarters was entitled to assume that the decision to attack was made after considering this report about the *Liberty*. There was no reason to feed the Air Force with information and considerations that did not concern it.

(C) 4. *Charge:* That the Naval Department's order not to attack the ship (the *Liberty*), "for fear of error and out of uncertainty with regard to the true identity of the ship," was not delivered to the torpedo boat division.

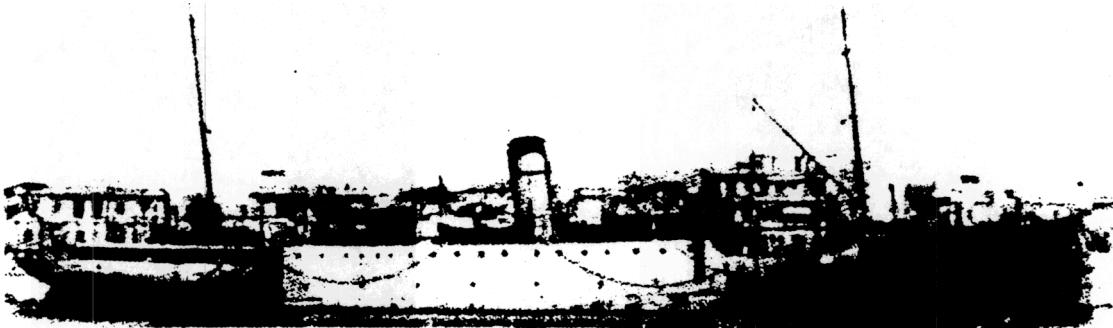
*Finding:* Though the torpedo boat division commander claimed he never received the message not to attack, the deputy commander of the boat testified that he had received the message and passed it on to the division commander. The examining judge believed that, in the heat of battle, it was possible that the message escaped the awareness of the division commander and, in any event, there was insufficient evidence to commit any accused person to trial.

(S) 5. *Charge:* That it was negligence to give the order to attack a warship without previously establishing, beyond doubt, its national identity and without taking into account the presence of the American ship, *Liberty*, in the vicinity of the coast of Israel.

*Finding:* To the examining judge, there was no doubt that the dominant factors in the initial attack decision were the speed and course of the target. Those in command were entitled to assume that the reported speed (28 knots) of the ship was correct, within the usual limits of reasonable error of 10-15 percent, relying upon the existing means of determining the speed of the target. It was, therefore, concluded that this was a military vessel, and since the *Liberty* was classed as a cargo ship, there was no reason for surmising, in view of the speed, that the target could possibly be the ship, *Liberty*. If one adds to this other factors such as the report of the shelling of the Al 'Arish coast for hours on end, the ship's course toward Port Said, the aircraft report that the target was a warship and carried no naval or other identification marks, and the ship's location close to shore in a battle zone, the cumulative effect negates any presumption whatsoever of a connection between the American supply ship and the target discovered by the torpedo boats. Thus, the examining judge concluded that the assumption it was an enemy ship was reasonable and that the order given to the aircraft to attack was justified.

(C) 6. *Charge:* That it was negligent to order the torpedo boat to attack the ship upon an unfounded presumption that it was an Egyptian warship, and this as a consequence of not taking reasonable steps to make proper identification.

*Finding:* The examining judge considered it noteworthy that the identification of the target as the *El-Kasir* was made both by the division commander and the commander of a second torpedo boat. Upon examining photos of the two ships, he was satisfied that a likeness existed between them, and that an error of identification was possible, especially when the identification was made while the ship was



(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)

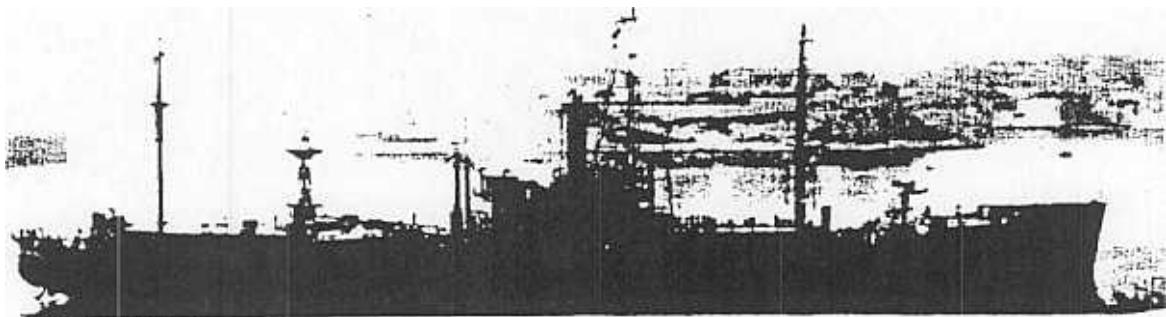
clouded in smoke. The Chief Military Prosecutor argued that this identification was unreasonable because it was inconceivable to think that this auxiliary ship *El-Kasir* could shell the Al 'Arish coast or that she could move at a speed of 28 knots. In reply, the examining judge said that it seemed reasonable to him that the *El-Kasir* might have been part of the vessels that shelled the coast and failed to get away from the area or that the ship had come to assist in the evacuation of Egyptian soldiers struggling away from areas occupied by Israeli forces. Further, the judge said that there was no doubt that the *Liberty*'s refusal to identify herself to the torpedo boats contributed largely to the error of identification.

(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.

(C) The incident is doubly tragic when it is realized that three hours before the attack occurred, Israeli Navy Headquarters was made aware of the



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

(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

*Liberty's* presence, including exact name, ship type, and hull number. The first error in responsible military operations came when the *Liberty's* identity was totally erased at 1100 hours from the combat information center plot table at Naval Headquarters because no exact location for her was known after 0900 hours on 8 June.

(O) The next sin of omission was the Israeli Navy's failure to share with the Air Force full details about the *Liberty's* presence off the Al 'Arish coast. This combat parochialism was almost certainly a factor contributing to the attack on the *Liberty* — the examining judge's opinion to the contrary. Even the Israeli examining judge alluded to such possibility when he said:

Indeed, whoever peruses the ample evidence presented to me, may conceivably draw some lesson regarding the relations between the two arms of the Israel Defence Forces, which were involved in the incident, and the operational procedures in time of war....

(O) In spite of the fact that the Israeli Air Force did not have all the information about the *Liberty* that was available to the Navy, the pilots of the attacking planes were at fault for failing to make positive identification of the *Liberty* before attacking the ship. Though the pilots testified to the contrary, every official interview of numerous *Liberty* crewmen gave consistent evidence that indeed the *Liberty* was flying an American flag — and, further, the weather conditions were ideal to assure its easy observance and identification. These circumstances — prior identification of the *Liberty* and easy visibility of the American flag — prompted the Department of State to inform the Israeli Government that

the later military attack by Israeli aircraft on the U.S.S. *Liberty* is quite literally incomprehensible. As a minimum, the attack must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life.<sup>2</sup>

(O) In the chain of mistakes, the next one occurred when the division commander of the attacking torpedo boats failed to hear his deputy tell him that Naval Headquarters had ordered the boats not to attack for fear of having mistaken the ship's identity. The Israeli examining judge exonerated the com-

mander because he believed it quite possible that the message "escaped the awareness of the division commander in the heat of battle."

(C) The final error was the identification of the *Liberty* as the Egyptian supply ship *El-Kasir*. The fact that two separate torpedo boat commanders made the same false identification only raises the question of the veracity of both commanders. The *El-Kasir* was approximately one-quarter of the *Liberty's* tonnage, about one-half its length, and offered a radically different silhouette. To claim that the *Liberty* closely resembled the *El-Kasir* was most illogical.

(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.'

(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>3</sup>

#### Notes

*Source documents are in the "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.*

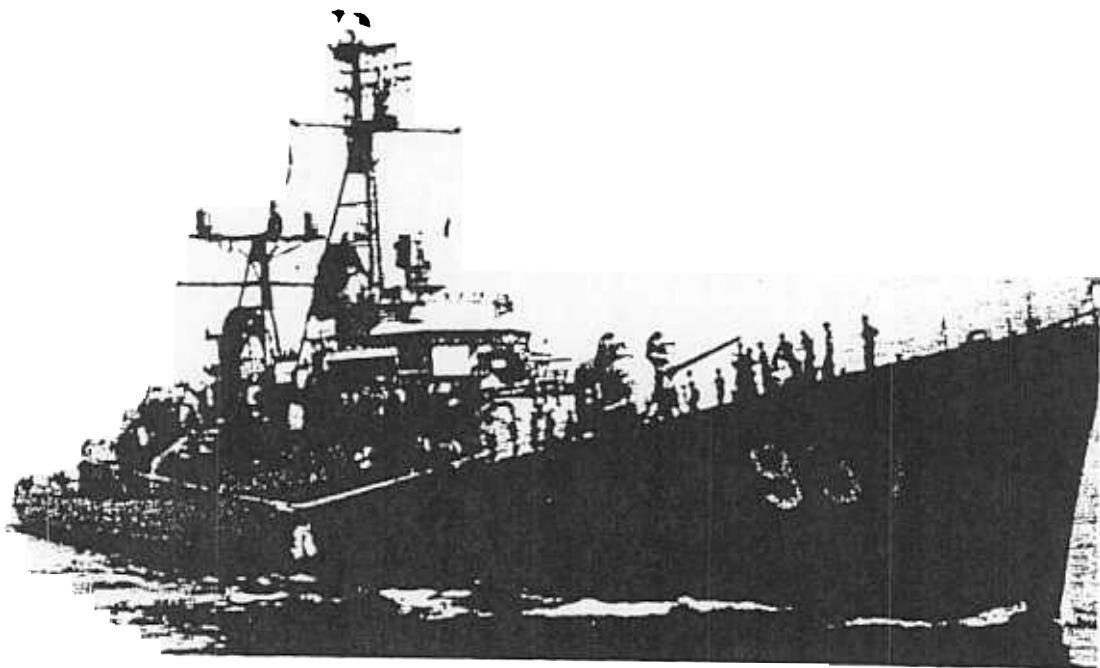
(U) Israel Defence Forces, Preliminary Inquiry File  
1/67, 21 July 1967. Forwarded to Director, NSA [redacted]

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

(U) Ibid.  
(U) A penned long-hand comment by Louis W.  
Tordella, Deputy Director, NSA, 26 August 1967, attached to the  
copy of the Israel Defence Forces Preliminary Inquiry (cited in  
footnote 1).

- (b) (1)
- (b) (2) -50 USC 403
- (b) (2) -18 USC 798
- (b) (2) -P.L. 86-36

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(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*.

→(C-000) Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, 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 Research Department 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)

~~(C-GCO)~~ A possible replacement for the *Liberty* was already being considered. At approximately 1300 hours, the Director, Naval Security Group Europe sent a message to [REDACTED] the *America* and [REDACTED] the *Little Rock* requesting the status of Arabic linguists (civilian and military) aboard the *Liberty* for possible transfer to the U.S.S. *Bel-*

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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36



(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.

~~((C CCO))~~ Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, NSA.  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

mont, another technical research ship just arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, for repairs.<sup>6</sup> Three hours later, at 1555, [redacted] replied to this inquiry. The only remaining Arabic linguist aboard the *Liberty* was Robert L. Wilson (NSA civilian); all others were wounded (and evacuated), killed, or missing. [redacted] also forwarded Lieutenant Bennett's request that a team from the Naval Security Group Europe meet the *Liberty* when she docked at Malta to assist in evaluation of compromise of cryptomaterials and preparation of reports.<sup>7</sup>

#### Recovery of Sensitive Materials (U)

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

ruptured Research Department's operations space prompted NAVFUR 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>8</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,

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

~~(C CCO)~~ Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, NSA.  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

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

~~(C CCO)~~ Enroute to Malta, the *Papago* continued to take exceptional measures to recover materials. Always in *Liberty*'s wake, she used boat hooks and crab nets to pick up floating material. Lights were rigged on *Papago*'s bridge wing so that visibility at night was even better than during the day. When material could not be recovered, *Papago* ran over it with her propeller and then backed down over it to shred the paper into small pieces. Although some paper with typing on it did not disintegrate in nine hours when placed in water by *Papago*'s CO, it was believed that ocean-wave action would have caused the fanfold paper (which was in multimesage blank lengths) to ball up and sink or at least not be easily visible. Total materials recovered by the *Papago* weighed eight pounds:<sup>10</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 ~~(C CCO)~~

~~(C CCO)~~ 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>

~~(C CCO)~~ 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 Robert L. Wilson's 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

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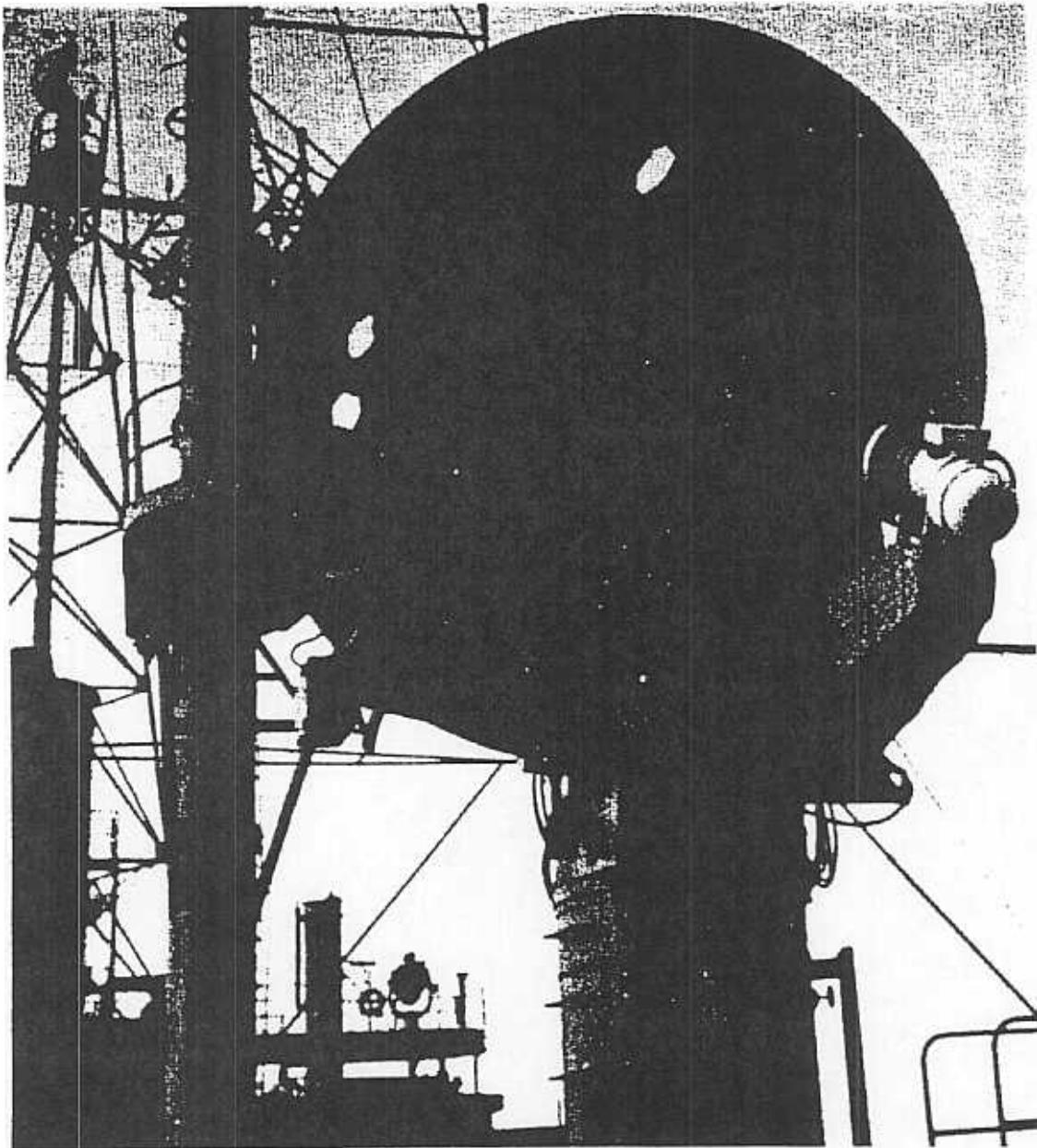
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(U) *Liberty's* forward dish antenna after the strafing attack by Israeli jets.  
((C-CCC)) Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, NSA.)  
(Figure is UNCLASSIFIED)

as possible and at the same time deliver mail addressed to the ship's company.<sup>14</sup> The *Liberty* continued cleanup 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>

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### **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>

(C CO) Captain Carl M. Smith, Director, Naval Security Group Atlantic, was designated Commander, TG 100.4; other TG 100.4 personnel were Commander E. H. Platzek; Lieutenant Commander Benjamin M. Bishop; Lieutenant Philip G. Firestone, USNR; Lieutenant R. H. Lee; Lieutenant M. H. Bennett (from the Sigint component aboard the *Liberty*); and CTC Alfred J. Pawlinkowski. Additionally, NSA Europe named Lieutenant Colonel Robert T. Green, USAF and Clarence R. Klumfoot (NSA security officer) to assist TG 100.4 as necessary.<sup>21</sup> Of this group, Bishop, Firestone, and Pawlinkowski were further designated to assist Lieutenant Bennett, as he had requested, with the evaluation of security compromise and preparation of required reports.<sup>22</sup>

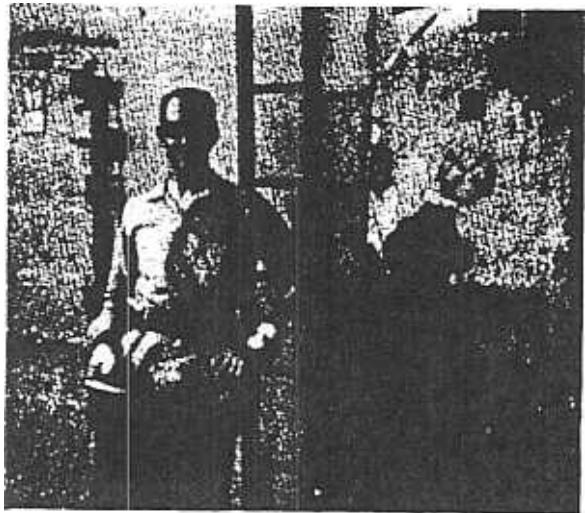
(S CO) To assist TG 100.6 (Communications) with its services, the Director, Naval Security Group Europe also arranged with [redacted]

[redacted]  
for TF 100 inasmuch as the communications guardship provided by Sixth Fleet to the Task Force lacked the capability.<sup>23</sup>

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

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~~(C CCO)~~ NSA civilian, Donald L. Blalock, was a member of the Sigit unit aboard the *Liberty*. Slightly wounded, he was evacuated to the *America* with the rest of the *Liberty*'s wounded.

~~(C CCO)~~ - Photograph courtesy of Robert L. Wilson, NSA.  
(Figure is ~~CONFIDENTIAL CCO~~)

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 with the aim of maintaining the credibility of the official announcements regarding the mission of U.S.S. *Liberty*; i.e., 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>

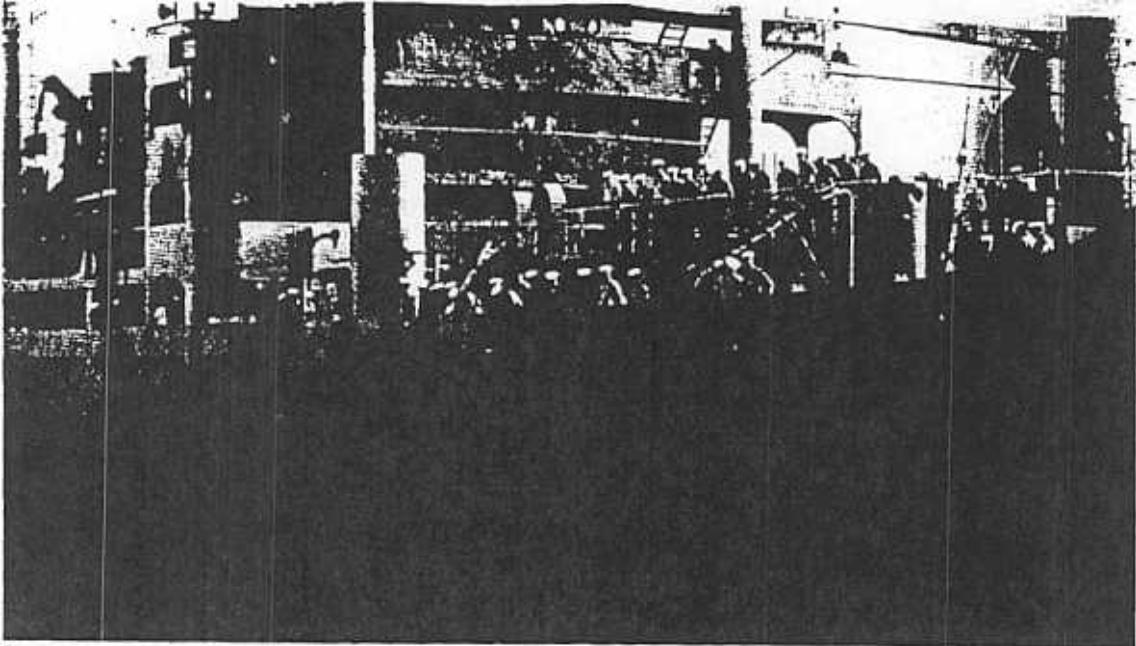
(U) Upon arriving at Malta, Rear Admiral Renken met with his task group commanders and American embassy officials on Tuesday, 13 June, to complete plans for docking operations, which would commence on *Liberty*'s arrival — then estimated at about 2300 hours that night.<sup>26</sup>

### Blalock Returns Home (U)

~~(C CCO)~~ 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)

~~(C CCO)~~ *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



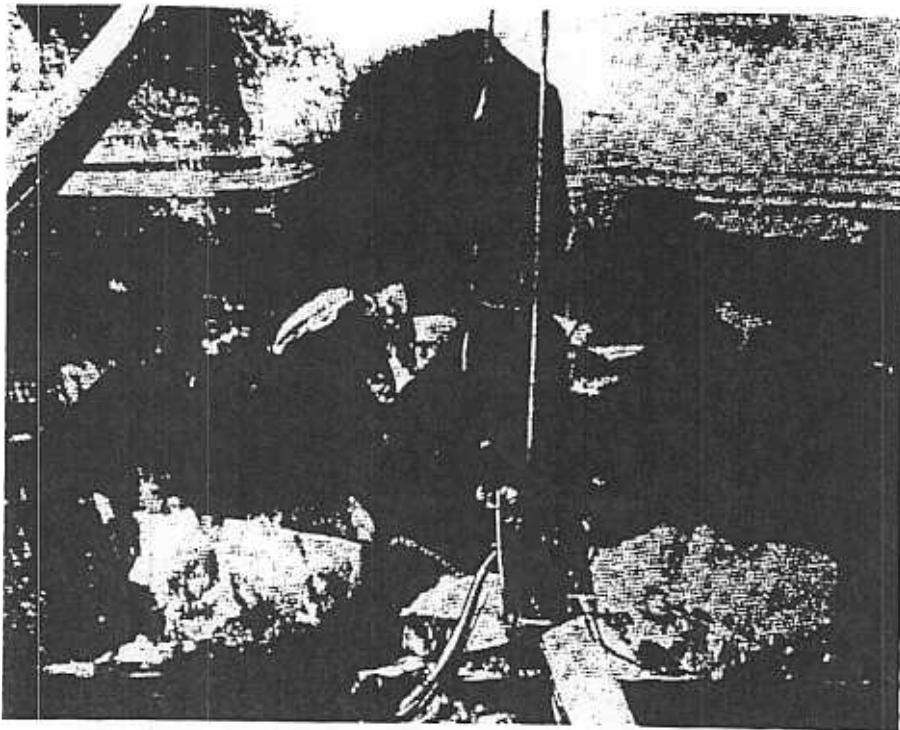
UNCLASSIFIED 49

(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)

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(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 indoctrinated Naval Security Group personnel. NSA Europe personnel, sent to Malta, witnessed all drainage operations.<sup>28</sup>

### **Evacuation of Wilson (U)**

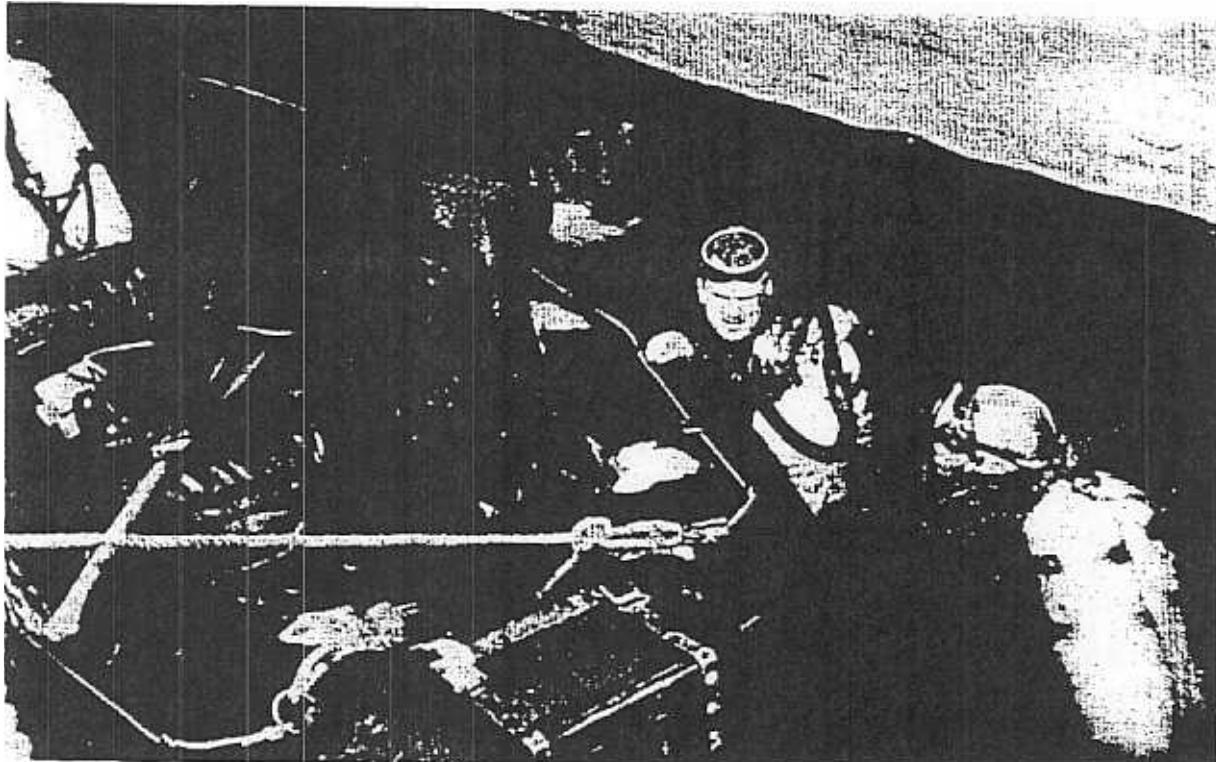
~~(C CO)~~ Earlier, as soon as the *Liberty* entered Malta, NSA Europe personnel boarded the ship to see NSA civilian Robert L. Wilson. When Wilson said he did not wish to stay aboard any longer, he was quickly ushered to the U.S. Consulate in Valletta for a short debriefing. Immediately thereafter,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

Lieutenant Colonel Green (from the NSA Europe staff), he returned home. Later Wilson 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.

~~(C CO)~~ 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)

Research Department space, a guard was posted and all personnel were required to log in when authorized access. Crews of indoctrinated 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 168 large canvas bags) 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)

~~(C CCO)~~ In Washington, the Naval Ships Engineering Center was coordinating a visit to the *Liberty* to survey damage in order to expedite repairs to the ship's electronic system; it was recommended that the inspection team include contractor personnel plus NSA and NSG people.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Eugene Sheck, Comint Collection (Mobile) Management, K12, and Lieutenant Allan Deprey, USN, Sigint Engineering (Mobile

K32, in company with representatives of the Naval Security Group, Naval Ships Engineering Center, and contractor representatives of Ling-Temco-Vought (LTV) and the FTM Systems Company visited the *Liberty* on 19-21 June. Their findings confirmed the massive damage to the Sigint electronic configuration.

~~(C CCO)~~ 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. In Research Room no. 1, 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. The processing and reporting spaces, transcribing positions, maintenance shop and cryptographic room were severely damaged; all equipment was either destroyed by the explosion or

removed from the spaces at Malta because of extensive damage. In the Research Department and non-morse search 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 four and six million 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.

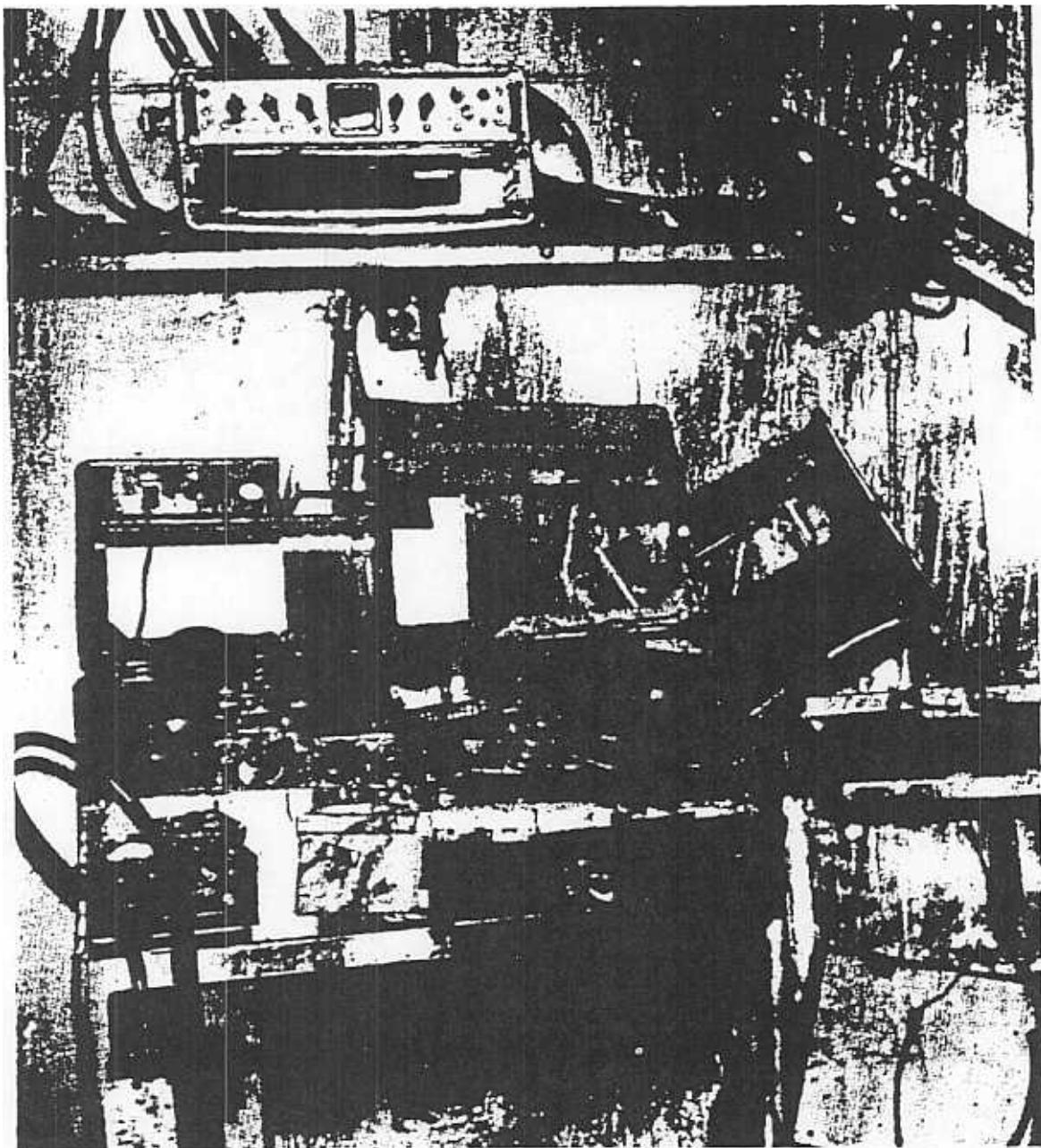
~~(C CCO)~~ Headed by Major General Joseph R. Russ, USA, the JCS Fact Finding Team arrived in London on Tuesday morning, 13 June and spent most of the day at Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe Headquarters interviewing Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., and members of his staff. Late that afternoon, the team flew to Stuttgart to talk with U.S. European Command personnel involved in the *Liberty* incident. The following day's interviews also included one with Brigadier General William Keller, Chief, NSA Europe. Points covered in the talk with Keller were:

1. Explanation of the mechanics involved for tasking in satisfaction of both national and theater consumer intelligence requirements;
2. Technical reports issued by the *Liberty* (the JCS Team was provided a copy of *Liberty*'s reports from 2 through 8 June); and

3. [Redacted]

Both the JCS team and J-3 EUCOM appeared satisfied with General Keller's explanations.<sup>34</sup>

(U) On 15 June, the team spent two hours visiting Vice Admiral William I. 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



~~(C CCO)~~ In the Sigint spaces, several manual-morse positions were destroyed by the torpedo blast, as reported by the inspection team sent to Malta. This team was composed of personnel from NSA, NSG, and contractors from Ling-Temco-Vought and FTM Systems Company.

(Photograph courtesy of the NSA/NSG inspection team.)

*(Figure is ~~CONFIDENTIAL CCO~~)*

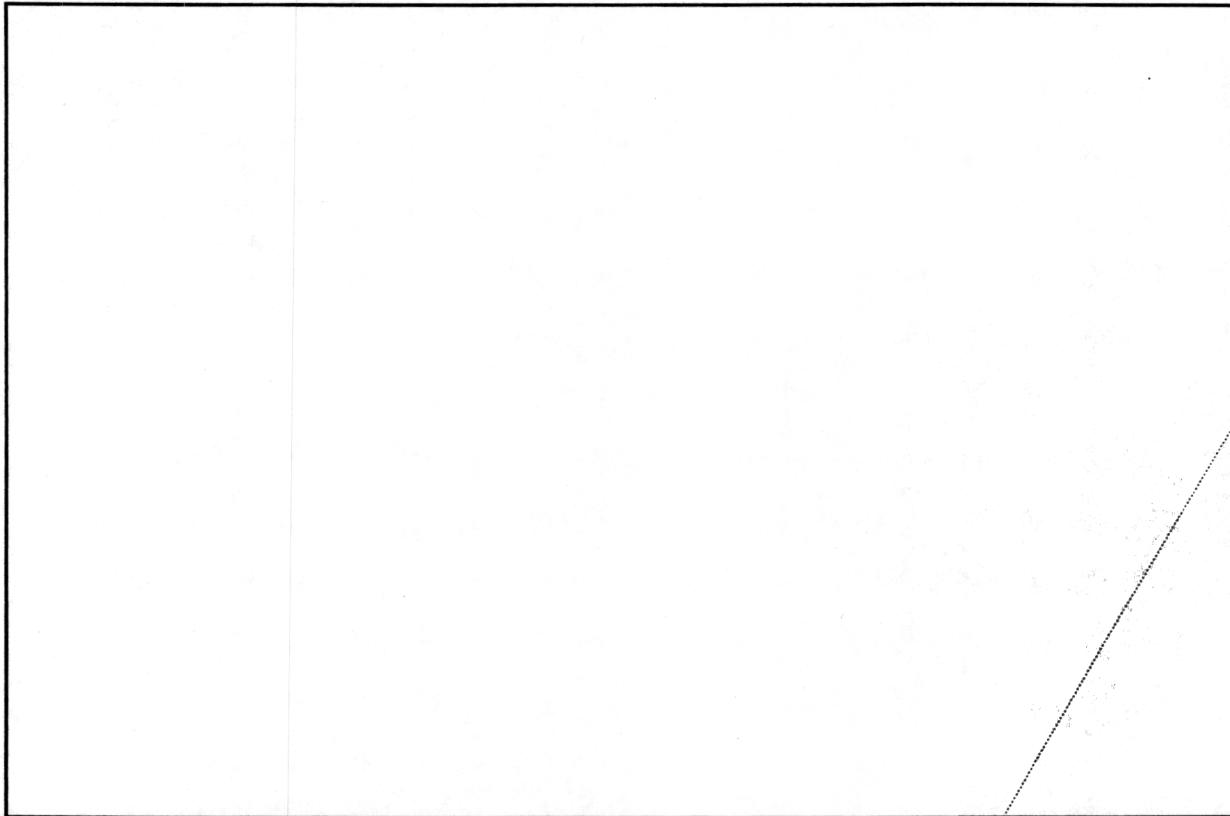
0700 hours the next morning. At Malta, Major General Russ and his team visited the *Liberty* and also spoke with Rear Admiral I. C. Kidd, President of the Naval Court of Inquiry. The JCS team returned to Washington in the early evening of 18 June.

### Accounting for Classified Material (U)

(C CCO) 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 Director, NSA requested appropriate field station and NSA elements to compile

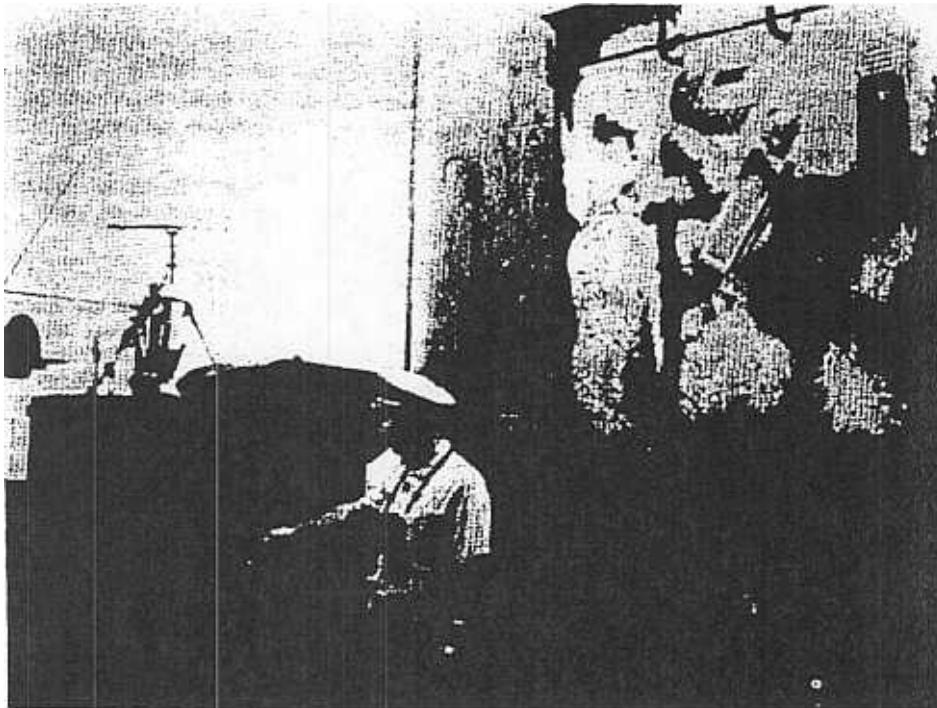
detailed lists of all technical support materials that had been forwarded to the *Liberty*.<sup>35</sup>

(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>



(C CCO) The NSA/NSG inspection team reported that the equipment in this Sigit space had been totally ruined by the torpedo blast.

(Photograph courtesy of the NSA/NSG inspection team.)  
(Figure is ~~CONFIDENTIAL CCO~~)



(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, on-board cryptographic keying materials 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>

~~CG-CIO~~ NSA representatives to this team were: Billy Durham, Operations, Comsec Status, (S13); Benjamin G. Cwalina, Security, Research Division, (M55); and Lieutenant John T. McTighe, USN, Operations Staff, (G04). 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 Research Operations spaces, where the canvas bags of residue were piled. Sailors from the *Liberty*'s Sigint complement, dressed in rubber overalls and gloves, selected about six or seven bags at random from the grimy, oily 160-plus 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-GCO)~~ With this command approval, *Liberty*'s CO arranged for appropriately cleared personnel to fill a trailer with bagged residue and burn it at the Norfolk incinerator. A list of documents identified in the burning process was forwarded to CNO. At NSA, M55 determined that there was only minimal security damage and no compromise had occurred.

~~(C-GCO)~~ Though incinerator flames consumed the last bits and pieces of oil-soaked residue from the assault on the *Liberty* these ashes did not mark the end of the train of events set in motion on 8 June 1967. The Israeli attack had already taken the lives of 34 Americans — 25 from the Sigint unit, including Allen Blue, and 9 of the *Liberty*'s crew — and touched

those of scores more. The investigations then underway would affect even more people.

### Notes

Source documents are in the "Crisis Collection" of the NSA History Collection.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| '(U)   | COMSIXTHFLT msg 090513Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | Commander, Task Group (CTG) 60.5 msg  |
| 090758Z Jun 1967.  |   |
| '(U)   | Commander, Task Group 60.5 msg 092119Z  |
| Jun 1967.  |   |
| '(U)   | CINCUSNAVEUR msg 100025Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | COMSIXTHFLT msg 0923-7Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 091068Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | ██████████ msg 091355Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | CINCUSNAVEUR msg 091459Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | CTG 60.5 msg 092119Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 191358Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | USCINCEUR msg 101106Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNSA msg 091345Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | DIRNSA msg 101718Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | CTG 60.5 msg 101750Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry 7816-67; <i>Liberty</i> Incident, 8 Jun 1967; Record of Proceedings. |
| '(U)   | Joint Chiefs of Staff msg cite no. 7642, 102140Z  |
| Jun 1967.  |   |
| '(U)   | USCINCEUR msg 101045Z Jun 1967, and   |
| '(U)   | CINCUSNAVEUR msg 111311Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | U.S. Defense Attaché Office, Tel Aviv msg   |
| 131335Z Jun 1967.  |   |
| '(U)   | CINCUSNAVEUR msg 111031Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | Ibid.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 111931Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 091814Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 111442Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | CINCUSNAVEUR msg 120950Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | Ibid.   |
| '(U)   | Commander, Task Force (CTF) 100 msg   |
| 130934Z Jun 1967.  |   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRU msg 131706Z Jun 1967 and   |
| '(U)   | NSAEUR msg 140829Z Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | CTF 100 msg 150200Z Jun 1967 and NSAEUR   |
| '(U)   | msg 161530Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | Robert L. Wilson, oral interview transcript, 6 May 1980.  |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 191326Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | CTF 100 msg 150200Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | NAVSHIPENGCTR msg 141551Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | NSA; K12, K32 Trip Report (by Eugene Scheck and Lt. Deprey), 27 Jun 1967.                       |
| '(U)   | NSA; D1 msg for Gen. Carter through NSA   |
| Rep NORAD, circa   | 21 Jun 1967.  |
| '(U)   | NSA; Status of Operations Actions Relative to   |
| Sigint Readiness Bravo/Crayon, Report no. 13, 9-10 Jun 1967. |   |
| '(U)   | U.S.S. <i>Liberty</i> msg 200735Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | DIRNAVSECGRUEUR msg 191326Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | CNO msg 142227Z Jun 1967.   |
| '(U)   | U.S.S. <i>Liberty</i> msg 021630Z Aug 1967 and  |
| (b) (3) - P.L. 86-36   | oral interview transcript, 9 May 1980.  |
| '(U)   | DIRNSA msg 081648Z Aug 1967 and CNO msg 102136Z Aug 1967.                                       |

(b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

## 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.

#### 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-CCC) 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 any of the three 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 technical materials which would reveal the mission of the ship and that it had electronic equipment which would compromise U.S. success in demultiplexing VHF and UHF multi-channel communications. 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

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.

(C-CCC) Other concerns were for the reassignment of the *Liberty*'s intercept mission to other collectors, [redacted] in the face of the inevitable attention the press would give to this incident, and for developing a core of information for the expected questions the Agency would receive from DoD and other officials.

(S-CCC) As the eighth of June wore on, the NSA staff considered ways to reassigned *Liberty*'s mission.

[redacted]

Should the U.S. actively enter the hostilities as a belligerent, they were willing to consider assignment of certain Sigint tasks

[redacted]  
Finally, they considered redeployment of the U.S.S. *Belmont*, scheduled for refitting at Norfolk at about that time. Only the last mentioned seemed promising in consideration of the *Liberty*'s VHF/UHF mission, but full approval for assignment of the *Belmont* would not be forthcoming. They also confirmed that the U.S. airborne collection flights out of Athens would continue without interruption.

(C-CCC) The NSA directorate examined *Liberty*'s [redacted] If there should be questions about the civilians on board, what should be said? Dr.

Tordella discussed this matter with Rear Admiral Ralph E. Cook, the Director, Naval Security Group.

[redacted]  
This stated that the *Liberty*'s presence off Port Said was "to assure communications for the U.S. Government posts in the Middle East and to assist in relaying information concerning the evacuation of U.S. dependents and other citizens from the Arab-Israeli war area." 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.

(C-GCO) 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. Already 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.

(C-GCO) To take care of this need for information, General Carter established in his outer office a Temporary Mid-East Information Group consisting of three NSA individuals — Mr. Walter Deeley of the Production Organization an(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36nd Lieutenant Commander Edward Koczak, USN, of the Director's staff. 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-GCO) With timely help from agency components, the group assembled basic data on the ship itself, on [redacted]

[redacted] on operational and technical responsibilities, and on the technical rationale for the mission; 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

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).

(C-GCO) 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.

(C-GCO) The JCS Fact Finding Team was asking specific questions such as these:

- Does NSA receive and plot situation reports? Does it keep the track?
- Why was an Opscomm circuit not established between NSA and the *Liberty*?
- Were there any communications problems during transit in the Mediterranean?
- Did NSA fail to receive any technical summaries, product, or other communications from the *Liberty*, nonreceipt of which would have been indicative of communications difficulties?
- Was there any departure from normal command relationships in the handling of the *Liberty*'s cruise?

(C-GCO) And Patrick Coyne of the National Security Council's Special Committee asked broad questions such as these:

- What information was received from the *Liberty* from the time it arrived on station until the incident?
- Were there any Sigint reflections of the Israeli attack?
- Would we receive all of our Sigint holdings relating to the incident?

(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

- (b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
(b) (3)-18 USC 798  
(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

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.

~~(C-GOO)~~ The JCS team visited NSA, other Washington-area principals, and concerned military staffs and commands in Europe and the Mediterranean. On 10 June, as the team began its fact-finding mission, General Carter called General Russ and offered the total cooperation of NSA and followed through on this offer by making as much information available to him as required, although General Russ had already decided not to concentrate on sensitive (that is, special intelligence) matters.

(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

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.

~~(C-GOO)~~ 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 "procedures governing the control of surveillance platforms be made more definitive with respect to technical research ships to insure that "artificial barriers between operational elements of staff and NSA/Naval Security Group" owing to security considerations be eliminated "in order to improve the value and timely utilization of the Sigint products at all major command echelons." Insofar as NSA was concerned, this recommendation was off the mark since Sigint product already went directly to all commands and not through NSA/Naval Security Group staff. 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 reassessments, 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 "Crisis Collection" 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 Temporary Mid-East Information Group," 8 June 1967; Walter G. Deeley, 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)

~~(C-CCO)~~ 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 cryptologic organizations.

#### Safety Estimates for Collection Missions of Mobile Platforms (U)

~~(C)~~ One principal area of concern was the manner in which safety factors were adjudged. Prior to the *Liberty* incident, commanders did not essentially regard mobile collectors as integral components of their commands. After all, JCS/JRC assigned the schedules and routes, the platforms existed to satisfy "national intelligence" and — as they may have thought — not their own intelligence requirements, and NSA was on the sidelines as a major interested party. As General Russ learned, commanders accordingly felt some uncertainty as to their specific responsibilities in supporting these platforms. The General reasoned therefrom, and so stated in his report, that commanders must have adequate knowledge of a ship's mission if they are to control and support it effectively.

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

the platforms operated and were, JCS/JRC believed, in the best position to evaluate safety factors.<sup>1</sup>

~~(C-CCO)~~ In the *Liberty* incident, the Commander, Sixth Fleet, was responsible for the safety of the ship. But Vice Admiral Martin was not in a position to evaluate the expected intelligence gain or assign degrees of importance to the expected intelligence gain in terms of changing risk factors. Judgment on the value of the intelligence to be gained could come only from DoD-level intelligence agencies — and, in the case of the *Liberty*, particularly from NSA.

~~(C-CCO)~~ In the aftermath of the incident, there was indeed some soul searching on this point within NSA. The head of NSA's Temporary Mid-East Information Group 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 "that the need is not established frivolously" and questioned whether or not the intelligence requirements against which NSA worked at the time were really of such a compelling nature as to justify using the special operational areas in the Middle East which NSA designated.<sup>2</sup>

~~(C-CCO)~~ One has to pose this question. Had NSA sent a message to the JCS/JRC on 5 June, the day war broke out, and stated simply that the agency which initiated the mission in the first place, NSA, now believed the risk to its cryptologic materials and personnel outweighed its estimate of technical and intelligence benefits to be derived, would there have been more expeditious action by JCS/JRC to cut the mission short? NSA may have drawn a mild rebuke for presuming to evaluate safety factors. But the hypothetical NSA message might have added to the position the CNO was taking at about this time to increase the ship's CPA, and it might have stimulated JCS/JRC action earlier than 080110Z.

~~(C-CCO)~~ On 8 June NSA was, however, of a totally different mind. Since it did not want to lose

the coverage it had planned for the Middle East, it sent a message to the JCS/JRC proposing assignment of the U.S.S. *Belmont* to the eastern Atlantic/Mediterranean as soon as possible after that ship's expected arrival at Norfolk on the next day.<sup>3</sup> The Director, NSA later withdrew this request in the face of reluctance on the part of the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic<sup>4</sup> and reevaluation of the CPA constraints on mission effectiveness.

~~(C COO)~~ In reflecting on the *Liberty/Pueblo* incidents in an oral history interview, General Marshall S. Carter said

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.

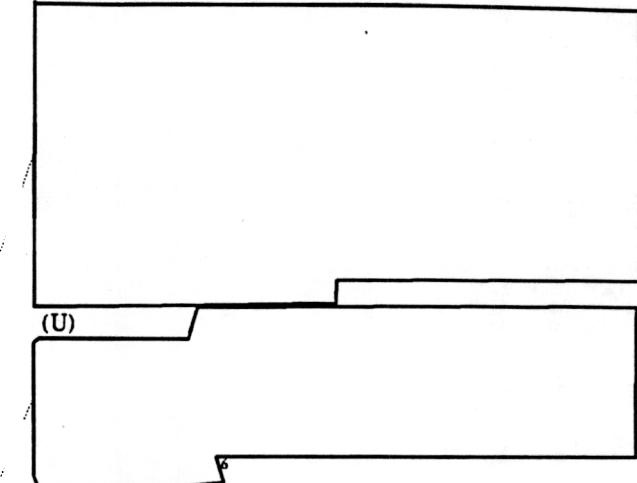
~~(C COO)~~ As it turned out, the *Liberty* incident — and some six months later the *Pueblo* seizure — brought about some modification in the JCS/JRC procedures for weighing risk vs. intelligence-gain factors. Instead of relying entirely on military assessments, the new procedures took into account intelligence-agency information relating to potential risk.<sup>5</sup>

~~(U)~~ NSA should not yield or should yield grudgingly to others, this review would suggest, in safety evaluations of missions involving large holdings of Sigin materials, equipment, and personnel.

#### **Availability of Linguists (U)**

~~(C COO)~~ Looking back on the *Liberty* incident, one perhaps should fault the cryptologic organization for not assuring the presence on board of qualified Hebrew linguists for on-station examination of Israeli voice communications uncovered in the intercept from the nonmorse search and development mission and for not even having a token mission on Israeli voice communications. It turned out that Hebrew language tapes produced by USN-855 from the search and development mission on the morning of 8 June did not contain information on the forthcoming Israeli attack, but NSA did not learn this until it had received these tapes and had processed them several days after the event. For all NSA and USN-855 knew at the time, information on Israeli intentions towards the ship might well have been on those tapes.

~~(C COO)~~



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#### **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 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 Exposed Collectors (U)**

~~(TS-COO-NF)~~ The Six Day War and the *Liberty* incident created conditions in which Sigin personnel had to take fast action to prevent loss of their documentation and equipment.

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(b) (3)-50 USC 403

(b) (3)-18 USC 798

(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

not specific to USN-855's eastern Mediterranean mission, records which could have remained behind at Rota. This same judgment would probably not apply, on the other hand, to on-board Sigint equipment, virtually all of which was essential to the mission.

(C) The *Liberty*'s experience, together with the *Pueblo* capture, led to some emphasis on file reduction and on measures to facilitate destruction of cryptologic materials and 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) As a direct result of the *Liberty* incident and at General Carter's urging, NSA's Communications Security Organization revised, for example, its physical security doctrine (KAG-1D) to limit keying materials in normal circumstances to a four-month's supply and to curtail possession of those materials to that which was clearly essential to mission requirements.<sup>11</sup> The incidents also gave impetus to the use of alternative means for technical support, such as Opscomm equipment for teletype exchanges on specific technical problems. And a small amount of water-soluble paper came into use for technical documentation subject to possible loss at sea. But measures such as these did not solve the problem in its entirety.

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

Size of files and time factors in the destruction process continue as problems to this time.<sup>12</sup>

(C GCO) The *Liberty* and *Pueblo* incidents should serve to remind cryptologic managers of the need to exercise restraint in the use of Sigint equipment and documentation in high-risk areas.

#### Unanswered Questions (U)

(U) A persistent question relating to the *Liberty* incident is whether or not the Israeli forces which attacked the ship knew that it was American. Several authors and not a few of the *Liberty*'s crewmen and USN-855 staff are convinced that they did. Their belief derived from consideration of the long time the Israelis had the ship under surveillance prior to the

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attack, the visibility of the flag, and the intensity of the attack itself.

~~(C CCO)~~ 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 no specific mission against Israeli communications, others felt Israeli forces wanted the ship and men out of the way in order to deny the U.S. any Sigint on Israel's preparations to attack Syria — an attack the U.S. might try to prevent.

~~(S-GGO)~~ Authors of the several books now in print about the *Liberty*, whether members of the *Liberty*'s complement or not, have not had access to

[redacted] Sigint reports on the Israeli helicopter pilot voice communications, nor have they had access to the confidential Israeli Government's explanation given to the U.S. Department of State.

~~(C-CCO)~~ 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 upon the Sigint reports referred to above. While these reports revealed some confusion on the part of the pilots concerning the nationality of the ship, they tended to rule out any thesis that the Israeli Navy and Air Force deliberately attacked a ship they knew to be American.

### 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 CCO)~~ 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

initiated by the Department of State. In May 1968, 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 18 December 1980 when Israel agreed to pay \$6 million.

(U) After returning to Norfolk in July 1967, the *Liberty* languished there while NSA tried unsuccessfully to obtain DoD budgetary approval to restore her to Sigint operational status; the proposed budget figure was \$10,200,000. 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 USN-855 personnel 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 technical research ships to this nation's Sigint production also should not go unnoted. These were unique in their time, often irreplaceable, often unheralded. That the TRS program came to an end in 1969 was not for lack of competence and dedication of the men who served or for lack of NSA's appreciation for their contributions, but rather for budgetary considerations by the Department of Defense.

### Notes

Source documents are in the "Crisis Collection" 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) Walter Deeley, 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 Scheck, 11 Aug 1980.

~~(C CCO)~~ NSA Staff, "Critique-Sigint Readiness Bravo Crayon," 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, [redacted] 14 Jul 1967.

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

<sup>9</sup>(U) NSA Staff (P04) Memorandum to DIRNSA, "Classified Material Aboard U.S.S. *Liberty* (USN-855)," 11 Jun 1967. Enclosures to the memorandum consist of a 160-page listing of documents known to have been given to USN-855 by NSA and NAVSECGRU elements.

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

<sup>11</sup>(U) ADC Memorandum to DIRNSA, "Cryptographic Holdings of U.S.S. *Liberty*," 2 Oct 1967; DIRNSA memo-

randum to ADC, "Cryptographic Holdings of U.S.S. *Liberty*," 17 Aug 1967.

<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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*(Listed by Date/Time Group.)*

CINCLANT. 121414Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~

/ (b) (1)  
(b) (3)-50 USC 403  
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(b) (3)-P.L. 86-36

CNO. 142227Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~

102136Z Aug 67. ~~(S)~~

COMSERVRON 8. 240020Z May 67. ~~(G)~~

COMSIXTHFLT. 052015Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~  
062349Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
070626Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~  
071503Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~  
081250Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
081320Z Jun 67. ~~(U)~~  
081349Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
081514Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
081649Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
090513Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
0923-7Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~

CTF 60. 081316Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~

CTF 100. 130934Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~ [ ]  
150200Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~ [ ]

CTG 60.5. 090758Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~  
092119Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~  
101750Z Jun 67. ~~(G)~~

DIRNAVSECGRU. 131706Z Jun 67. ~~(S-COO)~~

DIRNAVSECGRUEUR. 091058Z Jun 67. ~~(C-COO)~~  
091814Z Jun 67. ~~(S-COO)~~  
111442Z Jun 67. ~~(S-COO)~~  
111931Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~  
191326Z Jun 67. ~~(S-COO)~~  
191358Z Jun 67. ~~(S)~~

DIRNSA. 231729Z May 67.-(S)  
 232133Z May 67.-(S-COO)  
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 2—6Z May 67.-(S)—  
 270006Z May 67.-(S-COO)  
 292013Z May 67.-(S)  
 292201Z May 67.-(S-COO)  
 022333Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 072104Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 081356Z Jun 67.-(S-COO)  
 081503Z Jun 67.-(S-COO)  
 091345Z Jun 67.-(S)  
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JCS. 052235Z Nov 65.-(TS)  
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 070259Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 072230Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 080110Z Jun 67.-(TS)  
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TF 60.5. 090758Z Jun 67.-(S)

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 010035Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 020717Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 101045Z Jun 67.-(S)  
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USCINCNAVEUR. 311750Z May 67.-(S)  
 011305Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 020717Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 031016Z Jun 67.-(S)  
 051352Z Jun 67.-(S)  
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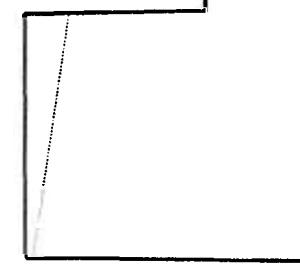
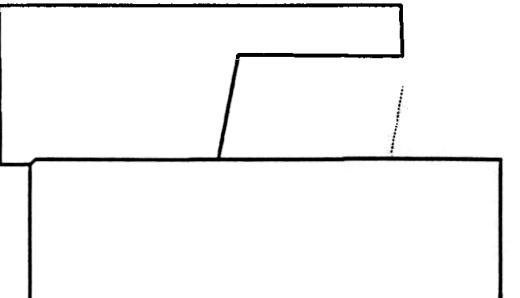
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