

The USS *Liberty* Affair

By James M. Ennes, Jr.

Seventeen years ago, in one of the worst peacetime naval disasters in American history, Israeli air and naval forces attacked the U.S. Navy intelligence ship *Liberty* on the high seas.

Even before the story appeared in the American press, U.S. Government public affairs officers went to work promoting a version of the story that was satisfactory to Israel, while representatives of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee descended on the press and Congress to help keep the story under control. Almost immediately, Jacob Javits in the Senate and Roman Pucinski in the House of Representatives took to the floor of Congress to lament the "tragic mistake" that had directed "friendly fire" toward an American ship.

The campaign was so effective that most American newspapers and all commercial television networks dropped the story almost overnight before most of the facts were known. No American newsman probed for the inside story of the USS *Liberty* affair. No member of Congress called publicly for the facts. No crewmen were interviewed on the evening news. Even today, few people anywhere have ever heard of the USS *Liberty*.

One who tried to reverse the trend was *Liberty's* Engineer Officer, Lieutenant George Golden. A Jew and former enlisted man, Golden was dis-



USS *Liberty*, riddled by Israeli gunfire, limps into Valletta, Malta, for repairs.

turbed about the Government's seeming unconcern for the truth. So he sought out Associated Press reporter Colin Frost in a Maltese bar while the Navy Court of Inquiry into the incident was still in session and told him why he thought the attack was deliberate.

The resulting story appeared in newspapers around the world,¹ but it failed to excite the press as Golden had hoped. Instead, it brought further pressure for crewmen to keep quiet.

Yet, despite the paucity of news and the fact that the Israeli Government promptly apologized and called the attack an accident, insiders knew that "America's closest ally in the Middle East" had done its best to sink a ship that it knew to be American. One unsatisfied official was Secretary of State Dean Rusk who complained bitterly and officially to the Israeli Government. But the complaining voices were never heard by the American public and the official protests were classified top secret to avoid embarrassing the attacking nation. Publicly the Lyndon Johnson Administration considered the attack on the USS *Liberty* an understandable error in the heat of war.

As officer-of-the-deck aboard the *Liberty* that day, I had a ringside seat. I personally observed the close range reconnaissance that preceded the attack. I saw the Israeli reconnaissance pilots wave to our crewmen. I talked to my shipmate, Chief Petty Officer Melvin Smith, moments after he intercepted Israeli radio messages in which Israeli pilots informed their headquarters that we were an American ship. I spent a year in military hospitals recovering from injuries received in the attack that followed. And for the next 12 years I probed Government files and interviewed everyone who would agree to talk about what happened to our ship and why our Government looked the other way.

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About This Issue

The story of the USS *Liberty*, like the ship itself, will not, it seems, simply roll over and die.

The Israelis could not sink the *Liberty* even after two hours of trying, first by high-performance jet aircraft, then by slower, more maneuverable jets carrying napalm, then by torpedo boats. They did leave 34 Americans dead and 171 wounded and they did blast a 40-foot hole in the ship's side along with 821 rocket and machine-gun holes. But the ship stayed afloat.

Israel claimed it was a case of mistaken identification. Our Government concurred, and told the survivors to say nothing of the attack other than that it was an accident. Seventeen years later, the story is still news. An organization has been formed by the survivors, whose eye-witness accounts belie the Israeli claims; a full-length movie is in the making, and recent books by investigative journalists, privy to previously undisclosed files, have implicated the Johnson Administration in a rude subterfuge.

This issue examines in detail both the assault and the subsequent reaction by our Government and the U.S. media. The author, Jim Ennes, was the

lieutenant on watch at the time of the attack and is the author of a widely acclaimed book on the subject.

Before going to press we learned that *Atlantic Monthly*, in a summer 1984 issue, will carry an article on the *Liberty*, reflecting the Israeli side of the story. Hopefully, a serious public discussion, long overdue, will now begin.

Two journalists who have delved into previously classified files dealing with the 1967 Mideast war are Stephen Green and Donald Neff. Their respective books, *Taking Sides: American's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel* and *Warriors For Jerusalem: Six Days That Changed the Middle East*, are reviewed on pages 13 and 14.

Our July/August issue will examine the relationship between water and politics in the Middle East.

John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director

Worldwide Fleet of Spy Ships

In 1967, *Liberty* was the newest and most elaborate of nearly a dozen intelligence-collection ships operated by the American Navy. Newsmen like to call them "spy ships." Akin to the Soviet intelligence trawlers that haunt the Western world, the American counterparts were fewer, but larger and better-manned. At least six were at sea at any one time, and, whenever tension developed anywhere in the world, the closest ship would be sent to the area.²

Thus 13 days before the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli Six Day War in 1967, middle-of-the-night orders from Washington moved the *Liberty* from

her usual patrol area on the west coast of Africa to a new position near the scene of the expected fighting in order to report the war's progress.

Unfortunately the decision-makers in Washington failed to consider that the Israeli Government rarely tolerates "observers," particularly during wartime. This time, Israeli officials were even more sensitive because, among other things, they planned to capture the Golan Heights from Syria despite heavy White House opposition. If the Golan grab was to succeed, it had to be done quickly and in secret before the Americans could interfere.

When war broke out between Israel and the Arab states on June 5, 1967, General David Elazar assembled his troops near Lake Tiberias in preparation for an assault on the Syrian (Golan) Heights, set to begin at 1130, June 8.

One obstacle remained. Israeli leaders had learned, probably through observers in Spain, that the USS *Liberty* had stopped overnight at the U.S. Naval Base in Rota en route to the Gaza Strip. If the ship arrived on schedule, *Liberty* would be within easy radio range of the invasion site hours before the invasion of Syria was to start.

On *Liberty's* third deck almost a 100 men with earphones, computers and sensitive radio frequency scanning equipment were already recording every radio signal from either side while linguists and other specialists analyzed the results. Everything of conceivable value was relayed instantly to Washington where larger teams of specialists and even more sophisticated computers resited and re-analyzed the results of *Liberty's* work. *Liberty* was still far out at sea, but soon she would be in perfect position to report every detail of the war—including the fact that Israel was proceeding with an invasion against the strongest possible protests of the United States.

And if that weren't enough to frustrate the Israeli generals, Secretary of State Dean Rusk learned of the invasion plan more than a day beforehand, possibly from the *Liberty's* work while the ship was still far at sea. Rusk immediately cabled Israeli leaders demanding that they de-escalate the war and, particularly, that they cancel the plan to invade Syria.³

Although Israeli leaders ignored the Secretary of State, they did not ignore the approach of the USS *Liberty*.

Early in the afternoon of June 7, a Central Intelligence Agency observer in the office of the United States Defense Attaché in the American Embassy at Tel Aviv reported to CIA seniors in McLean, Virginia, that Israeli leaders had decided to sink the USS *Liberty* if the ship came near the war zone.⁴

Liberty Ordered To Move

American military leaders took the warning very seriously and immediately issued an order for the *Liberty* to move at least 100 miles from the embattled areas.⁵

The military communications fiasco that followed was described by a House Armed Services Investigating

Subcommittee as "one of the most incredible failures of communications in the history of the Department of Defense."⁶ As far as the USS *Liberty* was concerned, the entire worldwide military communication system, indeed the entire United States military command and control apparatus, failed.

Because an American naval vessel was being threatened, officers in the Joint Chiefs of Staff War Room at the Pentagon did not rely exclusively upon the then-antiquated military communication system. Too much was at risk.

Military communications in 1967 depended upon a worldwide series of manual relay stations. Every message was received as a ribbon of punched paper tape, typically from 5 to 20 feet long. Young operators, often with minimal training, were expected to "read" the punched tape, make duplicate copies when necessary, and insert the tape in the proper machine for transmission to the next relay point. The problem was that the system, designed for World War II, could not handle communications in the 1960's. In times of crisis, backlogged message tapes often covered the floor up to the operators' knees.

So, instead of trusting the message system, a Major Breedlove in the Pentagon's Joint Reconnaissance Center placed a trans-Atlantic telephone call to U.S. Navy headquarters in London relaying the order from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to move the USS *Liberty* far away from the Israeli-Egyptian coast.

But because the order came by telephone and because it was not telephoned personally by a senior officer, the London headquarters chose to await a confirming message before taking action. The confirming message, unfortunately, went astray in the communications morass.⁷ It was sent not to London but to the Philippine Islands. Twice! Follow-up messages were lost. Repeatedly! Still other messages were delayed by "more important" messages — particularly by a lengthy transcript of a press conference given by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara.⁸

Every military command in the world promptly received about 50 pages of transcript from the press conference, since it was given a speed-of-handling precedence rating suitable for event contact reports. *Liberty's* urgent movement orders, however, were given a relatively low urgency rating which caused them to be

handled after most other naval messages. As a result, messages which could have saved the ship were delayed, mishandled and not received by the ship.

Careful Examination by Israeli Aircraft

Before midnight on June 7, as *Liberty* passed about 50 miles from Port Said, the first Israeli reconnaissance aircraft began to observe our ship. And from the start they did not act like friendly or even neutral visitors. Instead, they trained their missile guidance radar on our ship as though preparing to fire deadly guided missiles.⁹

Liberty's trained technicians recognized the radar immediately as Israeli and attempted to report the incident to Washington. Unfortunately, a supervisor insisted that the operators must be mistaken. "Israel would never aim guided missiles at an American ship," the supervisor insisted, and refused to sign the report. He had much to learn.

When daylight came, we saw a procession of Israeli reconnaissance aircraft that flew over us at incredibly low level while our intercept operators eavesdropped on the radio conversations between Israeli pilots and their headquarters. By this time I had relieved the watch on the bridge in order to assume the forenoon watch as officer-of-the-deck.

"No sweat, Lieutenant," Chief Petty Officer Melvin Smith, our leading enlisted cryptologist, whispered to me. "We can hear the pilots reporting by radio that we are American."

"It's good that they are looking us over so closely," Captain McGonagle, the ship's commanding officer said. "This way there can be no mistakes." (In the Israeli War Room, a green peg marked the location of the USS *Liberty*. The green color signified a neutral vessel. Alongside the peg were the words, "Liberty, an electro-magnetic, audio-surveillance ship of the U.S. Navy."¹⁰)

In eight hours of daylight we were visited eight times by Israeli aircraft that circled our ship thirteen times, sometimes as close as 200 feet directly overhead.¹¹ Visibility was unlimited. Off-duty officers in swimsuits waved to the pilots and could see the pilots waving back.

My shipmates relaxed. It looked

like the war was over.

At 2:00 p.m. as I was preparing to go below after nearly seven hours on the bridge, radar operators detected three jet aircraft and three motor torpedo boats approaching from the east. Expecting another reconnaissance flight, I stood stupidly watching the aircraft approach when suddenly a pattern of orange flashes danced the length of our ship accompanied by a deafening roar. Men on the ship's forecave were thrown high into the air, while men around me fell to the deck. My left leg shattered from the impact of fragments from an Israeli rocket.

We were under intense fire, first by Israeli supersonic Mirage jets that momentarily knocked out our four puny 50-caliber machine guns and disabled all radio antennas, then by slower Israeli Mystère jets that plastered the stack, gun mounts, open bridge and superstructure with an inferno of napalm. Flames were everywhere.

When *Liberty's* radiomen tried to call for help, they found that all the ship's usual radio frequencies were blocked by a loud buzz saw sound generated by sophisticated jamming equipment, apparently operated from the jets.¹² As they tried to find an unjammed frequency, a napalm bomb exploded outside their compartment, overheating the room and causing paint to smolder within. The space filled with smoke, but the ship's safety depended upon these men and they would not leave their post. Instead, they lay flat on the deck, below most of the smoke, choking in the foul air, calling into their microphones as they continued to search for an unjammed radio frequency. In less than ten minutes Chief Radioman Wayne Smith and his men found a clear channel and got a message through to U.S. Navy forces operating near Cyprus about 300 miles away.

On the bridge of the Sixth Fleet carrier *Saratoga*, Captain Joseph Tully received *Liberty's* call for help and promptly turned his ship into the wind. A tough, no-nonsense skipper, Tully didn't wait for someone to tell him what to do. He started launching aircraft even as he relayed our message to his seniors. But just before his aircraft were out of sight they were gruffly recalled by orders from Washington.

By this time a radio receiver on the carrier's bridge had been tuned to *Liberty's* distress calls. Even today,

Saratoga's officers recall their frustration as they heard frantic calls for help from fellow Americans and knew that the aircraft that could have saved them were now flying under order back toward the carriers.

We may never know the reason, but we do know that the aircraft which might have arrived in time to save American lives were recalled. A radio-man who relayed the order reports that it was given personally by Defense Secretary McNamara. Even a fly-over was forbidden while officials in Washington mulled over the fate of the *USS Liberty*.

Meanwhile, after 25 to 30 minutes of intense air attack by a dozen or more aircraft and unobstructed by Sixth Fleet air power, three Israeli torpedo boats arrived to finish the job. Our ship was an easy target.

The boats approached at high speed and fired five torpedoes. Luckily, the first shots went wild. One torpedo passed safely astern, where it missed by a bare 25 yards. Another passed so close ahead of the ship that it vanished under the point of the bow, "sounding like a motorboat" to Petty Officer Rick Aimetti, who stood, astonished, on the forecastle. Two torpedoes passed safely, unseen. And one torpedo made a direct hit on the ship's cryptologic spaces where it killed 25 men and temporarily trapped at least 50 more in the flooded compartment.

When *Liberty* miraculously remained afloat despite severe flooding from a 40-foot torpedo hole, the torpedomen circled the ship at close range, machine-gunning anyone who came on deck. Finally, at 3:15 p.m., it appeared that *USS Liberty* was going to sink. Orders came from the bridge to prepare to abandon ship, and *Liberty* crewmen responded by launching three rubber rafts — the only boats not damaged in the attack. Almost immediately the torpedomen machine-gunned the empty rafts, plucked one out of the water, and set a course for their base at Ashdod.

Liberty was alone, in flames, dead in the water, and sinking. She had no usable lifeboats. Her radios were dead. Thirty-four men were dead or dying and 171 more were wounded from a crew of 294.

Almost two hours after receiving our call for help, U.S. Navy commanders were given White House permission to come to the *Liberty's* defense. For a second time that day, rescue aircraft streaked toward the *Liberty*.

Immediately, as though aware the game was ending, the Israeli Government summoned the U.S. Naval Attaché to report that Israeli forces had "erroneously attacked a maybe U.S. ship" and to offer "abject apologies."

At 4:32 p.m., the torpedo boats returned to ask: "Do you need help?" The reply from the bridge was profane. The attack, after more than two-and-one-half hours, was over.

Inquiry Leads To Inaccurate Report

The cover-up began. *Liberty* sailors were told daily that they could say nothing about the attack to anyone, not even to members of their own families. A Court of Inquiry was to be held, the men were told, and nothing could be said until the Court had completed its work.

But the hearings were limited and some of the most important witnesses were not asked to testify. Lookouts who might have described pre-attack reconnaissance were not questioned by the Court. My sworn statement as officer-of-the-deck was read to the

Court, but was not accepted as evidence or entered into the official record. Vital deck logs were rewritten and most references to reconnaissance were deleted. Evidence that failed to support the Israeli version was often changed, lost or ignored by the official body assigned by the Navy to "inquire into all aspects" of the attack.

Despite the inadequacy of the Court of Inquiry, the final report did contain damning testimony and evidence — much of which conflicted directly with the "Findings of Fact" reported by the same Court. Unfortunately, the entire 707-page report was classified top secret and only a 28-page watered-down excerpt was released to the public.

Instead of describing repeated reconnaissance flights as low as 200 feet overhead, the U.S. Government disregarded the crew's sworn testimony and reported publicly that the attack was an understandable case of mistaken identity which was preceded by only three distant and casual reconnaissance flights. The Government ignored the ship's logs and sworn testimony that the American flag stood clearly displayed in a 12-knot wind,

Burns from a torpedo blast mark face and arms of Lt. Commander David Lewis.



and reported instead that the flag probably hung limp and indiscernible on a windless day.

Instead of describing a prolonged and carefully coordinated attack in which the ship was under heavy fire for 75 minutes and called desperately for help for another 75 minutes, the U.S. Government reported publicly that the air attack lasted only 6 minutes and that all firing ended when the torpedo boats drew close enough to see the American flag. The American Government repeated Israel's claim that the ship was mistaken for the Egyptian freighter *El Quseir*, but failed to note that *El Quseir*, a rusted-out, 40-year-old horse carrier then awaiting the salvage yard at Alexandria, was a most unlikely candidate for a *Liberty* look-alike.

Meanwhile, the American Government complained bitterly but privately to Israel that *Liberty* was indeed identified before the attack. Secretary of State Rusk officially informed the Israeli Government that the attack was "quite literally incomprehensible (and) must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life."¹³ But such candor was only for diplomatic channels. Publicly, the Johnson Administration portrayed the attack as brief, spontaneous, casual, and mistaken — a story they knew to be untrue.¹⁴

American-Israeli Debate Continues

The *Liberty* crew had been told early in the cover-up that they would be free to talk to the press once the Court of Inquiry report was declassified and released. But this was not to be. When the press blanket was "lifted," the men were told that the Court of Inquiry had reported everything that could be said about the affair. The crew, therefore, could say only what had already been reported by the Court and only in the same words the Court had used.

Omitted from the Government's published version of the Court of Inquiry report were facts that the radios were jammed, that napalm was used, that the life rafts were shot up in the water, that American forces failed to arrive during a two-and-one-half hour ordeal, or anything indicating that the attack was planned and deliberate. No one was allowed to describe the

close-range reconnaissance that preceded the attack. Particularly forbidden was any description of the American flag or the steady breeze that displayed the flag clearly for the Israeli pilots to see.

It was clear from the beginning that such a complex, carefully orchestrated, thoroughly reconnoitered military operation could not have been an accident as Israel claims. The Israeli Government, over the past 17 years, has churned out a fascinating series of "rebuttals" and "official versions," each different and each readily disproven. (See "The Official Israeli Excuse," on pages 11-13.) Meanwhile, several former U.S. Government officials and scores of *Liberty* survivors have stepped forward to support the story. And Government files continue to reveal telling evidence that the United Government knows it was deliberate, that the story was covered up and is still being covered up.¹⁵

Book Receives Favorable Response

Even before I was discharged from the hospital I started interviewing other survivors. Research for my eventual book, *Assault on the Liberty*, spanned more than 12 years. For much of that time I was a Navy lieutenant commander, stationed in Germany and Washington, D.C. Throughout that period I was in constant contact with other survivors and with officers who had watched the affair unfold from Washington. But documentation was hard to come by because the Government steadfastly denied access to most records that could provide written evidence to support the recollections of survivors.

All this changed when the Freedom of Information Act was passed in 1974. For the first time, Americans could demand access to Government information with a reasonable chance of success. Important files could no longer be legally withheld. To be sure, there were delays and foot-dragging. At one point I filed suit in Federal court just to get the Department of State to answer one of my requests under the Act.¹⁶ For two years they had simply ignored my requests. But eventually I gathered proof for most of the story of the attack on the USS *Liberty*.

Although Columnist Jack Anderson

and others had speculated in print that the attack must have been deliberate,¹⁷ until now no one had ever presented proof. No one had ever shown, step by step, how the attack was conducted, how the American rescue was mismanaged, how the American Government had covered up the truth, and why the Israeli excuse for the attack was plainly untrue.

Finally, in January 1980, my findings were published by one of the world's most respected publishers, Random House, in New York.

The reviews exceeded my fondest hopes. The widely-read *Hartford Courant* called *Assault on the Liberty* "a balance between *The Cruel Sea* and *Mister Roberts* — the most important book you'll read this year." The *U.S. Naval Institute* at Annapolis called *Assault* "probably the most important naval book of 1980." *Military Review*, the professional journal of the U.S. Army, hailed the book as "a meticulous account, unemotional and detailed," while the *Naval War College Review* called it "an instructive reading exercise."

People magazine did a two-page spread while leading newspapers found the book "convincing, provocative, haunting, absorbing, indelible, lively, stirring, revealing, exciting and fascinating."

The Washington Post ran two book reviews, two news stories, and an editorial on the subject, and gave the book its highest rating, "Choice." Two retired chiefs of naval operations praised the book publicly, as did several leading members of Congress and four Pulitzer-winning authors.¹⁸ Even the independent Jewish press wrote that *Assault on the Liberty* exemplifies "the best traditions of quiet investigative journalism."¹⁹

Interest soared. I did a two-hour interview with Larry King on his national radio network and about seven hours on Washington, D.C., stations alone. Eventually there were over 150 radio and television interviews, including 12 hours in a series of talkshow appearances on KGO, a powerful San Francisco radio station that is heard in 11 states. The "Radio Reader" at Michigan State University selected my book to read in its entirety on a coast-to-coast radio network — a minimum of 9 hours of air time on each of 44 stations. Most stations broadcast the reading twice.

One would expect that such price-less publicity would sell books. Indeed, four booksellers told me that *Assault on*

the *Liberty* was their best-selling title, accounting for over 1,000 sales for each dealer. But these stories were not typical.

Campaign To Discredit Begins

An early disappointment was *Newsweek*. The news magazine had covered the story objectively in 1967 and its "Periscope" column set about doing a story on the book. The story was written, edited and ready to run when, according to Random House Publicity Manager Cheryl Merser, it was pulled moments before press time — supposedly for "hotter news." It never ran.

Columnist Jack Anderson had written twice about the *Liberty*, once stating flatly that the attack "was planned in advance." Anderson also writes for Random House. But the book I arranged to send to him was received in stony silence. When I called his office I found a hostile staff that did not want to talk about the *USS Liberty*.

The first indication of the likely source of the problem was a report from a newspaper reporter in Washington, D.C., who called to warn of trouble. The Israeli Government, he said, was working hard behind the scenes, particularly in New York and Washington, to discredit my story. I soon learned that he was correct.

The Israeli Foreign Office in Jerusalem, I discovered, had prepared and distributed a four-page criticism of my book. "Ennes," said the Israeli Government, "is illogical and unrealistic. His conclusions fly in the face of logic and the military facts." The paper made no attempt to refute my evidence and produced no evidence of its own; instead, Israeli officials simply discounted my story out of hand, ignored the evidence and the testimony of eyewitnesses, and repeated their original claims of mistaken identity. Unfortunately, that was enough to provide ammunition for other spokesmen for Israel.

Soon the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee published a six-page attack drawn heavily from the Israeli document. Similar language was published by Israeli Counsels General in Chicago, San Francisco and Atlanta. Identical phrases and paragraphs surfaced in "fact sheets" and "background papers" prepared by other pro-Israeli organizations. In one

striking case, my name appeared in a published list of "Who's Who in Arab Propaganda" distributed by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee. (Former Illinois U.S. Representative Paul Findley explores the depth of AIPAC's influence on the Congress and the media in his forthcoming book, *They Dared To Speak Out*.)

Before long, language from the Israeli propaganda mill began to appear in letters to editors and media managers whenever my book was mentioned publicly. Most radio talk-show callers were friendly, but the unfriendly ones invariably used arguments taken from the Israeli literature. In California, 20 members an Oakland B'nai B'rith chapter signed a letter to radio station KQED asking to cancel a scheduled reading of my book. In another case, a statement drawn from the Israeli document was read on radio station KUOW in Seattle by an Anti-Defamation League chairman, and the same statement reappeared word for word 3,000 miles away in a letter to the editor of the *Jacksonville Times-Union* in Florida. A Jewish reader who objected to this organized campaign mailed an Anti-Defamation League circular to an editor of the *San Diego Union* after the *Union* supported my book editorially.²⁰ In the circular, ADL members were instructed never to be first to mention the *USS Liberty*, but to respond quickly with a canned protest if the subject were mentioned publicly.

Book Orders Disappear

Meanwhile, I began to receive reports that orders for the book were not being filled. Booksellers who failed to receive a book order usually assumed that it was out of print and so informed their customers. The book has never been out of print; Random House has reprinted it three times. Nevertheless many orders vanished without a trace somewhere in the distribution pipeline.

Would-be readers from several states wrote to tell me when they bypassed local retailers to place orders directly with my publisher, an order clerk told them falsely that the book was out of print, or that Random House had suspended distribution to avoid a law suit. In one case a determined New York City reader argued at

length with a Random House clerk who insisted that Random House had never published a book called *Assault on the Liberty*.

Random House traced a large order at my request and discovered that all West Coast orders from Ingram Book Company, a major wholesale book dealer, had simply "vanished." Ostensibly, all orders for *Assault on the Liberty* had been "lost." Following several important reviews and talk-shows, the manager of the popular Washington, D.C., Pentagon branch of Brentano's bookstore told me that my book was unavailable for months — even though Random House had an abundance of books at that time.

Waldenbooks, a large national chain, dropped *Assault on the Liberty* prematurely from stock despite steady demand.²¹ The naval base in San Diego returned a large supply of books to the publisher after a chaplain at the base filed a complaint.

Even the advertising department of the venerable *Washington Post* may have yielded to the pressure of hundreds of complaining letters and telephone calls in response to the *Post's* two book reviews and two news stories. According to *Post* military editor George Wilson, "It seemed that every phone in the building had someone calling to complain about our mention of the book." A few days later when Seattle bookseller Karen Smith called the *Post* to place an ad offering to sell *Assault on the Liberty* by mail, the ad clerk warned: "I don't know if we can accept an ad for that book. There have been a lot of complaints that we should not have reviewed such a controversial book."

The ad did not run. Several weeks later, after repeated apologies for unexplained delays and missed publications dates, *Post* Advertising Manager Robert Rawls returned the bookseller's check with apologies for the "foul-up." (Although the advertising department may have folded under pressure, the *Post's* editors did not. They eventually published yet another review and a feature story about the *Liberty* crew.)

On radio station WIND in Chicago, interest in the subject was so intense that a talkshow scheduled for one hour was extended to three hours while studio phone lines buzzed with callers. Then came the complaints. Two weeks later when I waited near my telephone for a scheduled follow-up interview, the phone never rang.

When I complained to WIND's pro-

gram director, Tom LaPorte, he apologized grandly. It was a "terrible oversight." It was something that had never happened before at WIND, he assured me, and it would never happen again. He promised to investigate the "inexcusable error" and to call back within the hour to reschedule the interview. He did not call. When I called him, he refused to accept my calls. He did not answer my letters and he declined to discuss the matter with a Chicago citizen who did manage to reach him by telephone. Apparently the truth about the "oversight" was too embarrassing to discuss.

Television Coverage Cancelled

The campaign to suppress the *Liberty* story was probably most effective with the national commercial television networks. A producer for ABC's popular "Good Morning America" invited me to an interview set for March 10, 1980. She said she would invite the Israeli embassy to send a representa-

when "Nightline" interviewed four *Liberty* crewmen for three hours in the "Nightline" studios and prepared a complete show on the history and circumstances of the loss of the ship.

The program was fully edited and ready to run when, shortly before air time, "Nightline" producer Pat Cullen called me at home to say the *Liberty* story was to be pushed aside temporarily for news of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. "Don't worry," she told me, "the *Liberty* story is too big to ignore."

Anchor Ted Koppel confirmed that intention a few days later in a letter to a San Francisco viewer. "I cannot now say just when we will be able to air this program," Koppel wrote, "but it is still our intention to do so."

Yet when producers tried to resurrect the aborted story later, they found that the valuable, fully edited studio tape and more than 15 reels of supporting raw film had mysteriously disappeared from the "Nightline's" film library.

At the request of Ira Rosen, producer of the popular "60 Minutes" television series, I spent a week preparing a de-

reluctantly.

When NBC News producer Robert Toombs in New York City asked his office for permission to interview a group of *Liberty* survivors for "The Evening News," he was told, "NBC is not interested in the USS *Liberty*." Toombs seemed surprised. The survivors were not. We have seen it all before.

Now a Hollywood company is hard at work writing a screenplay and doing other preproduction work for a full-length motion picture based on *Assault on the Liberty*. Already, theater distribution has been offered both in the United States and in Europe, and some leading Hollywood personalities have offered their support, even though skeptics and nay sayers predominate.

Incredibly, a common response from friends as well as foes is, "Israel will never allow this movie." If that is true, the backers have decided, then the United States is in deep trouble. They are determined to complete the film.²²

Liberty Crew and Friends Step Forward

Soon I began to hear from other survivors, most of whom told me they found the book almost therapeutic. The book, they said, relieved a weight from their shoulders; for the first time they felt free to discuss the attack with friends.

One of the first to call was retired Master Chief Petty Officer Stan White, the senior enlisted man aboard the *Liberty*. Stan had helped with some of my research. Now he wanted to help tell the story. Starting with my list of about 40 survivors, he almost single-handedly tracked down more than 150 former crewmen and their families.

A few of the men just wanted to forget the *Liberty*. Many were bitter. Most felt that they had been ravaged by an ally and then betrayed by their own Government. Many were frustrated and angry that the "official" story told by both governments was so different from what they had experienced. And nearly every man wanted to help tell the *Liberty* story to a wider audience.

Stan set to work immediately planning for a reunion of the *Liberty* crew.



Abraham Weiss, an Hasidic Jew, pickets Israeli consulate in New York to protest the attack.

James Ennes

tive to appear with me. Then she phoned the embassy and dropped me cold. Weeks later when asked about guest appearances the ABC computer reported, "Ennes, James — cancelled." ABC still will not discuss the reasons for the cancellation.

ABC's late-night news show "Nightline" scheduled a *Liberty* story three times, but cancelled the segment each time. Most notable was in June 1982,

tailed *Liberty* synopsis, complete with copies of key documents and a long list of suggested guests. Apparently Mike Wallace and Rosen wanted to do the story, but anything as controversial as the USS *Liberty* story needed approval from CBS management. And there the plan died. "Nothing short of direct testimony from a defecting Israeli official will justify doing this story," producer Rosen told me

A Visit To Washington

A big boost came late in 1980 when I was invited to discuss the attack with then-Senator Adlai Stevenson of Illinois. Senator Stevenson quizzed me privately for two hours about the attack, the evidence, and my sources of information. Then he invited me back on another day to be grilled by members of his staff and that of Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater.

While everyone seemed to agree that my story was sound, Senator Goldwater's staff argued (incredibly, I thought) that the matter should not be pursued because "nothing can be gained" by probing this ugly matter.

Senator Stevenson, did not agree. He argued that "to tell the American people the truth" was reason enough, and his staff stood behind him. He went to work trying to get the support of Senator Goldwater and others.

Soon Senator Stevenson published the *Congressional Record* (S13136, September 22, 1980) the full text of a review from *The Washington Post* written by former USS *Pueblo* skipper, Commander Lloyd Bucher, and he urged every member of Congress to read the book. Then he gave UPI reporter William J. Small a remarkable interview which was broadcast by radio and widely printed in newspapers on September 28.

In that interview, Senator Stevenson said: "I intend to use the [Intelligence] Subcommittee as a means of looking into this matter further... One possibility would include providing (crewmen) with an opportunity to tell their story to the American people. Those sailors have one story to tell, and that story leaves no doubt but what this was a premeditated, carefully reconnoitered attack against our ship."

The story quoted three Government officials who were not interested in examining the matter. "That's the explanation Israel brought forward, and that's what we have to go with," said State Department spokesman Jack Toohey, neatly dismissing the value of the logs, files and testimony of survivors. "To Israel it would only be an irritant with little purpose," said Ted Cubbison on the State Department's Israel desk, apparently untroubled by the charges and unwilling to examine the evidence. "The findings of the Court of Inquiry have not been re-

vised," said a Navy spokeswoman, as if that settled the matter. Then the story closed with these astounding remarks by Senator Stevenson: Congressmen are "intimidated by a lobby which at the moment takes its orders from an extremist minority within Israel. It's about time we indicated that Mr. Begin is wrong when he says they can go on defying the United States. If you acquiesce even in an attack against your own ship, and the killing of your own countrymen, you lose all credibility, in the world as well as in Israel. You lose your self-respect, ultimately, and you may lose the peace of the world."

Unfortunately, Senator Stevenson did not prevail. He had not run for reelection and his term in Congress was about to expire. Other senators were simply unwilling to risk their

score. President Carter accepted and his decision was announced by the Department of State on December 18 with a press release entitled, "The Book is Now Closed on the USS *Liberty* Affair." Adlai Stevenson remarked that the book would not truly be closed until the Government acknowledged the truth, but that rhetorical book-closing was more than enough to satisfy several hundred Congressmen.

USS *Liberty* Reunion

Meanwhile, Stan White continued to work toward a *Liberty* reunion. On June 4, 5 and 6, 1982, more than 100 former crewmen of the USS *Liberty*



Former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Admiral Thomas Moore, told *Liberty* survivors, "I never could accept that the *Liberty* attack was an accident."

futures by openly challenging the Israeli Government. Just before he left the Congress, Senator Stevenson wrote to tell me that most members of Congress are "timid" about the USS *Liberty* and that Barry Goldwater, though initially interested, had chosen to take the path [of caution] advised by his staff.

UPI reporter William Small's story, however, did have one apparent result. After years of procrastination and refusal to pay the \$14 million demanded by the United States for loss of the ship itself (actually worth more than \$40 million) the Israeli Government suddenly offered \$6 million to settle

met a block from the White House at the Hotel Washington in Washington, D.C., for their first gathering in 15 years. It was a joyful, tearful, emotional occasion.

All the men had been ordered (illegally, we now believe) never to say anything about the *Liberty* to anyone. For the first time, they felt free to discuss the attack, and most found that speaking out relieved a heavy burden.

Virgil Brownfield described what it was like to see his best friend die. "People don't die like they do on TV, you know. They sort of die... like chickens. And everyone is falling — the navigator and the executive officer

and the officer of the deck — and you wonder if you should just stand up and get it over with.”

“At one point I got madder than hell. I just wanted to kill somebody,” said Chuck Jones. “But I got over that. ‘Cause there were just too many things to do. In my own mind it wasn’t a mistake, but I don’t hate those guys.”

“We’re not blaming the Israeli people,” said Ron Grantski. “The Israelis had some people in charge who should be held responsible.”

“We should have stood up a little bit, instead of accepting their apology just like that,” added Gene Kirk.

Joe Meadors asked, “How many Russian intelligence trawlers have been wiped out? You know if one of those were sunk, they’d go to war over that.”

Crewmen had sent the Ambassador of Israel a polite invitation to attend the reunion or to send a representative to ask questions. We were hoping he would come, as we felt it would be impossible for him to defend his government’s actions after hearing first hand from men who had survived the attack. Instead, Israeli journalist Wolf Blitzer phoned, promising to attend. But he didn’t show up either. Apparently a public meeting with men who knew the truth about the *Liberty* attack was more than the Government of Israel wanted to risk.

The gathering did have other results. A reporter called former Secretary of State Dean Rusk to ask his opinion. “Sure the attack could have been deliberate,” he said. “They had sightings beforehand of the ship. I don’t buy the Israeli explanation. We were never able to get to the heart of what happened.”²³

Perhaps the most outspoken of all was retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, who did not hesitate to tell the crew and assembled reporters that the attack “could not possibly have been a case of mistaken identity. I have never been willing to accept the Israeli explanation,” he said. Later he added, “Even a rag-tag Navy could not make a mistake like that.”

Soon after the reunion a heavily-censored report by the supersecret National Security Agency revealed the true feelings of another Government servant. Scribbled in a margin next to the still-officially-censored Israeli excuse was a note by the agency’s Deputy Director, Dr. Louis Tordella. Never intended for public exposure,

the note read: “A nice whitewash.”

Even retired Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, who headed the official Navy inquiry into the attack, agreed by telephone to a request by *Liberty* survivor Don Blalock that he reexamine the evidence and rethink the conclusions of his 1967 Court. If he ever did reread the file, he kept his findings to himself.

Veterans Organizations Lend Support

Liberty crewmen are now supported by almost every major veterans organization except the American Legion. Strangely, the American Legion was first to cry out publicly about the *Liberty*. In 1967 the Legion passed a national resolution calling for a proper investigation (and rejecting the official Navy investigation), but according to Legion staff member Dr. Frank Maria, who proposed the original resolution, the American Legion failed to follow through because they came under heavy pressure from pro-Israel organizations.

Columnist Philip Geyelin addressed the gathering and characterized the Israeli excuse as “simply not believable.”



James Ennos

mented request for rebuttal space from the USS *Liberty* Veterans Association.

But the VFW was not intimidated. VFW members attending the 1983 national convention passed Resolution Number 685 calling upon the United States to establish "a fitting memorial... honoring those men lost on the USS *Liberty*."

The Israeli Government Persists

Largely through the efforts of *Liberty* crewmen working together, the story has now been told on the front pages of the *New York Times*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, and in major stories in many other pages including *The Washington Post*. It has

been covered repeatedly in national wire service stories and on national radio networks. According to columnists Evans and Novak, President Reagan even mentioned the *Liberty* attack to his staff as an example of Israeli treachery.²⁵

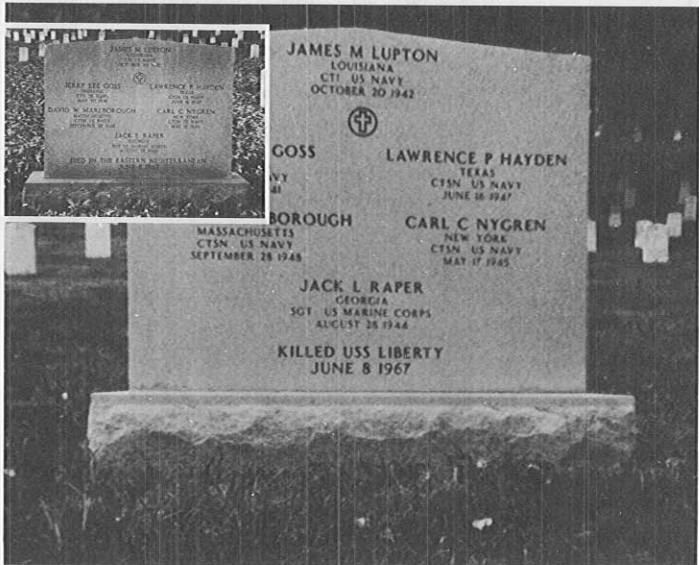
Meanwhile, the Israeli Government periodically releases yet another "official version" of the incident. The latest, prepared by the History Department of the Israeli Defense Forces, was released in 1982 on the eve of the *Liberty* reunion. Like those before it, the report ignores hard evidence, laws of physics and testimony of crewmen. Instead it dwells on the incredible claims that the ship flew no flag and was tracked by radar from patrol boats that were in fact far beyond radar range.

As this is written, another salvo is about to be fired. According to a cor-

respondent in Jerusalem, two leading Israeli writers will publish a 7,000-word essay on the USS *Liberty* in the summer issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. The authors reportedly believe that their article "refutes all that has ever been written about the Israeli attack."

To do that, the article will have to resolve all inconsistencies found in the official Israeli excuses. Why do *Liberty* crewmen recall waving to reconnaissance pilots when Israel claims there was no reconnaissance? Or why *Liberty* crewmen remember seeing the torpedomen deliberately destroy life rafts at 3:15 when Israel claims that the last shot was fired before 2:40. It will have to explain away CIA reports that Moshe Dayan directed the attack²⁶ and that the decision to attack the *Liberty* was made a day in advance.²⁷ It should make interesting reading.

Original and new tombstones of six *Liberty* crewmen in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.



1. *New York Times*, June 18, 1967, p. 20. Although the story is attributed only to a senior officer of the *Liberty*, Golden now admits freely to having been the source. At the time of the interview he was *Liberty's* Acting Commanding Officer.
2. For a detailed look at *Liberty's* mission and capabilities and her relationship with the National Security Agency, see James Bamford, *The Puzzle Palace*, Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
3. From documents in the Mideast File of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library obtained in 1983 by author Stephen Green under the Freedom of Information Act.
4. Stephen Green, *Taking Sides*, Wm. Morrow, 1984, pp. 238-239.
5. JCS Top Secret message 080110Z JUN 67, reproduced in Navy Court of Inquiry file and elsewhere.
6. Review of Department of Defense Worldwide Communications, Report of the Armed Services Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, May 10, 1971.
7. Proceedings of Navy Court of Inquiry, Exhibit 47.
8. From documents in the Mideast File of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library obtained in 1983 by author Stephen Green under the Freedom of Information Act.
9. From interview with Cryptologic Technician Charles Rowley who was present.
10. Sources: Israeli Defense Forces Preliminary Inquiry File 1/67 of *Liberty* hearing before Sgan-Aluf (Lt. Colonel) Y. Yerushalmi, July 21, 1967; also, Report on the *Liberty* Incident by History Department of the Israeli Defense Forces for senior officers of the U.S. Navy, June 1982.
11. The Israeli Government insists that there was no reconnaissance whatever and that my claims of 13 reconnaissance orbits "may be dis-

missed as exaggerated." However, a careful reading of survivors' testimony in the Navy Court of Inquiry file verifies that all 13 orbits did occur. A Top Secret study by Department of State Legal Adviser Carl F. Salans dated September 21, 1967, cites testimony from crewmen of "overflights of the *Liberty* at 0515, 0850, 1030, 1056, 1126, 1145, 1220 and 1245." Dozens of crewmen are willing to testify publicly that they recall repeated overflights at sea-level level. This report of radio jamming is ridiculed in the IDF History Department report as untrue and impossible. However, the original source of this report is the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry which concluded as a "Finding of Fact" that *Liberty* radios were jammed, apparently by equipment operated from the jets. The use of jamming is confirmed by *Liberty's* Chief Radioman Wayne Smith and by radio logs of the affected radio circuits which reflect loud and unusual circuit noise. See also, *Taking Sides*, p. 230.

13. Navy Court of Inquiry File.
14. President Johnson's Press Secretary, George Christian, told me in 1978 during my research for *Assault on the Liberty*, "There was considerable skepticism in the White House that the attack was accidental, even though tragic mistakes are rather common during wartime." Later, Christian said, he became convinced that "an accident of this magnitude was too much to swallow." Yet the Johnson White House nevertheless chose to look the other way. Donald Neff, in *Warriors for Jerusalem*, Linden Press, 1984, examines in detail the Israeli influences on the Johnson White House which caused that reaction.
15. Probably the single most explosive revelation is Green's finding in *Taking Sides* that the United States knew a day in advance of the Israeli plan to attempt to sink the USS *Liberty* 16. James M. Ennes, Jr. versus Department of State, Civil Action #80-1126 in United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

17. Syndicated column by Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson, June 30, 1967.
18. Admiral Arleigh Burke, Admiral Thomas Moorer, Senator Adlai Stevenson, Senator Barry Goldwater, Congressman Paul Findley, Congressman Paul McCloskey, Seymour Hersh, George Weller, Philip Geyelin.
19. *St. Louis Jewish Light*, *Winnipeg Jewish Post*, *Jewish Western*.
20. December 24, 1980. The editorial was then picked up for national distribution by a national newspaper editorial service and probably appeared in many other newspapers.
21. The national bookseller restored the book to stock after I discussed the problem with Walden VP Kay Sexton.
22. For more information about the *Liberty* film, write to The Liberty Limited Partnership, PO Box 80008, San Marino, California 91108.
23. *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1982, "Survivors Still Seek Answers," p. 1.
24. *The Jewish War Veterans* magazine, April-May-June 1983, p. 7.
25. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, syndicated column, "New Tactics of the Israeli Lobby," February 9, 1983, distributed by Field Enterprises.
26. CIA Information Report, "Attack on USS *Liberty* Ordered by Dayan," based on the report of an informant obviously present in the Israeli War Room. The CIA has since discounted the report as "unevaluated," even though it is consistent with other reports and has not been discredited.
27. This writer has received five separate reports, including one from a highly placed CIA official, that the United States learned in advance that Israel had decided to attack the *Liberty*. Stephen Green in *Taking Sides* is the first to produce a credible witness, in this case former Congressman Robert Sikes of Florida, who is willing to stand behind that information publicly.

The Official Israeli Excuse

The Israeli Government has provided at least four "official versions" of their excuse for the attack on the USS *Liberty*. Various versions conflict with one another as well as with testimony from *Liberty* crewmen and information from the ship's logs. Here are the main points of the Israeli excuse, along with the rebuttal arguments that are given by men who were aboard the ship.

Israel: The *Liberty* was operating too close to shore in a time of war.

Survivors: The *Liberty* was in international waters, never less than 13 miles from the nearest land. The U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry that investigated the matter pointed out that under international law a neutral nation has a legal right to dispatch a ship into international waters adjacent to an area

of hostilities, and that each belligerent has a duty to refrain from attacking such a ship.

Israel: The Israeli Government asked the United States Government whether any American ships were operating near the war zone, but received no reply (or, according to another version, was told that there were no American ships within 100 miles). According to still another official version, however, the ship was identified during the morning, but was mistakenly attacked anyway because someone removed the ship's name from a chart in the Israeli War Room.

Survivors: The claim that Israel asked about American ships in the area was investigated by the Department of State when it was first made in

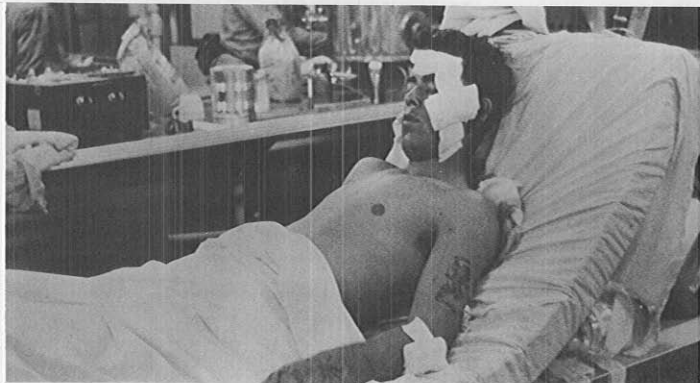
1967. The official finding was that the Israeli claim was a fabrication created by Israel for propaganda purposes.¹

Israel: The town of El Arish was shelled from the sea during the morning.

Survivors: The town of El Arish was not shelled from the sea. That story appears to have been fabricated to explain the presence of torpedo boats in the area.

Israel: Torpedo boats sent to investigate the shelling of El Arish detected the *Liberty* on radar at 1:41 p.m. from a distance of 17 miles and mistakenly calculated her speed as 30 knots.

Survivors: The Israeli story is a physical impossibility. The torpedo boats



James Eaves

A wounded *Liberty* sailor being treated in the ship's mess hall a few hours after the attack.

made the 77-nautical mile trip to the *USS Liberty* from their base at Ashdod in 150 minutes, averaging 30.8 knots (nautical miles per hour). That was close to their top speed in the open sea while fully loaded. At 1:41, when the boats are said to have first detected the *Liberty* on radar, the boats had travelled only about 50 nautical miles. They were still about 27 nautical miles (31 land miles) from the *USS Liberty*. Due to the curvature of the earth, it is impossible for a vessel the size of the Israeli boats to detect an object the size of the *USS Liberty* from a distance of more than about 16 miles. The boats did not come close enough to detect the *Liberty* by radar until 2:00, and by that time the attack was already underway.²

Israel: Due to the ship's supposed high speed, she was thought to be an enemy vessel trying to escape. The torpedo boat commander called for air support.

Survivors: For several hours before the attack, *Liberty's* speed did not exceed five knots. She was incapable of speeds in excess of 17 knots. The Israelis, however, claim to have plotted *Liberty's* speed twice, and to have made a six-fold miscalculation each time. However, since it is impossible for the boats to have detected the *Liberty* by radar at all before the start of the air attack, they could not have made the miscal-

ulation that supposedly led to the air strike. The "30-knot miscalculation" appears to be a fabrication invented to shift blame from Israeli headquarters, which *did* plan and direct the attack.

Israeli: The aircraft made a "run over the ship" and, finding no flag or other identifying marks, commenced the air attack at 2:00 p.m. (According to a 1982 version, they made *two* runs over the ship.)

Survivors: No aircraft made a "run over the ship" in the moments before the attack. Had they done so, they would have seen a distinctly American-looking ship with a freely-flying American flag and American sailors in swim-trunks sunbathing on deck. Other aircraft did circle the ship up to one hour before the attack; however, *Liberty's* radio operators overheard those pilots reporting to Israeli headquarters that the ship *did* fly an American flag.

Israel: At 2:14 p.m., an attacking Israeli pilot reported seeing letters CPR-5 or GTR-5 on the ship's bow. Thinking the ship might be Russian, Israeli headquarters ordered the attack terminated.

Survivors: Certainly Israeli pilots are aware that Soviet ships do not display their identification in English. Soviet ships display numbers only (no

letters), and Egyptian ships such as *El Quseir* display black cursive Arabic script. In any case, the air attack did not stop at 2:14, but continued until almost 2:30 when the torpedo boats were close enough to have been endangered by the aircraft.

Israel: Officers who were aware that *Liberty* had been seen in the area during the morning did not think the ship in question could be the *Liberty* because the ship they were stalking had been moving at 30 knots and had supposedly been conducting a shore bombardment.

Survivors: If the ship being stalked was too fast and too heavily armed to be the *Liberty*, then it could not have been *El Quseir* either. *El Quseir* was even slower and more poorly armed than the *Liberty*.

Israel: When the torpedo boats arrived near *Liberty* at 2:35 p.m., the ship was covered with smoke from the air attack. Before attacking, a careful visual identification was made from close range. Officers on two different torpedo boats identified the ship in front of them as the Egyptian ship *El Quseir* which *Liberty* is said to resemble.

Survivors: Since *El Quseir* was the only ship in the Egyptian Navy that

was not a submarine or a destroyer, it is certain that the torpedomen knew her very well. *El Quseir* was less than half *Liberty's* length and less than one-fifth her overall size. *El Quseir* lacked *Liberty's* distinctive antenna system and had a radically different silhouette. Undoubtedly every Israeli seaman was aware that *El Quseir* was a 40-year-old rusted-out horse carrier for the Egyptian cavalry, totally incapable of launching a shore bombardment. No doubt they knew, too, that *El Quseir* was rooted to her pier in Alexandria waiting to be scrapped. The *El Quseir* story is an elaborate fabrication.

Israel: When asked to identify herself, *Liberty* refused to do so and opened fire on the boats with a machine gun.

Survivors: The Navy Court of Inquiry investigated the Israeli claim in 1967 and reported officially that the *Liberty* did not refuse to identify herself. To the contrary, the *Liberty* flew an oversized American flag as the boats approached, while a signalman repeatedly flashed "U.S. Navy ship" with the ship's 36-inch searchlight.¹

Israel: Convinced that they were facing an enemy ship, the torpedomen fired torpedoes. Moments later the boatmen observed the hull number "GTR-5" in English on the ship's bow and terminated the attack, thinking the ship might be Russian.

Survivors: The Israeli torpedomen continued to fire upon the ship with machine guns until 3:15, when messages from the United States Sixth Fleet promised *Liberty* that help was on the way. Apparently it was the impending arrival of American warplanes that caused the Israelis to stop firing, not the belated sighting of the ship's hull number.

Israel: Rescue helicopters called by the torpedo squadron commander saw an American flag being raised. This was the first indication that the ship might be American.

Survivors: *Liberty* crewmen recall that the helicopters were fully loaded with armed troops in battle dress. Each helicopter trained a large machine gun on *Liberty* sailors from an open doorway. These were attack helicopters, not rescue helicopters. They did not fire, but neither did they offer help. Help

was not offered for another 77 minutes (4:32 p.m.), more than two-and-one-half hours after the first shot was fired.

Israel: Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told a Congressional Committee, "It was the conclusion of the investigatory body...that the attack was not intentional."

Survivors: Robert McNamara's statement in defense of the Israeli attack is misleading and out of context. Israeli apologists ignore the fact that Secretary McNamara was being quizzed by an angry Congressional committee whose members did not believe him at all. The true flavor of the hearing is more accurately reflected in Chairman Borke Hickenlooper's protest: "I can't tolerate for a minute that this was an accident. I think it was a deliberate attack... It creates a sense of utter frustration when we can't find out what the facts are in this thing."⁴

1. The only Israeli request for information about American ships was made on June 9, the day after the attack. The Israeli claim to have asked about American ships was first made to American reporters, not to the American Government, and it was not true. No such assertion was ever made officially by the Israeli Government. Nevertheless, the claim caused great consternation in the State Department and was the

subject of several messages, including AMEMB Tel Aviv serial 4178 JUN 67, USDAO Tel Aviv 161943Z JUN 67, and AMEMB Tel Aviv 162000Z which said flatly: "No request for info on U.S. ships operating off Sinai was made until after *Liberty* incident. Had Israelis made such an inquiry, it would have been forwarded immediately to the Chief of Naval Operations and other high naval commands and repeated to the Department [of State]."

2. The still-withheld Israeli Preliminary Inquiry File 1/67 claims that the torpedo boats left the Ashdod Harbor at 12:05, which is consistent with other reports. For 15 years that report, although deeply flawed, stood as the most definitive Israeli excuse for the attack; it was the product of a judicial proceeding and supposedly drew information from senior officers and official records. In time, however, that version had to be changed. Apparently recognizing that 12:05 departure renders impossible the 1:41 radar sighting which is vital to the Israeli excuse, the Israeli History Department has "changed history" to present a more credible story. The 1982 Israeli Defense Forces now assert that the boats actually left the harbor at 11:35 and were already on patrol when they received orders at 12:05 to "investigate the shelling of *El Arish*."

3. The Israeli claim that the *Liberty* refused to identify herself was investigated thoroughly by Rear Admiral Isaac G. Kidd when it was first made by Israel. Kidd reported emphatically (NAVCOMMUNIT Naples Secret message 061222Z JULY 67) that it did not happen. This writer has probed further by interviewing *Liberty's* signalman, Russell David, who did his best to identify the ship, but was ignored by the torpedomen.

4. Most of the points in the Israeli excuse are addressed in the top secret study by Carl Salan, State Department Legal Adviser. In each case addressed, the State Department study supports our conclusions and refutes the official assertions of the Government of Israel.

Book Views

Taking Sides: American's Secret Relations With a Militant Israel

By Stephen Green
William Morrow and Company, 370 pp., 1984, \$14.95.

Warriors For Jerusalem: Six Days That Changed The Middle East

By Donald Neff
Simon and Schuster, 384 pp., 1984, \$17.95.

By David Yates

Steven Green has limited his study topically to U.S. - Israeli relations from the founding of the Jewish state in 1948 to the June 1967 War. Having supposed, wisely, that sensitive reports by experts would be classified, he

submitted more than 100 Freedom of Information Act requests to 22 different Government agencies. Whenever a request for politically sensitive papers was turned down, Green compensated by conducting interviews with former officials in the U.S. administration who had seen them. This approach results in an automatic revision of history with new information divulged on many episodes which occurred during this era.

There is a misconception prevalent in America that the Israelis were chronically short of arms and dangerously outnumbered by Arab armies in 1948. However, Green quotes classified Army Intelligence and Defense Attaché reports from military experts

in Tel Aviv at that time, which estimated that Israeli fighters outnumbered the Arabs three to one at the termination of the British Mandate. Meanwhile, as the British blockade was lifted, "trained volunteers, arms, and aircraft flooded in from Eastern Europe." By November 1948, at least 160 planes were flying on the Israeli side, piloted mainly by American World War II veterans. Israeli soldiers received training in Czechoslovakia, a country which also sold the Israelis arms for badly needed hard currency, available in the tens of millions of dollars from concerned Americans. As Green puts it, "the Arabs were not fighting the Jews of Palestine. They were fighting the combined forces and resources of the international Jewish community." The Israelis kept their overwhelming military superiority as secret as possible to make them appear a more worthy recipient of U.S. Government assistance.

One of Green's interviews corroborates the interpretation of Israeli Professor Avi Shlaim of "the Lavon Affair." Long considered an inept Israeli attempt to sour relations between the U.S., Great Britain and Egypt, these ineptly run sabotage attempts seem more likely to have been an attempt by some Israeli politicians to destroy secret peace negotiations between the liaisons of Egyptian President Nasser and Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharret. Sharret continues to be exonerated from earlier blemishes, after his family's publication of his personal diary, and Green identifies "the inability of the Eisenhower Administration to recognize the significance of Ben-Gurion's retirement and Sharret's peace initiatives as one of the major U.S. policy failures in the history of the Middle East conflict to date."

More revelations come out about the Six Day War. Green has traced a warning that the Israelis would attack the *Liberty* if she did not change her course to a day before the ship was attacked "by mistake." Another, more startling, discovery describes in detail a mission involving direct U.S. participation in the air attack on Egypt during the war.

In a narrative history of the Six Day War itself, Donald Neff, correspondent and Senior Editor for 16 years of *Time* magazine, has also done a great deal of research, particularly at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. This

history, *Warriors for Jerusalem*, brings two climactic months in Middle East history into sharp focus.

During May and June 1967, the Israeli cabinet began to take direct orders from the military. Accurate intelligence had determined that Israeli military strength would allow them to devastate the Arab armies, and take what land they desired from the Arab people. But the memory of 1956 — (when Ben-Gurion "lost the peace" and was forced by Eisenhower to give up conquered territory) made Prime Minister Eshkol and Foreign Minister Eban somewhat cautious.

But fate was on the side of the army. Coincidentally, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson was at that time left without any domestic support because of his unpopular Vietnam policy, and he had discovered that unequivocal support for Israel was one way, if not the only one, to garnish favorable feedback and muster support for his Administration. In America, "Vietnam doves were Israel hawks." Otherwise at the nadir of his political career, Johnson woke one morning in June to find that an Israeli newspaper poll had rated him more popular than heroes Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman.

The ingenuousness of Johnson's Middle East policy is obvious when one considers that his friends, Arthur and Mathilde Krim, were privately giving him constant advice on handling Israeli affairs at the same time he was claiming his impartiality in public. Not only were the Krims staunch supporters of Israel, but Mathilde had also served in the Irgun terrorist group in the 1940's and had smuggled explosives from cell to cell across the borders of Switzerland, France and Italy. The Krims were frequent guests in the White House. Ironically Mathilde was staying in the White House when the Six Day War erupted.

As Neff says in his prologue, "The crucial support of the United States soon encouraged the most recalcitrant and militant elements... (who) came to govern the State of Israel." Furthermore, "United States' blind support of such reckless leaders (in the Six Day War) tarnished its reputation as a champion of human rights... Because of the events of 1967, America's will and determination to stand on the side of justice are open questions today."

David Yates, a specialist in Middle East affairs, is on the staff of A.M.E.U.

New Selections

□ Stephen Green, *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel*, William Morrow, 1984, 370 pp., \$14.95. Exploring America's behind-the-scenes relations with Israel, the author spent two years examining files recently de-classified, many at his request. Important new information emerges concerning Israeli army strength vis-a-vis the Arabs since the 1940's, Israel's shaky friendship with the Eisenhower Administration, the nuclear power plant at Dimona, and U.S. participation in the 1967 war. Our price, \$11.50. See review on pages 13 and 14.

□ Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: Six Days That Changed the Middle East*, Simon & Schuster, 1984, 384 pp., \$17.95. An award winning *Time* correspondent brings the June 1967 War into focus. The conquest of the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai, the confrontation of American and Russian fleets in the Mediterranean, and the open alliance between America and Israel, are related against a background of the war which destroyed U.S. credibility in the Middle East. Our price, \$12.75. See review on pages 13 and 14.

□ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Palestinian Rights: Affirmation and Denial*, Medina Press, 225 pp., \$7.95. In this book of essays, seventeen distinguished international scholars examine, analyze and detail Palestinian national rights, including their right to national identity, sovereignty in Palestine, return, and representation. The international assessment and response to these rights and their violation by Israel are carefully probed and documented. Our price, \$3.95.

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