

Assault on the Liberty

Addendum to 2002 Edition

September 2002

James M. Ennes, Jr.

Copyright 2002 James M. Ennes, Jr.

All Rights Reserved

EVERY AUTHOR MUST WONDER how his new book will be received, how it will be criticized and, indeed, whether it will be noticed at all. Those concerns and more faced me when *Assault on the Liberty* first appeared, for this book was in many ways more controversial and more vulnerable than most. Because I had criticized Israel, I could be attacked on political or even ethnic and racist grounds. Because I included personal experiences, the book could be dismissed as “merely a memoir.” Because I had criticized some aspects of U.S. Navy performance, I could be called disloyal to the Navy I love. Because I was not a recognized author or an accredited historian, my work could be dismissed on those grounds. And because I was not the first to charge that the attack was deliberate, my new evidence could be dismissed as “nothing new.”

To no surprise, *Assault on the Liberty* was attacked on all those grounds. Many stores refused to carry it, wholesalers and chain bookstores dropped it, distributors regularly lost or misplaced orders for it, and major reviewers such as the *New York Times* and all national news magazines refused to review it. *Newsweek* actually had a review set in type and ready to print before an order came to kill the story.

Slowly, however, other reviewers discovered the book. Reviews that did appear were uniformly favorable, sometimes highly enthusiastic. “A balance between *The Cruel Sea* and *Mr. Roberts*...the most important book you’ll read this year,” said the *Hartford Courant*. “Reads like a thriller,” said the *Washington Post*. “A superbly told account. A gripping yarn that can stand with any of the Hornblower tales,” wrote James J. Kilpatrick. “I’ve never read a more graphic depiction of war and its effects at sea,” said Seymour Hersh. *People* magazine devoted two pages to the story. The professional military organizations were even more positive. “The author develops a strong case to support his contention of a cover-up,” said the *Naval War College Review*. “...A meticulous account, unemotional and detailed – not reckless or shrill. It will require answers,” wrote *Military Review*. “Perhaps the most important naval book of the year,” said the *U.S. Naval Institute* while honoring *Assault* as a “Notable Naval Book.”

Still my mailbox was jammed with letters from strangers who could find me but could not find the book. Few booksellers could identify it when customers asked for it, because it had vanished from most booklists even before it was distributed. Yet stores that did manage to order the book and displayed it prominently often found that it did quite well. Of the 10,000 copies in the first printing, for instance, 4,000 were sold by just four retailers. “We have had it on order for months,” a *Brentano’s* manager told me in the basement of the Pentagon. “It just doesn’t come in,” she said. Her experience was typical.

Much the same happened when *Assault on the Liberty* was published by the Ivy Books division of Ballantine. *Assault* was to be the flagship edition of a new Ivy series of war books, to be featured in every book store in the country. “This

4 – Addendum to “Assault on the *Liberty*”

book will never go out of print,” Ivy told me. “Your grandchildren will be receiving royalties.”

But that was not to be. Ivy did not anticipate the complaints from their Zionist customers. Although the 40,000-copy first printing sold out quickly, it was never reprinted. My inquiries to Ivy and those of my agent went unanswered for nearly two years. Finally, under the terms of my contract, I requested and received return of my rights so that I could republish the book independently.

DESPITE CONTINUING DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS, demand for the book has persisted. More important, the story continues to unfold, evidence for it continues to mount, and people increasingly come forward with new information. For instance, soon after the book was published I heard from Captain Joseph M. Tully, Jr., who commanded the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* during the attack.

During my original research, I had talked with several people aboard the carrier USS *America*, but had not met anyone from the *Saratoga*. Now Captain Tully and some of his top officers filled me in on what was happening aboard “Sara.”

The carrier task force comprising USS *America*, USS *Saratoga*, Sixth Fleet flagship USS *Little Rock* and support vessels was conducting maneuvering exercises north of Crete, Captain Tully reports, when his communications officer brought to him on the bridge a message from the USS *Liberty*. “Under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and require immediate assistance,” said McGonagle’s message. Tully personally relayed the message on a voice radio circuit to the Sixth Fleet Commander, Admiral William Martin, whom he knew to be present on the bridge of his flagship. “Unless otherwise directed, I will launch fighter aircraft immediately to defend the *Liberty*,” he reported as he turned the big carrier into the wind. The Commander concurred and ordered the *America* to do the same.

Saratoga launched within moments. Nothing happened on the *America*. “WTH?” Tully signaled *America*’s skipper, but got no reply. Then one of Tully’s officers returned from the *America* by helicopter to report that the *America* was not prepared to launch because, with the apparent cessation of the Arab-Israeli war, the *America* had been authorized to relax from the high alert status that *Saratoga* had continued to maintain. Thus, *Saratoga* had armed, piloted aircraft ready; *America* did not. Tully launched twelve aircraft and a pair of tankers to refuel them. Help was on the way within moments – in plenty of time, Tully believes, to have prevented the torpedo attack. But none of this helped the *Liberty*. Moments later, as reported in Chapter 6, a message from the flagship ordered the recall of all aircraft. “The Israelis continued their attack on American sailors for almost an hour more,” reports Tully’s navigator, now-retired Admiral Max Morris, who was present on the bridge. “We were forbidden to help and could only listen to *Liberty*’s calls for air cover,” Admiral Morris writes. Captain Tully, too, recalls hearing frightened *Liberty* radiomen calling desperately for help long after all Sixth Fleet aircraft had been called back. Then came the torpedo boats, the torpedo explosion, and silence – while Tully’s frustrated pilots headed toward bases ashore. Nothing more was heard from the USS *Liberty* for hours.

Eventually a message from Washington authorized the second launch of aircraft, but they were not sent until long after the shooting had stopped. These aircraft, too, were recalled moments after they were launched – this time because Israel had admitted responsibility and the aircraft were presumed to be no longer needed.

Although the *America* could not send conventionally armed jets, reports still come in that four jet bombers were catapulted from the carrier *America* with nuclear bombs aboard. Even today there is no official confirmation of that launch and much high-level denial. A nuclear launch has been strongly denied by Secretary McNamara, Admiral Martin (now deceased), Admiral Geis (deceased), Admiral Moorer, and *America*'s skipper, Admiral David Engen (deceased) and others. Yet eyewitness reports persist. Clearly no such launch could have been intended for offensive purposes. Surely nuclear weapons would not have been used in defense of the USS *Liberty*.

It is clear that I was mistaken about the aircraft involved, as F4s do not carry nuclear weapons. Others tell me that the aircraft that were launched carried Bullpup missiles, which might easily be mistaken for nuclear bombs. And we learned much later that the USS *America* was involved in a nuclear weapons loading drill at the very time the ship learned of the attack on the *Liberty* and that this drill is one factor that delayed *America*'s response to our call for help. It is also possible that those were the weapons seen by our sources.

Also confusing this issue is an oral history report from the American Embassy in Cairo, now in the LBJ Library, which notes that the Embassy received an urgent message from Washington warning that Cairo was about to be bombed by US forces, presumably in mistaken retaliation for the USS *Liberty* attack. That strange message was never explained or cancelled.

THE SUBMARINE STORY described in Chapters 3–6 continues to evade official confirmation, although it came to me originally from a man who claims to have been a member of the submarine's crew and has been confirmed orally but confidentially by others, including several members of the crew of the submarine *Amberjack* who say their submarine was involved – although the story is strongly denied by *Amberjack*'s skipper. *Liberty* survivor Charles Rowley has confirmed the original story. The submarine, he says, was on an especially sensitive mission called “Project Cyanide.” And the LBJ Library has released a document showing that, just shortly before *Liberty*'s arrival, a U.S. submarine was authorized to conduct a Top Secret mission within Egyptian territorial waters.

Project Cyanide is discussed in a new *Liberty* video called *Dead in the Water* and in a new book by prize-winning investigative reporter Peter Hounam called *Project Cyanide*.

DETAILS OF THE LIBERTY STORY continue to unfold. How, I wondered in Chapter 10, could the Navy have produced and approved a Court of Inquiry report with so many obvious errors and omissions?

For instance, Captain McGonagle’s testimony has long been a puzzle, partly because his recorded testimony in the Court of Inquiry file is at odds with the recollections of every known survivor. Indeed, for 35 years, when asked about the attack, Captain McGonagle would say only that his crew believed that the attack was deliberate. He declined to express an opinion.

Finally, on June 8, 1997, shortly after he was diagnosed with lung cancer, Captain McGonagle, in a speech at Arlington National Cemetery honoring his dead crewmen, told the assembled group that “for many years I wanted to believe that the attack was pure error” but “it appears to me that it was not a pure case of mistaken identity” and called upon the governments of both countries to release details that would explain why the ship was attacked. He died March 3, 1999, without any answers.

ADMIRAL KIDD, who died in 1999, defended his work to the end. In several letters and long telephone conversations with me, Admiral Kidd never disputed my conclusions and encouraged me to persist in my effort to tell the story. Yet when I challenged his official findings, he insisted that the evidence I point to was not available to him during the proceeding, and that in any case I have not had access to the “full picture.” Asked if the “full picture” includes information withheld from the record, he denied that anything was excluded, yet he was unable or unwilling to clarify the many inconsistencies and contradictions in the record or to explain why weather logs, pertinent deck logs, my sworn testimony and other vital records are missing.

A report from Navy headquarters in London, however, does show that Kidd’s Court of Inquiry report did not have smooth sailing between completion in London and official acceptance in Washington.

The just-completed report, we have learned, was personally delivered by Kidd to Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, who had convened the Court. There it was assigned to the staff legal officer, then-Captain Merlin Staring, to review and to prepare a forwarding letter for McCain’s signature. But Staring, who eventually became Judge Advocate General of the Navy and retired from the Navy as a rear admiral, was not impressed with the caliber of the record.

Israeli apologist A. Jay Cristol (*The Liberty Incident*, Brassey’s) characterizes Staring as a pedant and claims that his concerns were for errors of spelling and punctuation. This was not the case at all. Staring had very serious concerns about the quality and integrity of the Court’s work. Before he had even completed reading the 700-plus pages, he had compiled a long list of questions and apparent discrepancies. Among other things, he was concerned that many of the Findings were unsupported by and even contrary to the evidence in the record.

Admiral McCain, however, was under pressure from Washington to speed the report along. So rather than deal with Staring's questions, he had another officer prepare a "quickie" endorsement and forwarded the flawed report to Washington – warts and all. Kidd conveyed it personally to Washington in a locked briefcase chained to his wrist.

Since review of the Court of Inquiry was Staring's responsibility as staff legal officer, he feared that the hasty approval would reflect badly upon his professional reputation and integrity. He was so concerned, in fact, that he sent a personal letter to the Judge Advocate General of the Navy disassociating himself from the report. The Court of Inquiry report, however, even without Staring's endorsement, had been officially approved by Admiral McCain. It sailed quickly through the approval process without a single question being asked.

Perhaps because he was alerted by Captain Staring, however, the Judge Advocate General did have some obvious problems with the report. Usually JAG's endorsements are pro forma forwarding letters, particularly when the convening authority is a four star admiral who has given the report his full approval. Not this one. Here the Judge Advocate General prepared an unprecedented 23-page summary of evidence in the record, while almost entirely ignoring the "findings."

JAG, in other words, took his summary from the testimony and evidence in the record, not from the "findings" of the court. And, unlike the "findings," which would have us believe that reconnaissance was almost nonexistent, the air still and the attack brief, the JAG endorsement describes eight reconnaissance flights, a flag that fluttered in a good breeze and an extended attack – exactly as described in *Assault on the Liberty*.

This exceptional endorsement, while not acknowledging any errors in the report itself, did serve to correct the most obvious errors and contradictions. It spared JAG any embarrassment for having forwarded a flawed report, and it presented the Chief of Naval Operations with a summary that could be approved in good conscience – for certainly no senior officer would take time to read the full report. And none of this would come to light for many years, since it was all classified Top Secret and locked away.

The final stamp of approval and acceptance was given by a Deputy Chief of Naval Operations subordinate to Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, who approved the report for the Navy. And citizens who question the report's defects – for there are many defects and they are obvious – receive boiler-plate replies that ignore the questions. The Navy's acceptance makes the report "legal and final," inquisitive citizens are told. No further review is possible. The matter is closed.

Apologist Cristol maintains that "the quality of the report is outstanding." Any layman reading the report can readily see that this is not the case. Such a claim coming from a lawyer of Cristol's experience only reveals his bias.

For years, that badly flawed report has been considered the final word on the attack; it in turn has spawned other flawed reports, such as the Clark Clifford report to President Johnson which concluded, based solely upon Clifford's review of the flawed Kidd report, that there was no evidence that the attack was deliberate.

Years ago I wrote to every member of the Court of Inquiry to ask how the Court could justify Findings of Fact that were contrary to and unsupported by evidence in the record, which is a legal requirement. None of the members answered my letter.

Finally, in June, 2002, *Navy Times* demolished the 35-year-old charade when they interviewed retired Navy Captain Ward Boston, who served as Admiral Kidd’s legal advisor to the Court. Both he and Admiral Kidd regarded the attack as deliberate, Captain Boston told *Navy Times*. How could the Court report legal Findings that the attack was probably accidental when they believed it was deliberate? “Officers follow orders,” Captain Boston said.

For 35 years that corrupt report has been the source of other flawed reports. Israeli sources claim constantly that the Court of Inquiry report “exonerates Israel”. The flawed report is cited constantly by apologists for Israel who claim that survivors’ stories cannot be true because they are inconsistent with the Court of Inquiry report. Now we know, directly from the Court’s own legal advisor, that the report itself was a sham because “officers follow orders”. For 35 years survivors have asked Congress and the Navy for a new investigation because the original was incomplete and corrupt. This should end the argument.

REPORTS CONTINUE THAT the United States learned on June 7 that Israel intended to attack the *Liberty* a day later. Perhaps the best work on that subject was done by author Stephen Green in *Taking Sides* (Morrow, 1984). Green learned through interviews with members of the intelligence working group of the 1967 Defense Subcommittee on Appropriations that the subcommittee had investigated the *Liberty* affair in September of that year. The committee concluded, Green tells us, that the attack was deliberate and that the United States knew in advance of Israeli plans to attack.

Senior CIA and NSA officials testified before that committee, Green learned. Both reported that they considered the attack deliberate – although neither has admitted publicly to foreknowledge of Israeli plans. The report itself is still Top Secret 35 years later. The official justification, we are told, is that release would “embarrass an ally.” Even today, the report’s contents are staunchly protected by several pro-Israel congressmen who still refuse to release it.

To verify Green’s report even further, we had a long interview with a former CIA analyst who confirms the essential details. According to the analyst, the CIA was asked three questions by the White House immediately after the attack. The CIA reply: Yes, the attack was deliberate. Yes, Israel knew in advance it was an American naval vessel. We do not yet know who in Israel ordered the attack. (Not long after, as we know, the CIA received a report from Israel that Moshe Dayan ordered the attack.)

Further evidence of deliberate intent came from a career U.S. Navy intelligence officer known personally to me who wishes to remain anonymous. The officer attended a senior cryptologic manager’s course at the National Security Agency in 1979 when the USS *Liberty* was discussed. The instructor, my friend

reports, was Major General John E. Morrison, Jr., USAF (retired) who informed the class that Israeli plans to attack were known to NSA twenty-four hours beforehand and that they were the reason for the frantic attempts to move the ship. Later, however, when I queried both General Morrison and NSA legend Frank Raven about this, both men denied that NSA had any foreknowledge of the pending attack.

Yet another report came from retired Air Force Lt. Colonel Ralph Hoppe, now retired, who had access in 1967 to an intelligence analysis of the *Liberty* attack. According to Hoppe, a Top Secret message from the Defense Intelligence Agency reported the consensus of the entire U.S. intelligence community that the attack was deliberately conducted against a ship known by the Israelis to be American. The incriminating report, however, proved too dangerous to stay in print. Almost immediately, it was ordered canceled. All copies were collected and destroyed, along with all supporting documents. Colonel Hoppe has told this story on national television and is willing to testify before Congress if asked.

OF ALL THE REPORTS from the scene to support survivors' claims that the attack was deliberate, probably none are more revealing than several reports of intercepted messages between the attacking Israeli jets and their headquarters.

Shortly after *Assault on the Liberty* was first published, I was contacted by an Israeli pilot named Evan Tovni who called from New York to say that he flew the first attacking Mirage. On his first pass, he said, he saw the American flag and asked his headquarters for instructions. "Attack," he was told. He refused to do so and returned to headquarters, where he was arrested. His wingmen followed orders and continued the attack.

Ambassador Dwight Porter in Beirut was informed of this intercept and eventually told the story to me and to columnists Evans and Novak, who wrote about it in their syndicated column. Israeli Major Seth Mintz also told us – and denied later – that he heard those conversations from within an Israeli war room. Still, Israeli supporters claimed the stories were untrue.

Eventually author Jim Bamford reported in *Body of Secrets* (Doubleday) that Navy intercept operator Marvin Nowicki, overhead in an air force EC121, had also intercepted fighter pilots' messages which indicated that they knew they were attacking Americans. Nowicki later recanted, saying he was misquoted, but others were coming forward to tell the same story.

Richard Block, an Air Force watch captain at the 6931st All Source Reconnaissance Center in Crete, was receiving intelligence from the airplane and confirms the Nowicki/Bamford account. Charles Tiffany, one of the EC121's navigators, also confirms the story and adds that Israeli jets were scrambled with orders to shoot down his aircraft. They narrowly escaped by gaining speed with a power dive from 12,500 feet and very quickly leaving the area. Block confirms the Tiffany account of the near shootdown. Another Air Force analyst in Nebraska, who talked to us and only agreed to film his recollections if he was shown in shadow, confirms in the *Dead in the Water* documentary that the Israeli pilots

knew they were attacking Americans. Still others who do not wish to be identified publicly have confirmed that the United States has known for 35 years that the attack was no accident. Now, with recent publicity and convenient email access, these people are coming out of hiding to blow away all pretense that the attack was accidental.

A Hebrew linguist in London who gained access to recordings of the actual communications tells us that they, too, leave no doubt that the Israeli pilots knew they were attacking an American ship. “How can certain authors and apologists for Israel claim otherwise?” I asked. “Either they are lying, or they don’t speak the language very well,” he said.

MANY LIBERTY SURVIVORS have come forward to add vital details to the story. For instance, the Israelis claim that their decision to attack was based partly upon *Liberty*’s failure to fly a flag and her refusal to identify herself when asked. Kidd, despite his calculated whitewash, determined that claim to be untrue. Now former signalman Russell David provides further confirmation. According to David, he and signalman Joe Meadors together hauled up the oversize American flag well before the torpedo boats came within visual range. Also, unknown to McGonagle, David repeatedly signaled “USS LIBERTY, US NAVY SHIP” to the boats in English as they approached. David first used the ship’s 36-inch signal light on the starboard side of the bridge, then moved to the 12-inch lamp when the larger one was disabled. He used that light to signal repeatedly to the approaching boats until he was struck by gunfire and the lamp was shot out. Then Meadors took over the task and continued to signal to the boats.

The Israeli claim that the ship refused to identify herself was also investigated by Admiral Kidd separately from the Court of Inquiry proceedings, and his findings were reported to Washington by message on July 6, 1967, almost a month after the attack. According to the Israelis, McGonagle sent a signal “AA” supposedly meaning “identify yourself first.” Kidd determined, however, that no such signal was sent. Even if “AA” had been sent, however, the signal should not have caused the attack. According to the Navy Historian and other experts, “AA” is merely an invitation to communicate. It has never meant “identify yourself” as the Israelis claim.

Chief Radioman Wayne Smith has described in more detail the scene in the ship’s radio room during the attack. The room was filled with smoke, Smith reports, due to napalm and gasoline fires that raged just outside, causing paint inside the room to blister and smoke on the overheated steel bulkhead. Radiomen worked on their hands and knees to try to stay below the smoke, reaching up to tune transmitters and receivers. The work was especially difficult, Smith reports, because the frequencies needed were being blocked by Israeli radio jamming equipment – thus confirming findings of the Court of Inquiry that *Liberty*’s radios were jammed. Of the six frequencies needed to call for help, Smith reports, five were blocked by a buzz saw sounds apparently broadcast from the jets. Smith

reached the carrier *Saratoga* with his call for help only because the Israelis overlooked a sixth frequency, which he was able to use.

Smith’s report is important, because Israel could not possibly have blocked the signal without knowing who we were and what language we were using. Israel and its defenders deny that jamming occurred at all, attributing the report to me and claiming I am wrong or malicious. However, that report came from the Court of Inquiry, not from me.

THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT has now produced at least seven official and semi-official accounts of what “really” happened to the USS *Liberty*. Many of those accounts are specific attacks on the story told here. Unfortunately, rather than address the facts as documented in U.S. government records, the Israeli accounts generally attribute the story exclusively to Jim Ennes and then attempt to discredit Ennes as a bigot, a racist, a pro-Arab propagandist, or an emotional hot-head whose perceptions have become distorted by battle and the sight of blood. Also overlooked by the Israelis is the fact that the same story is told by scores of *Liberty* survivors. Then the Israelis simply retell their original stories, often with variations to rebut new details as they are revealed. None of these accounts examine the readily available evidence in U.S. government records or attempt to resolve the difference between U.S. and Israeli versions.

A striking example is a 55-page study of the *Liberty* attack created by the Israeli Defense Force History department specifically as a rebuttal to *Assault on the Liberty* and sent personally to the American Chief of Naval Operations in 1982. While earlier accounts have asserted that the Israeli torpedo boats left their base at Ashdod during the noon hour to investigate reported shelling at El Arish, the new account claims that the boats were already at sea when they received those orders – thus did not have as far to travel. According to the new version, the boats were 22 miles from the *Liberty* at 1341 (not 27 miles as earlier reports would have it) when they made the fatal radar plotting error that supposedly brought the order to call in aircraft. Even detection at 22 miles, the Israelis acknowledge, was “highly unusual.” Due to the size of the vessels and the curvature of the earth, we believe any detection beyond 12 or 15 miles was impossible.

The IDF report also goes on to describe, in somewhat more detail than most other accounts, the careful steps the Israelis claim to have taken in their efforts to identify the ship before attacking. The lead pilot dropped to low level and circled the ship twice, they claim, looking for a flag or other markings but could find none. His second-in-command also circled, but could see no identifying marks. Both men concluded that the ship was Egyptian. As we know, however, dozens of *Liberty* crewmen saw those aircraft commence their attack without any attempt to examine her closely.

The IDF account also mentions reports in the book that the ship was circled thirteen times during eight daylight reconnaissance visits. “Ennes’s claim regarding reconnaissance can be dismissed as exaggerated,” the Israeli report claims.

Any aircraft seen from the *Liberty* were transport planes high in the sky whose pilots probably failed to notice the ship at all, the report claims. Yet, had the Israelis bothered to check, they would have found all eight reconnaissance visits fully documented in the Court of Inquiry and other official American records including sworn testimony of survivors.

Soon after that report was published, *Liberty*'s Master Chief Petty Officer, Stan White, wrote directly to the President of Israel and to the head of the IDF History Department asking them to reconsider their conclusions in view of documented contrary evidence in U.S. government files. Replies from both men informed Master Chief White that the Israeli government was quite content with the report as it now stands and did not wish to consider any additional evidence.

Like the other ever-changing Israeli accounts, we believe the IDF History Department report is an elaborate fabrication.

Even thirty-five years later, following several books and television documentaries telling the story, Israel and its supporters cling doggedly to the claim that the attack was a tragic accident caused because we flew no flag and refused to identify ourselves when asked, none of which is true.

A most persistent argument from the Israeli side is that the attack could not have been deliberate because there was no logical motive. “Why would Israel attack its best friend and benefactor?” they ask.

Several possibilities emerge. Clearly Israel was doing *something* that they did not want the US to know about. Some US intelligence professionals have suggested that this was the planned invasion of the Golan Heights. The 1956 Suez war was still a bitter memory in which President Eisenhower forced Israel to withdraw before they could capture the Suez Canal. Better to present the United States with a *fait accompli*. Others suggest it may have been to prevent the ship from detecting the shooting of 1,000 Egyptian Prisoners of War that was then underway at El Arish, just 13 miles from *Liberty*'s position off the coast. Surely this grave war crime, if known to Americans, would weaken American support for the Jewish state. Or perhaps, as others suggest, Israel attacked the USS *Liberty* in order to blame the attack on Egypt, thus providing an easy justification for the US to enter the war openly on Israel's side.

As with any criminal act, we may never know the motive unless the criminal tells us, and these criminals are still lying about what happened even after more than 35 years.

Yet for all the evasions and explanations presented by Israel's many apologists, no one can explain how competent Israeli pilots and naval officers could possibly confuse USS *Liberty* for a 40-year old horse transport a quarter her size, or how the torpedomen could continue to fire by mistake on the ship from close range for forty minutes after examining her American flag and her name in English from fifty feet away. Some simply claim that all 250 or so living survivors are lying, a proposition which is as preposterous as the claim that it was all a tragic mistake.

NOR HAS THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT been entirely silent about the *Liberty*. Soon after the book first appeared in 1980, I was invited to discuss the attack with then-Senator Adlai Stevenson III in his office in Washington. The senator quizzed me privately for two hours, then had me return the next day for two more hours of heavy questioning by several congressional staff members.

When it was over, Senator Stevenson called me at home to say that he thought the attack was deliberate and that the American people deserved to know the truth. Then he called a news conference to announce his intention to look into the charges. The story was widely reported on September 28, 1980, in a UPI story by William J. Small.

Unfortunately, Senator Stevenson had not run for reelection and his term was about to expire. Nevertheless, he set about working with Senator Barry Goldwater and other members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to start the machinery needed for an official inquiry.

Suddenly, just before Christmas, an aide to Senator Stevenson called to say that President Carter had just agreed to an Israeli offer to pay \$6-million in three annual \$2-million installments for damage to the ship.

This was a dramatic reversal, since Israel for thirteen years had steadfastly refused to pay for damage to the ship. Negotiations had continued and the American side had never stopped demanding payment, but the Israelis remained intransigent. Payments for the dead and wounded were made for "humanitarian" reasons, the Israelis said; damage to the ship was caused by American blunders and would not be paid for. Now suddenly the Israelis had reversed themselves, and I wondered why.

The next day a State Department press release announced, "The book is closed on the USS *Liberty*." News reports around the world including a *New York Times* front page story announced the agreement, usually repeating the "book is closed" caption.

And the book was indeed slammed shut. From that day on, Adlai Stevenson could not find a single senator willing to support or even to consider an investigation of the USS *Liberty*. Could there possibly be a connection, I wondered, between the September announcement of an investigation and the December agreement?

State Department files show that the two events were inextricably linked. Notes from meetings at the Department of State reveal that *Assault on the Liberty* and Adlai Stevenson's interest in the subject were discussed. More revealing, State Department spokesmen who announced the settlement agreement were specifically briefed on how to respond to press questions about the book. "Those charges are not new," they were told to say. "Allegations that the attack was deliberate have been made for years. The Department, however, has no information to substantiate those allegations."

Adlai Stevenson paid the usual price for his courageous support of the USS *Liberty*. He was branded an enemy of Israel and his quest for the governorship of Illinois ended in defeat.

DESPITE CONTINUED OBSTRUCTION by both the Israeli and American governments, information about the *Liberty* continues to trickle out.

For instance, despite repeated Freedom of Information Act requests, the Israeli report by IDF Colonel Ram Ron described in Chapter 10 has never been released except in the hastily transcribed form copied by the U.S. Naval Attaché. We have learned, however, that Colonel Ron’s report led to a recommendation within Israel that certain Israeli military officers be considered for possible trial by court martial. A “preliminary inquiry” was then conducted by Israeli Military Judge Lieutenant Colonel Yeshayahu Yerushalmi to determine whether a court martial should be conducted.

The Yerushalmi report, exonerating everyone in Israel and putting most of the blame on *Liberty*’s captain, was signed in Israel on July 13, 1967. It was subsequently delivered by hand on August 15 by Israeli Foreign Minister Ephraim “Eppy” Evron to Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Eugene V. Rostow with an urgent request that it be withheld from the American public.

The request has been honored, even though the document is unclassified. Within the Department of the Navy, for instance, its distribution was restricted to four admirals: the Chief of Naval Operations, Chief of Naval Information, Chief of Naval Intelligence and the Naval Security Group Commander. By mistake, however, a copy of the unmarked document was filed in the unclassified public information file of the Office of Naval Information, where it was found, legally copied, and sent to us.

Yerushalmi’s report shows, as Ram Ron’s had earlier, that the Israelis did identify the ship as American during the morning. Like Ron, Yerushalmi claims that the ship was attacked anyway because its identification marking was removed from a war room chart shortly before the ship was “rediscovered” and thought to be Egyptian.

Although the Yerushalmi report can probably still be legally copied today from the unclassified public file, the official custodians of that document still refuse to release it under the Freedom of Information Act, claiming that it is exempt from the law. Ironically, however, a detailed analysis of the still-withheld report has been released – though not willingly – in a \$25,000 Freedom of Information lawsuit by James Miller of Milwaukee who was inspired by reading this book.

That five-page analysis by State Department legal adviser Carl Salans examines each point of the Israeli excuse and weighs its credibility. Salans had only Kidd’s Court of Inquiry report and Clifford’s now-missing report for the President to work from. Yet, despite the handicap, he found enough to discredit completely each point in the Israeli excuse. The Salans report is the most stinging indictment of the Israeli position ever found in official U.S. files. It shows clearly that the Israeli excuse is untrue. Worse, it shows that key American officials have been aware from the beginning that the Israelis are lying and have chosen to look the other way. Instead of demanding answers from Israel, the Department of State classified the report “Top Secret” and locked it away until it was forced out through the federal courts in 1983.

ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING ASPECTS of the *Liberty* affair and cover-up has been the stolid refusal of American government officials to admit that anything is wrong or even to address the subject seriously.

Members of Congress usually forward questions about the *Liberty* to the Navy or the Department of State for a reply. There, clerks ignore the questions and instead pull boilerplate paragraphs from computers to make the following points:

1. Allegations that the attack was deliberate have been made for years.
The Department, however, has no information to substantiate those allegations.
2. The circumstances of the attack were "thoroughly investigated" in 1967 "by an admiral in whom we have great confidence" during a hearing in which survivors testified freely and messages to and from the ship were reviewed.
3. The court had insufficient evidence to determine the reasons for the Israeli decision to attack, but found no evidence that the attack was deliberate.
4. The Israeli government apologized and paid approximately \$7-million in damages to surviving crewmen and families of men who died. In 1980 another \$6-million was paid for damage to the ship.
5. The matter is closed. There are no plans to reopen the investigation. Any further inquiries should be directed to the Judge Advocate General of the Navy.

MOST CONGRESSMEN SIMPLY forward State's reply with a brief statement saying something like, "As you can see, Israel apologized and paid compensation for the attack. If I can be of any further help..."

Many Congressional replies are evasive.

"I will remember your views if this matter comes to the floor for a vote," says Senator Daniel Moynihan, ignoring the questions.

"Anti-Semitism is a terrible scourge," writes Senator Carl Levin, sidestepping the issue while impugning the writer's motives.

Some replies are creative.

"The USS *Liberty* was in Port Said, Egyptian waters of a declared war zone," writes a badly misinformed Senator Paul Simon. "She and her crew were relaying intelligence information. The obvious concern of the Israelis was that the USS *Liberty* was relaying to the Egyptians intelligence information concerning Israeli military logistics."

But despite the evasions, follow-up letters do sometimes bring offers to support an inquiry and some members of Congress have been willing to demand better answers from the agencies involved. So far, the voices have been small and the replies from State and Navy have been consistently unresponsive. That will only change, we believe, when Members of Congress hear from enough of their constituents to realize that Americans do want their government to tell the truth about the USS *Liberty*.

DESPITE THE PASSAGE OF TIME and the documented certainty that the attack was deliberate and that the Israelis (and their American apologists) are lying about it, the story will not go away.

Survivors, with the support and encouragement of Admiral Thomas Moorer and others, have gathered together to tell the truth about the attack to the American public and to properly honor the memory of our lost shipmates. Through the association, *Liberty* survivors stay in touch, hold periodic reunions, publish a newsletter, operate a web site at <http://www.usliberty.com>, and work to tell the truth about the attack. Many of the men speak regularly before local civic and veterans groups, write letters and articles, and give press and radio interviews when asked. Until the U.S. government tells the truth about the *Liberty*, many of the ship’s survivors are determined to do it themselves.

JAMES M. ENNES, JR.
SEPTEMBER 2002

ERRATA AND NOTES TO REINTREE PRESS EDITION

Page 13: Frank Raven wrote to me in 1983 to say that he objected, not to the mission, but to the ship's planned location near the contested coast. He wanted to station the ship near Crete where she would be safer. He says he "blew up and started pushing panic buttons all over the place" when he discovered that *Liberty* was moving toward the coast, but his efforts to move the ship failed. "After all that, I was heartbroken when the *Liberty* was attacked," he wrote.

Page 19: The six men who came aboard in Rota were Wilson, Blue, Blalock, Lockwood, Raper and Rehmeyer, all Arab or Russian linguists. Only Blue knew any Hebrew, and he had learned it on his own in his spare time for fun. He was not a qualified linguist.

Page 37: Bob Eisenberg was probably the only Jew in this room and probably the only Jew to die in the attack. He was proud of being Jewish, identified with the Israeli war effort, and kept his own map on his desk on which he charted the progress of the war.

Page 74: After initial attempts to communicate, Ward raced to the transmitter room to help the men there tune another transmitter. "Ward saved the day," Chief Smith said later. From that point on, all communications were by Wayne Smith and Jim Halman. The room was thick with smoke from burning paint on the hot inside bulkheads caused by the napalm and gasoline fires outside. "To keep breathing, we took turns tuning receivers, talking into mikes, and writing down whatever the captain was shouting into the ship's general announcing circuit, all the while hugging the deck to avoid the smoke," Smith said.

Meanwhile, Terry Halbardier and Steve Latorre repeatedly exposed themselves to vicious fire from the aircraft in order to repair the one serviceable radio antenna by running a coaxial cable from the damaged antenna across the dangerous open deck and through a watertight door to a working transmitter.

Page 75: Jamming of his frequencies was thorough and sophisticated, Chief Smith reports, and consisted of buzz saw sounds on some frequencies and bagpipe sounds on others. He could find only one clear frequency, and this is the one they used to reach the Sixth Fleet, he says. Smith reports that the Court of Inquiry seemed skeptical about this, and he got the impression they did not believe him, but the Court did report a Finding of Fact that the radios were apparently jammed. Israel insists that this did not happen and claims that "Ennes is simply mistaken," ignoring the fact that this comes from the Court of Inquiry, not from me. And well they should deny it, for it is impossible to sustain an argument that they did not know we were American if they knew enough about us to jam our radio circuits.

Page 75: Chief Smith reports that he handled the emergency destruction himself in the smoke-filled room. In confusion, smoke and haste, he tore out and destroyed only the one page they needed to prove that their call for help was legitimate.

Page 77: The question whether nuclear weapons were launched is still hotly contested more than 35 years later. Witnesses, including a catapult operator, UPI reporter Harry Stathos, and others who claim familiarity with nuclear weapons all insist that the aircraft did carry nuclear bombs – for whatever reason no one can guess. Others insist that such weapons can only be launched upon orders from Washington, and that the men may have mistaken Bullpup missiles for nuclear bombs. In any case, F4s do not carry nuclear weapons. While the jury is still out, I think the truth is that the weapons seen were Bullpup missiles.

Page 86: Lockwood helped rescue David Hawkins and Fred Johns and probably others, no doubt saving their lives.

Page 88: Radarman Charles Cocnavitch tells us that Seaman Quintero fired on the center torpedo boat just as that boat fired its torpedo at us, causing the center boat to swerve into the path of another torpedo boat, which also swerved, thereby spoiling the aim of both boats. Thus Quintero’s gunfire may have been the most important single act of the day, saving the ship. Quintero’s heroic act went largely unnoticed and was unacknowledged and unrewarded.

Page 91: As we learned much later, USS *America* was involved in a nuclear weapons loading drill which made it impossible for the ship to respond to our call for help for more than 90 minutes.

Page 96: Israel and its many apologists hotly contest reports that the life rafts were deliberately fired upon, which is a serious war crime under international law. However, the act was witnessed by several *Liberty* survivors, including Americo Aimetti, Tom Smith, Phil Tourney, Al Easton and Lloyd Painter, all of whom are prepared and willing to so testify under oath if asked.

Page 106: Americo Aimetti retrieved the message packet, which was actually a brown paper lunch bag weighted down with an orange from someone’s lunch. He raced to the bridge with the message, slipping on some spilled oil along the way. McGonagle reacted angrily, cursing the helicopter and giving the men the finger. Castle misinterpreted the single extended digit to mean “one casualty” and so reported in his message to Washington.

Page 117: Larry Goins was dispatched by McGonagle to the forecastle with a flashlight where he spent the night flashing “AA AA AA” into the sky to guide the expected aircraft, but no aircraft ever arrived.

Page 121: "Smokey" contacted me after reading this section. He was Roger Annan from Illinois.

Page 127: Harry Stathos called me later from New York to describe his frustration trying to uncover and report this story. He learned from clandestine interviews with survivors that the true story was not being told and that the attack was undoubtedly deliberate, and so reported. But he learned later that his stories were being refiled and changed without his knowledge, removing all suggestions that the attack was not an accident.

Page 131: USS *Fred T. Berry* (DD 858) not USS *Barry*.

Page 135: The officer with jaundice was Peyton Dobbins, a man of impeccable judgment and taste, who eventually married nurse Felicity.

Page 154: On October 6, 1981, General Ghazala, then Egyptian Defense Minister, was wounded during the assassination attack on President Anwar Sadat.

Page 160: Charles Rowley reported later that he gave the Court a photograph he took during morning reconnaissance which showed the flag clearly displayed in a good breeze. The Court confiscated the photograph and stamped it Top Secret, no doubt because it conflicted with the official finding that it was a windless day.

Page 161: *El Quseir* displayed pennant number 91 in black cursive Arabic script.

Page 163: Soon after the attack, Admiral Martin came personally to the flagship's photo lab where he confiscated all photographs and negatives depicting the *Liberty*.

Page 206: According to pro-Israel apologist A. Jay Cristol, Bennett now denies that this conversation occurred at all. It did.

Page 283: This resolution was proposed and sponsored by Frank Maria of Warner, New Hampshire. It brought shrill protests from apologists for Israel who complained that it was anti-Semitic. The American Legion took no action to support the resolution, eventually withdrew it, and has staunchly resisted *Liberty*-related resolutions ever since.

