

New Evidence Shows Israel's Attack on USS *Liberty* Far More Vicious Than Thought

STARTLING NEW EVIDENCE about the 1967 Israeli attack on the American naval vessel, the USS *Liberty*, has been brought to light in a just-released Random House book, *Assault On The Liberty*, by James M. Ennes, Jr.

Ennes was on the bridge of the *Liberty* during much of the assault. He was commissioned an ensign in 1962, and from 1965 until he retired from the Navy, he was assigned to cryptologic duties.

The *Liberty*, which was attacked in international waters off the Sinai Peninsula, was initially attacked by Israeli high performance jets. Those attacks were followed by torpedo boats armed to kill. The attack lasted for two hours, killing 34 Americans and wounding 171 others. When the *Liberty* failed to sink quickly, Israeli forces machine-gunned her life rafts and sent in troop-carrying helicopters.

Once the US' Sixth Fleet rescue aircraft were on their way, the Israelis quickly apologized, claiming that her forces had mistaken the ship for an Egyptian freighter. The US government quietly accepted the excuse. But Ennes produces strong evidence to support the following new allegations:

- Pre-attack reconnaissance was more intense than the government has admitted: at least 13 orbits of the ship were made by reconnaissance aircraft before the attack, some only 200 feet overhead.

(The government claims that only three significant reconnaissance flights were made, and that only one aircraft came within five miles of the ship.)

- The identification of the ship was known to the Israeli War Room several hours before the attack, and its position plotted on a chart.

(An Israeli aircraft was heard before the attack informing its headquarters by radio that the ship flew an American flag. Bowing to the Israeli request to keep cir-

cumstances of the attack secret, however, the American government states publicly that the *Liberty* was not identified until after the attack.)

- Three days before the attack, USS *Liberty* requested the Sixth Fleet to send an armed destroyer to provide protection against attack.

(The Sixth Fleet's commander assured the *Liberty* that she was operating in a safe area, promising immediate support in the "unlikely" event it might be needed—and denying the ship's request for special protection.)

- Although the Sixth Fleet promised air support within 10 minutes of any request, the US Navy failed to protect the ship during the attack.

(The *Liberty* pleaded over the radio for assistance for more than two hours, but the Sixth Fleet—because of White House intervention and Sixth Fleet unpreparedness—failed to come to her aid.)

- Israel's explanation for the attack contradicts known facts and evidence, but was accepted without question by the American government.

(Israel claims that the *Liberty* was mistaken for the small Egyptian freighter *El Arish*, even though Israel and the US were both aware that *El Arish* was far from the area. Israel also claims that the attack occurred because Israeli motor torpedo boats falsely identified *Liberty* as an enemy vessel after erroneously tracking the ship by radar at 30 knots—although she was only moving at five knots—and subsequently called in the air strike. The strike, which in fact was called before the torpedo boats were within radar range of the *Liberty*, was organized by forces ashore.)

- A cover-up of the circumstances of the attack was ordered by President Johnson. (The President was concerned with negotiating a peace treaty in the Middle East and could ill afford a confrontation with Israel;

he thus accepted Israel's flimsy explanation, failed to investigate the attack properly, and ordered a cover-up of the circumstances that were already known.)

- *Liberty* sailors were forbidden any unsupervised contact with the press, even after the "news lid" was lifted.

(Crewmen were not allowed to talk with reporters until after a Court of Inquiry report was published. Even then, however, sailors were permitted to repeat only the official version of the attack and only in the same words the Court had used. The few interviews that were authorized were carefully supervised and rehearsed.)

- Testimony to the Court of Inquiry revealed that the attack was probably deliberate, but all such evidence was withheld from the public.

(*Liberty* officers and crewman told the Court of Inquiry of extensive low-level pre-attack reconnaissance, of the ship's American flag clearly displayed and of a prolonged and carefully orchestrated attack. All such details were ignored or classified Top Secret in order to support the government's contention that the

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attack was a mistake.)

- The American public was given a distorted version of the attack.

(The public was told that the air attack lasted five or six minutes; the ship's officers recall—and testified—that it lasted 20 or 25 minutes. The US claims that the attack ended with the torpedo explosion, while in fact torpedo boats fired on the ship's life rafts 40 minutes after that explosion—and fired on the crew in the interim. The fact that Israeli forces repeatedly used napalm against the crew was never made known. Moreover, although the government claims that the ship was never in danger of sinking, officers recall that "scuttle ship," "demolish ship" and "prepare to abandon ship" orders were given.)

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