8 June 1967

~~SECRET SAVIN~~

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: USS LIBERTY

About 0900 I was notified by Brigadier General Morrison that the USS LIBERTY, an AGTR, had been hit by torpedo while on station in the Mediterranean. The critic provided coordinates which showed that she was less than 14 miles off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula, about mid-way between the Suez Canal and the Gaza Strip. The depth of water shown on the chart which I used for plotting the position indicated about 30 fathoms. A refined position received in a subsequent report moved the ship two minutes West, less than a mile closer to the Sinai Peninsula,and into water which did not exceed 20 fathoms in depth. After considerations of personnel safety one of General Carter's and my immediate concerns, considering the depth of the water and the distance of the ship off shore, had to do with the classified materials which she had on board. These materials consisted of a substantial amount of texta data and some electronic equipment which would clearly reveal the mission of the ship and U.S. capability to demultiplex the VHF and UHF multichannel communications which she might intercept. In a conversation with Captain Vineyard of the JRC I expressed my concern that the written material be burned if at all possible and that the electronic equipment be salvaged if that were possible. Captain Vineyard had mentioned during this conversation that consideration was then being given by some unnamed Washington authorities to sink the LIBERTY in order that newspaper men would be unable to photograph her and thus inflame public opinion against the Israelis. I made an impolite comment about that idea.

Subsequent reports indicated that the ship was listing badly with 4 dead, some 50 injured, and that the ship had been able to get underway and was proceeding northward at about 8 knots.

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 11-17-2006 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended. ST Case 51671

Secretary McNamara called General Carter wanting precise information as to the ship's complement, number of civilians on board, the exact meaning of the designation AGTR, and other factors. Some of these data we supplied directly, including the fact that 3 civilians were on board, and others General Carter told Mr. McNamara he would have provided by Captain Thomas, Naval Security Group.

General Carter and I were particularly interested in the track which the ship had been following, the authorization therefor, and any responsibility NSA might have for the position in which the ship was. About this time (0945) we were informed that the attack had been made by Israeli torpedo boats rather than Egyptian as we had initially suspected. A detailed report on the track followed by the ship was provided by G Group personnel assisting Messrs. Kirby and Kellond. This information will be reduced to writing in summary form with complete documentation in the event an inquiry is launched into this aspect of the problem.

Immediate requests were placed on the Pentagon Command Center through the NSA Command Center, upon the Pentagon Information Office through Mr. Boucher, and upon Bureau of Naval Personnel through Admiral Schulz to have the casualty list screened immediately upon receipt to ascertain if any of the 3 NSA civilians--Messrs. Allen M. Blue, Donald L. Blalock, and Robert L. Wilson--were among the unfortunate. As of 1400 repeated checks and rechecks have confirmed that the list is not yet available in Washington. This is probably accounted for by the fact that the LIBERTY had been out of communications with the 6th Fleet for some extended period of time.

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

(4) rapid turn-around of the BELMONT which is scheduled to refit in Norfolk beginning 9 or 10 June.

Of all these possibilities only (4) appears to be particularly promising. [redacted] We also agreed that the BELMONT's turn-around should be rapid but orderly because saving 12 or 24 hours by a somewhat inadequate job is not worthwhile when it is realized that the transit time from Norfolk to the Mediterranean position for intercept would be at least 10 days.

About 1145 Mr. Coyne returned a call that I had made to his office earlier in the morning. He had heard of the attack on the LIBERTY and I gave him all the details then available including the number of casualties, the direction that the ship was sailing as she left the scene, the fact that the Israelis had "abjectly apologized" and our concern that the classified materials had been taken care of.

In recognition of the possibility that there may be questions either about the civilians on board or whether they were NSA civilians, the following actions were taken. [redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

The press release by the PIO, Pentagon, indicated that the ship was in the position where it was attacked in order "to assure communications for U.S. Government posts in the Middle East and to assist in relaying information concerning the evacuation of the U.S. dependents and other citizens from the Arab-Israeli war area." EO 1.4.(c)

Mr. Boucher also had his standing instructions reaffirmed by me to refer all inquiries to the Pentagon Public Information Office.

LOUIS W. TORDELLA
Deputy Director