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Robert L. Wilson

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by

Robert D. Farley

Henry F. Scherreck

Henry Millington

FARLEY: Today is the 6th of May 1980. Our interviewee today, Robert L. Wilson. Bob Wilson is currently assigned to G09 and was a linguist aboard the AGTR Liberty in June 1967 when it was attacked by Israeli military forces. He was one of the three civilians aboard. Mr. Wilson will discuss his experiences during this critical incident. The interview is being conducted in the M62 area, Sab 2, NSA. Interviewers: Mr. Henry Millington and Mr. Robert Farley.

~~QUESTION~~: Bob, let's get started, and Henry will come in later. The purpose of the interview is to get as much first-hand information as we can, Bob. Confirm, deny, reject information that we read in a lot of the published material. WILSON: Right. FARLEY: Henry Millington, along with Bill Gerhard are charged with the preparation of the SIGINT report on this. The information will be kept here, on tape, there will be a transcript made, but it will be

classified in any classification you wish, so feel free to talk about whatever you want.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, I read your list of questions, some of them I can address, and others I can't.

Barley ~~QUESTION:~~ Okay, I have expanded a little bit of it, based on reading Ennes' book and Pearson's book, so the first question is--during this critical period, this is May, June of 67, what was your assignment or your task?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, my task and the task of the other two linguists was to copy Arabic communications, basically Arabic communications emanating from the country of Egypt. And we knew the situation was getting pretty hot between Egypt and Israel at the time. We thought the best way to monitor these communications was for me to get on one of these Liberty ships. Or at least this was the rationale I was given, and monitor the communications almost first-hand. Stay at a safe distance, nevertheless, we can get the best information right there. And we were to monitor specifically Egypt. That was what we were after, any military communications, especially air and air defense communications, and report back on anything significant that we got. Besides being linguists, we were all three also experienced reporters and analysts, so we, in effect, could handle just about everything.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Now, the three of you you mentioned came from NSA?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Right.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ And they were Navy too.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Yeah, the other two were Donald Blalock and Allen Blue, the other two.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You joined the ship at Rota?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ We boarded the ship at Rota, Spain, around the, I think it was about the 28th of May. We had gotten there a couple days before, and we were waiting for the ship to be refitted and maintained a bit, and we left, I think it was the 28th of May.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Bob, Who assigned the mission to the task force for the SIGINT group aboard the Liberty?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I'm not sure who actually assigned the mission. We were just young linguists ourselves and we were not told all that much. We were just told, in effect, this is your TDY. Do you want to go on this TDY? It sounded very interesting to all of us, of course. So we weren't really in on who made the decisions to do this sort of thing.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Bob, Do you remember whether required reading for those aboard could have been OPINS 2855, which was the operating instructions for the Liberty, and MUSSO Document USN 855, also operating instructions? Did you ever see any of those, either of those documents?

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ I don't recall seeing either of them. No, no they don't ring a bell at all to me.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION:~~ You gave some information on the tasking of the SIGINT element aboard, was there any ELINT tasking?

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ None, that I knew of, at all. If there was an ELINT tasking, we weren't made privy to it. None that I knew of. If it was, maybe it was incidental.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ So it was VHF, UHF.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ HF, too.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ HF also?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ We did some UHF search; it wasn't too productive, I think, we stuck mostly to the only productive things we got which were basically HF.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ How about tasking against the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ There was none that I knew of. We weren't informed of any at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ How about any tasking against any Israeli communications, as well as Arab communications?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Again, there was none there that I knew of, and since I don't recall there being any Hebrew linguists on board, so I don't think so. We got a lot of Hebrew intercept when we were there since the Israelis were the only ones in the skies at the time because they had complete air superiority at that point. That's all, they were

dominating the air ways at that time.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Does it seem a little unusual that there wasn't a Hebrew linguist aboard?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, it didn't to me because I didn't think our mission was against the Israelis. Looking back on it, perhaps it would have been nice to have had one.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Twenty-twenty hind sight. WILSON: Yeah, ~~you're~~ right. You weren't aboard when the Liberty was cruising the Ivory coast area were you? Before they came into Rota.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ ~~No. Before they came into Rota?~~ No, I got on board in Rota, Spain.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Okay, and the question, I think you already answered, Did you know any of the Navy linguists aboard or who embarked at Rota?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, actually there were two other linguists that I know of, and they weren't Navy; they were Marines. And they as a matter of fact flew from the states with us to Rota, Spain. Two Marine types, one of them was a Sergeant, the other a Corporal, they were also Arabic Linguists. I think both of those, both of them were killed, in the lower compartments, too, as I recall.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Was there an Army Warrant Officer aboard at all? It seems that in one of those books, Hank, or in the study it mentioned an Army Warrant Officer, and I had never seen a reference to him.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ No, not that I recall, I don't ever recall seeing any Army Warrant Officer at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You would know! Hank, any questions that you have, just interject here? Millington: Aboard the ship, who was your direct superior?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ My direct superior was Maury Bennett, I think Lieutenant Commander Bennett, I believe, was my direct supervisor.

Millington ~~QUESTION:~~ What was his position?

Wilson: ~~ANSWER:~~ He was sort of, well, I think a Lt Commander Lewis might have been in charge of the entire operations area. But Maury was more or less his right hand man, I guess; he got everything done. And anytime I had any questions or problems I'd always go right to Commander Bennett. He had spent some time at NSA before; he was very familiar with the SIGINT community, and how things were done and how to get things done. So he was the one I always reported to if I had any problems. He's been back here since then, I believe, Lieutenant Bennett has.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ We're trying to contact him, I don't know whether he is here now or not. You said he met you about a year ago.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I have seen him I think about a year ago some where here.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Let's talk a little about the operations. The Liberty or the USN 855 was designated the technical processing

center. What does that mean?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ The only thing that I recall was it being referred to as the Technical Research ship. There was a certain area that could be referred to as a technical processing center. Now, as I said, we weren't made privy to a lot of the official aspects of the mission of the Liberty. We were just told that, "You're Arabic linguists and you're to go out there for this particular purpose" as I interjected at the beginning (of this interview). But technical processing ship, I don't recall that being thrown at me or anything so it doesn't really mean anything to me.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Can you explain in some detail the process, that is the intercept, the deciphering, the translating, the reporting or whatever the channels, the processing channels might have been during your days at sea?

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Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Yeah, there was some confusion. Of course, we got there on post like three days after the war began, ~~so we got~~ so there weren't a lot of communications emanating from Egypt at that time. I think we were south of Italy when the war began, so we got there the morning of the 8th, "on post," you might say. So the process when we got any reportable material, we also had some morse operators on board, and they copied some morse HF traffic, and they copied some, for example, there was a [redacted] Well, at that time, it was a [redacted] I was familiar with it and so were some of the others ~~so~~ and we were able

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And we translated it as best we could, then we gave the information to, I forget, it was some Seaman, who was supposed to take care of the final process of getting this reported. In other words getting it put out, and we classified it. I think we classified it as Top Secret, at the time. I think there was problems later on when we found out that it went out under the wrong classification. There were various problems apparently. We were involved in just in getting the hard nitty-gritty work done, and not too worried about getting it out electrically and all the things that had to go with it; we thought these people could take care of that. But I guess they weren't all that used to doing this sort of thing themselves. Commander Bennett didn't, wasn't always available to look right over them, I don't think. Some of these seamen were a little rusty. But we just assumed that it would be taken care of. But that was the procedure as far as we were concerned. We did the best we could with the material that we thought was reportable, write it up in a reportable manner and hand it to the man to see that it got sent back to NSA.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: So you did the translation then? Wilson: ~~For~~ Yeah. And handed ~~the~~ in useable form to the reporters. Schorreck: Did you do the [redacted] also?

Wilson ~~ANSWER~~: Yeah. In this case, I can say it was a [redacted] it was not anything elaborate.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION~~: Do you think that the people who sent you out were aware that you would, or would not get [redacted] material, they thought that you would get just [redacted]

Wilson ~~ANSWER~~: They thought that we would probably be concentrating on getting voice, mostly, and this just so happened that one of the Morse operators picked up a [redacted] message. And there was little else going on and I was familiar [redacted] I don't really know if they gave it any thought or not, if there had been any voice to process, I would've done that first priority, but there was nothing else going on, so I just worked on this and happened to [redacted]

Schorreck ~~QUESTION~~: There wasn't anybody else specifically assigned to do that?

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Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ No, there was no [redacted] or anything like that assigned, it was strictly, you know, we were catch-as-catch-can, you might say, anything you can possibly analyze, process, translate and report; do it. It was, I think it was a rush thing to get us out when they did. I don't think they really considered that.

Schorreck: ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you think about that kind of thing at the time?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ You mean...no, no, I didn't because, again, I thought that we were mostly going to be tasked with voice intercept, that was all we were going to be concerned with, and we did do a lot of searching, but ~~And~~ as I said, once we got on station, the Egyptians were dead, practically. There was no voice communications at all that we could pick up, except for the Israelis.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you do them?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, there was some of it copied, that doesn't mean anything to me, I mean we didn't have any Hebrew linguists on board. There were some tapes afterwards I understand that were processed, but I think they copied them because they had nothing else to copy. As I said, since there was nothing else much to do, we took some of this plain text stuff the morse operators were copying, translated some of it that was plain text and a couple of ~~segments~~ cipher messages we gave a shot, [redacted] I don't specifically recall us

reporting anything else, although I think we did report one or two other things, but I don't recall what. That was the only thing that stands out in my mind.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: Do you ever remember seeing any traffic, this was reported in Pearson's book, where he said that traffic was being passed from Cairo to Jordan and was being tampered with, and it was referred to as "cooking the message" where the Israelis would copy the Egyptian message, redo it and correct it or change it to their own benefit and retransmit it to Jordan. something about, that the UAR was getting badly beaten and that they were down to three or four planes or directing planes into an area where they would be "chopped up" by the Israelis. Did you ever hear of an expression called "cooking?"

Wilson ANSWER: I think I have heard of the expression called "cooking" but I heard nothing like that when I was on the Liberty. I'm sure I would recall it if I did and I don't see how we would've gotten access to that type of information there anyway, no, I don't recall that at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: Do you remember what type of reporting was accomplished on the Liberty in retrospect, maybe, that being a linguist you might not have recalled, I mean, be aware of it then.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ You mean reporting from the Liberty to the States?

Farley: Yes. Wilson: Well, as I said we were totally preoccupied with trying to get some intercept, trying to translate what we had, and when we couldn't we were on some of the receivers, searching, and so the technical functions, the technical duties of the Liberty, over-all reporting phase, I am not totally familiar with. The only ones I was intimately aware of was the ones I just outlined to you earlier. If there were any other duties that we had or other reporting responsibilities I wasn't made aware of them.

Farley: ~~QUESTION:~~ Would you recall whether any raw material, any raw intercept was transmitted to another field site or back to NSA without being processed by you?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I can't say for sure that there weren't, that there wasn't any. I know of what we did report I eventually forwarded also the raw traffic after that. I don't recall forwarding any just raw stuff that we couldn't process. We gathered up some stuff that we were going to let people look at later, but it didn't appear to be significant in any way. I don't recall sending any raw data by itself back.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Could you give us a quick run through on the make-up of the group again?

Wilson ANSWER: The reporting operations area?

Farley QUESTION: Everything that you remember of the NSA SIGINT group; how many linguists, how many reporters, how many?

Wilson ANSWER: All I recall are myself and the other two civilians, and the two Marine linguists. Now, myself and the other two civilians were often in the, what you might call the analysis reporting area, on one side of the ship and the Marine linguists were on the other side of the ship where all the intercept equipment pretty much set. They did a lot of searching themselves and checking out things. They would often bring our attention to other things. We would go over there ourselves lots of times on this side of the ship. There were a lot of operators, I should say Morse operators. Now the set up, as far as I know, as far as reporters go, it was left up to us, if we could find anything that was reportable, to write it up as best you can. There were one or two other seamen there that supposedly knew reporting procedures and would take care of the stuff once we had it. The writing up of the report was left pretty much up to us.

Farley: QUESTION: But the seamen were not part of your crew? or your unit?

Wilson ANSWER: Well they were assigned to the ship; they didn't go over with us. The only ones that were really with us

were those two marines. And as I said Commander Bennett also was put in charge of us. Now there were a number of others on the periphery, you know, that were down in the same area that we were and I'm sure knew what our mission was, but didn't really interfere with us, in any way. That's basically about it, there was only those five of us, Commander Bennett. Those are the only names that stand out.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Was Commander Lewis the overall operations officer?

Welsn: ~~ANSWER:~~ That's how I understand it, he had something to do with the overall operation, the overall running of that area down there. Now this goes back a ways and I haven't given it much thought in a long time, but as I recall, I know I recall seeing him down there often. And he did outrank Maury Bennett, so I assume he was the overall in charge of this operation.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ What was your impression of structure here? was this, did you feel that this was a primarily a Naval operation or was it an NSA thing or was it, that you didn't meet or did they meet at all or was there, did you have a feeling that there was...two distinct things going on here?

Welsn ~~ANSWER:~~ I didn't have that feeling at all, as a matter of fact, it seemed to me that they went out of their way to accommodate us however they could. It seemed to me it

was pretty much an NSA operation. They were very cooperative with us, not just the people that worked with us; the entire crew didn't get in our way, they were very friendly, you know, we didn't have any problems with anybody at all. And we went directly from Rota, as directly as we could to the station point. The operations area was pretty much open to us. If we wanted to change signal orientation or do whatever we wanted to do, it was pretty much up to us. So I had the impression that this thing was totally NSA run.

Schorreck: Fine, fine excellent.

~~QUESTION:~~ Farley: Was the area off limits to the ships' crew?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, to most of the ships crew. There were some of them that had the necessary clearance that could get in, but the large majority were not permitted in the third deck area where the operations area was.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you have badges of some sort?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, it was recognition, you couldn't get through that little port hole unless somebody knew you, and everybody knew their own place on the ship, no big problem.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ I think you partially answered this question, Bob. Were the ships crew or the housekeeping personnel aware of the NSA presence aboard?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ As I said, obviously the ones in the operations area were, but I don't think most of them were aware of our

mission, I think a lot of them perhaps guessed that there was something going on here, you know, the obvious, we're going to Egypt and here are these civilians coming on board. But they didn't ask any questions, and we, of course, didn't volunteer any information, so I couldn't really say what they thought since they never really got to us or asked us some questions.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ What type support was NSA providing to your people?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, when the war began, as I said, we were south of Italy at the time and we did start getting reports from NSA, and I think reports that were turned around from the field sites, told us more or less what was going on, the intercept that we were getting elsewhere in the world, the situation in the Middle East, the war, and how it was progressing, things like that, so we knew, from the time that we were practically on the station that it looked like the war was pretty much "wrapped up," as far as Egypt went, anyway. Now, this is operations support. Physical support, I'm not really familiar with. If they got any, they didn't show me, because it really wasn't my affair.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: This ship had all the documentation, the texta or whatever they used to call it? Everything aboard.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ There was texta, there was texta aboard, I know that. There was some reporting procedures aboard, some of it,

as I recall reading a long time ago, some of it looked a little outdated, as you might suspect, but they did have, basically, they had the necessary documentation they needed. There was no problem. And we of course, were fairly familiar with reporting any ways, so most of it was fresh in our minds. I didn't run into any problem in that regard.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Could NSA communicate directly with your unit?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, all I know is that we got wires directly from NSA; I think they were probably rerouted somewhere, I don't think they came straight. I think they went like to Germany, and from there on down to us, somehow. This was before, of course, overhead, and all that we could do this with. As far as I know it had to be detoured somewhere.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ How about the reverse, could you communicate directly with NSA or did you have to follow the reverse routes?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Same procedure, I'm sure we had to follow the reverse route; we probably had to go through one or two other areas before we got to NSA. The communication procedure between us and NSA, I think, was a lengthy one, I mean it took a long time for us to get to them and for them to get to us.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Yeah, I was going to ask you what kind of time lag was there in transmitting that kind of stuff?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, again at the time I gave it no thought. All I know is that it seemed like it took a day. That's in my mind, like it would take ~~took~~ a day. Like if we expected something from them we got it the next day. We would ask them a question and maybe the next day or two we'd get an answer. It was a long time. That's all I remember; I couldn't give any hours, even the days, I'm not sure. All that stands out in my mind is that it took a long time to get a response.

Millington ~~QUESTION:~~ In his book Ennes devotes some number of pages to the faulty TRSSCOM system. They had been having trouble with it in England at the time they of course left for the West Africa mission; and they even had problems in Rota trying to get the mountings for the dish to be accurate enough so that they could use it. From what you're saying I gather that really it was nonoperational it was just that the moon radar wouldn't work.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, I know they had a lot of trouble with it, as you were saying, they were always complaining about having to go and check it out and fix this and fix that. It would break down for a while and they'd have to do some more work on it. But specifics, I'm not sure. All I know, as you say, they were having some trouble with the TRSSCOM system, constantly it seemed like. But they thought, they had it operational enough to keep us in

communications.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: You alluded to this question also. The question, "How long had the Liberty been on station before Israeli forces launched their attack on Arab forces?" You said you were off the coast of Italy on the way toward station. When did you hear about the beginning of the six day war?

Wilson ~~ANSWER~~: It was about, we heard about it on the 5th, on the 5th of June when the war began. We got, I guess it was later that evening, we got some sort of wire from somewhere, because that's why I remember, I said here we are south of Italy and the war's begun, right, makes a lot of sense. So it was at that time that we got first notification that obviously hostilities between Egypt and Israel had begun. After that we occasionally would get wires updating us on the situation.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION~~: Was there any discussion among the group about the possibility of missing a lot of Israeli intelligence because you had nobody aboard to intercept it, understand it?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: No, no, there was no discussion about that because, once again, our concern as it was relayed to me and the others was with the Egyptians and the Arabs, we wanted to monitor their intelligence, you know, to see how they are coming along. We didn't know at the time that they were getting totally annihilated as they obviously

were. We didn't know that this war could go on for two or three weeks, who knows? There was no discussion at all about that. As I said we were a little parochial in our view because we were Arabic linguists, Egyptian-Arabic linguists, and not only concerned about the Israelis, they're our friends anyway, and that sort of thing. So, I recall no discussion at all about that.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION:~~ What was the relationship between the operations officer and the captain of the ship? Was the Captain kept apprised of information gathered through SIGINT of the on-going situation?

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, yeah he was kept apprised of what was going on, as I understood it, anything that affected the safety of the ship, in any way, or the orientation or the mission of the Liberty, he was kept apprised of. Now, every little bit and piece of SIGINT, you know, that really wouldn't concern him he was not informed of. But anything that might be of value to him in making a decision about the ship he was told about. And I think, I'm pretty sure, that he knew what the mission was out there.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Did he have a clearance? You don't know?

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ I can't say for sure, I assume he did. I don't ever recall seeing him down on the third deck though, never recall seeing him.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION~~: Another question concerns any sensitive SIGINT information that might have reflected Israeli preparations or concern about the presence of the Liberty. If that had been available, would the Captain have been told about it?

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, the only way we would have gotten sensitive information like that would have been if it would have been sent to us from NSA, cause we wouldn't have been able to find out, there were no Hebrew linguists.

Schorreck: They were Arabic linguists!

WILSON: Exactly. So we may have had something right there on the tape that told us everything that was going on we wouldn't have known.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ What do you think about that?

~~ANSWER:~~ WILSON Well, like you say, in retrospect it's a little scary. But who would have ever thought that this would have happened? I know I certainly wouldn't.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION~~: Did you have a feeling that you were... I don't necessarily want to use the word 'allied', but that, FARLEY: sacrificial?

Schorreck: what I would have thought you would have felt? Did you feel that, did you feel that you were allied with the Israelis in this mission that you were on, or not?

~~ANSWER:~~ WILSON No, I didn't feel that way, I couldn't say that. All I knew is that we're pro-Israeli, this is our policy in the U.S. Now, while ~~we~~ we're out here ~~we~~ we're supposed to monitor Egyptian communications. I assumed in my

mind, and I think a lot of other people did, too, that the Israelis are going to be informed that there is a U.S. ship in this area. I just assumed that; I don't know why it just seemed like the obvious thing to do. And you know, don't get alarmed, it's a U.S. ship and we are monitoring obviously Egyptian communications. And I never thought of it as an alliance of sorts, but of course we were concerned about the Arabs. That was my concern. As I said, I was a young linguist very parochial in my view, and I never gave it a thought to aiming our mission against the Israelis. ~~That's right.~~

FARLEY: ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you see copies of the message from NSA to the Liberty on the 6th of June which directed the vessel to "maintain high state of readiness because of the unpredictability of UAR actions and to report by flash any threatening or suspicious actions?"

WILSON ~~ANSWER:~~ I recall hearing, yeah I recall that message being sent, I don't know if I saw it or not, but maybe Bennett or someone told me about it. You know, well it's pretty obvious, anyway, the war is going on and you are going to be in the area so obviously you are going to do this. So it didn't surprise me or concern me, it was one of those things that you take for granted. If you get anything related to the war, you send it back flash.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ But it is interesting that it only mentions unpredictability of the UAR.

Welsh ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, that's true, well again it doesn't surprise me. Why would the Israelis do anything, right? They know we were there, I assume, so they're not going to do anything out of the way.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Do you recall when the Liberty got orders to move further away from its first location?

Welsh ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, our location, originally was about 15 miles from the coast. I was told that we got the message saying to move back like a hundred miles the 9th of June, in other words a day after the attack, which does us a lot of good. I understood that it was sent a good day or two before that, but because of rerouting problems, here and there, it got sent to Southeast Asia which is the only war somebody knew was going on, an amazing foul up, I guess, and no, it got to us after the fact, so it really did us no good at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You've already commented on the next question which concerns the two-day delay by CINCNAVEUR, Deputy Chief of Staff, when he said that other things were more important, and didn't send the message, plus the fact that he had ended up quote "without action" at NSA, and never did get to the Liberty?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: You mean the message moving us back? FARLEY: Yes. WILSON: Well, as I said I never did see the message, all I know is that somebody on board the ship heard that this message, maybe they told the Captain the day after the attack because we were rendezvoused by ~~another~~ a number of other vessels as you know. It eventually filtered down to me that a message had been sent to the Liberty before this attack, for us to move 100 miles away. I don't know whether it came to us electrically, whether it came from somebody on the USS Little Rock, USS America, by word of mouth, I'm not sure, but it got to me while I was still on the Liberty. And I stayed on it about five or six days after that.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION~~: Was this move coordinated with the NSA SIGINT Group or did the NSA SIGINT Group suggest the move?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: We had nothing at all to do with it. Now the thought, I think maybe Commander Bennett, maybe myself and the other civilians did talk about this, you know, saying that we're going to be awfully close to the shore, you know, that sounds a little bit dangerous. As long as we are flying the American flag we're obviously not a combatant, you know, I don't see why anybody would possibly attack us, right? And we had some thoughts and I must admit we were a little bit apprehensive about it at times, but nobody was panicking. And as I said, we had nothing

to do with the message at all about moving back. We hadn't asked to be moved back. I think the Commander I heard later, the Captain of the ship expressed a little bit of concern about it, but again, he was following his orders.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ So it was related to safety rather than better intercept capabilities.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Oh, yeah, yeah, that was the only discussion was in the realm of safety because we were, El Arish was extremely close to Israel, Israel was extremely close to Egypt. We were right in the middle, I mean you couldn't get any closer unless you hit shore.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Bouncing back ~~to~~ on your voyage from Rota. Did you ever hear a reference to a contact "X"? There was a reference to a contact "A" which was the Valdez and you passed and "waved in the night," but there was a reference in Ennes' book as well as Pearson's book which talked about a contact "X".

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ No, no, again these things took place, they were out of our purview, of course. And I do know the Valdez was also a TRS or one of our ships that went through the Canal earlier, but I know nothing about that. I never had any contact "X".

FARLEY ~~QUESTION:~~ What type armament did the Liberty have?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: The only type armament it had was four 50 caliber machine guns, I think. Two fore and two aft on the ship and that was it. I mean they may have had some hand guns or something like that, but other than that, that was the only armament we had.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION~~: Did they have routine practice, fire a few rounds?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: Somebody said that they did one day, clear the guns, yeah, or something like that. Problem too, is that you are on the third deck you don't hear anything that is going on on top, even when that attack was going on, I didn't hear half of what was going on. When the bullets were obviously bouncing off the side of the hull, it sounded to me like somebody was rattling chains on it or something. It took a while for it to sink in to me that we were under attack. So when you are down that low, you don't hear a lot that is going on up there.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION~~: Question that nobody seems to answer, was the Liberty flying the American flag?

WILSON ~~ANSWER~~: Well, I can tell you what people told me cause again I was down third deck, and I went up on that day. I went up on topside for a while because things were very slow. As I said, the Egyptians were apparently pretty much knocked out. I went up topside, I guess it must have been about 10 or 11 o'clock that morning and we were flying the American flag. It was flying.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Was it a big flag, the regular size?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I don't recall, all I know is that it was an American flag, I didn't say well, that's a big flag; I recall seeing an American flag flying. Now they said later that it was the big flag because the other flag was all messed up or something like that, so we had better get a nice clear flag out here. I don't know if it was the big flag or not.

Farley: ~~QUESTION:~~ Ennes called it 5 feet by 8 feet, and Pearson called it 6 foot by 12.

Millington: Well, Pearson was referring to the ceremonial flag and in fact in Ennes' book he had requested that the new flag be put up because the other had gotten dirty. and the seaman, the signal man was a little testy about wanting to put up another flag because they were running short. He said if we could put up the 5 X 8, the only thing that's left is the ceremonial flag, and Ennes said, "Put up a new 5 X 8." That's what he reports.

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I see. no I don't know whether it was the big flag or an unusually large one or not. I do recall seeing an American flag flying.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ But there was one flying?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Yeah, I do recall seeing that.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Here's one you probably can't answer, but was the ship warned in any manner by the Israelis before the attack

was launched?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I couldn't answer, I would certainly assume they weren't. I can't answer.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Another question which I can't completely understand. Why didn't the Liberty heed the warning to mariners on the international distress frequency?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ I'm not familiar with any warning to mariners.

~~QUESTION:~~ Farley: Does that mean that when the Liberty was in trouble they broadcast on a distress frequency and nobody reacted, do you remember that, Henry?

~~A~~ ~~No, I'm not familiar.~~ FARLEY: Because that is supposed to be a "May Day" type frequency. WILSON: All I know is that they told me that our communications were knocked out very soon after the ship was hit and we were madly trying to jury rig some kind of communications back to anywhere, but that particular thing I am not familiar with at all. I never heard of that.

Farley: ~~QUESTION~~: Here's one you can probably talk about for a half an hour. What do you remember about the actual attack immediately before, during, and after?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, yeah, I could, but I'll try to capsulize if I can. Well, we were, when it began we were, myself, the other two civilians, and the Marines, all of us were down below, as I recall, which was fortunate, ~~that~~ I almost went up on deck for a while to sun bathe, since things

were so slow, but I said no, I guess I had better get down and see if I can find some work to do. But we were all there and in our area, and we again, don't know what is going on up top, so you can hardly hear a thing. But we were given the orders to go to "general quarters." During general quarters everyone has a certain place they are supposed to be and they said, "this is "not a drill" or something like that. This is when I started hearing the things obviously alongside the ship and we all assumed by then that we're under attack. Well, also when you go to general quarters, or something like that, you put on a life jacket, go through various other things, and we did that, also I managed to get a helmet. The only thing I remember after that is ~~was~~ that someone had said that during this kind of drill we are supposed to load classified material into weighted bags. Now, on the second deck, which is the deck right above, is where we keep all our safes, which has all the classified incoming documents in it. Well I said, "well, I'll help you bag them." I don't want to sit here and twiddle my thumbs while this is going on. So I went up with one or two of the seamen to the second deck and we started opening the safes and bagging some of the classified gear in some of these big white weighted bags. And shortly after that, it

seemed shortly enough, we got the notification to prepare for torpedo attack. And a guy, one of the Navy types with me says what you do is sit on the floor and put your feet up against the wall. And in a narrow space, my back and my feet were against the wall, of sorts. (?) Well, I said well I'll go through this, you know. It was all a kind of unreal thing, I just couldn't believe it was going on so I wasn't nervous because ~~I hadn't~~ it hadn't settled in on me yet. And sure enough very shortly after I sat down there, it ~~had~~ hit and it blew a hole in the floor beside me. ~~They have a~~ It hit with tremendous force. And we... it's all hazy and even the second deck was pretty much filled with smoke soon after that; it was hard to breathe. But we got back over to the manhole, or whatever you, the porthole that the man came out from third deck to second deck in, opened that up, and some men came pouring out of there along with smoke. I don't think too awful many got out of there, just a few. And Commander Bennett was around too, he was on the second deck. And he eventually had to close that thing back up again, he said that later on in talking about it, that was the hardest thing he ever had to do in his life, because he was never absolutely sure that everyone down there was without hope, maybe there was one that was still alive. If he'd have kept

that thing open the whole ship could have sunk. I think somebody told me later that one of the Marines had gotten out and went back again to try to get somebody, but they never saw him; he never came back.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Is that the operations area? You were immediately above the operations area?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Immediately above the operations area.

TAPE I SIDE 2

~~(Hold on a second.)~~

WILSON: (Okay.) Now shortly after this, after we had closed the hatch, we all sort of stood around, not really sure what to do. Either Commander Bennett or someone, maybe ~~it~~ came over the PA system, I don't know, we were told to go to the main deck. So we went up to the main deck, in what they called the after deck area, after deck house or something like that. Now the firing and everything was still going on. There'll be times when it is very quiet and times when you hear something hit, explode. But it had quieted down a little bit since the torpedo had hit, seemingly. But we were all told to go to the after deck house; it's like a big bay area on the deck. Of course it's covered and things like that. So we were all sitting in this area a bunch of us, I guess there must have been 75 or 80 people in there, something like that. We were just sitting, waiting, we all had their life jackets on, helmets and we got the

notification to prepare to abandon ship once. And also shortly after that, we got the notification to prepare for another torpedo attack. And we all knew if another torpedo hit ~~and~~ it was all over, because when that first one hit, the ship listed awfully badly, and I thought it was going to go down right then, but it didn't. It came back up, and if another one had hit, it probably would have gone down like a rock, but there seemed like a interminable amount of time from that warning, "prepare for torpedo," the second torpedo attack, cause we never heard anything after that from the PA system. And we all just sat there and waited for what seemed like forever, because, you know, when you wait for that one to hit, and you don't get any news from upstairs, from up topside that says you know don't worry about it any more, so we all sat there, and just, you know, waiting for it to hit, and waiting to get ready to go over board, was just what it amounted to. But fortunately that second torpedo never came or at least never hit us. And the only thing I remember after that was that we heard a helicopter outside. You know, during the entire time this was going on, all of us ~~we all~~ assumed that these were Egyptians attacking us.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You were below deck all of this time?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Yeah, all the time I was below deck.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ So you didn't see?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Oh, no, I didn't see anything that was going on out on the deck. All I saw was the aftermath later on, I wasn't out there when it happened.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ What time did the attack take place, Bob, do you recall?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson It was around two in the afternoon.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ How long did it last, ~~do~~ would you recall?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson It seemed like to me that the major part of the attack and the torpedo attack lasted about a half an hour, but I think there was ~~just~~ a little bit more went on after that. But that half an hour was not long, but I guess the major part of it was over in a half an hour. We had a lot of time sitting and waiting. And I guess the PT boats did a couple of other runs at us, and that was why the warning for ~~the~~ a second torpedo attack. And it was probably over an hour until we felt a little relieved that the whole thing was apparently over, at least.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ When were you told to come top side?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, this, as I said, I don't remember where this came from, whether it was from the commanding officer on the second deck or whoever, but all of us eventually went top side. It was getting hard to breathe there, anyway, because of all the smoke. I went top side and was told to file in the afterdeck area. This was very soon

after the torpedo hit. Maybe I went up because, in effect, we knew if another one was hit we were going to have to abandon ship so we got in position in the afterdeck where we could easily jump overboard. So that is about what it was.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: Were all communications wiped out, that is the regular radio shack aboard the ship as well as the operations, the SIGINT operations area, all communications were wiped out?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson As I was told, ~~that~~ everything was knocked out. We eventually managed to, I guess, jury rig some sort of a link, they told me, with the Sixth Fleet, and that possibly ~~that~~ also, this communications got through to Israel. But this is what I was told, I'm just reporting what I heard. They said, soon after this, soon after we managed to get through to the Sixth Fleet and to Israel, the attack stopped. Well, you know, everything suddenly shut off and the helicopter came down and asked if he could be of assistance and things like that.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Now was that the Commander Castle's helicopter? From the Israeli, the U.S. Naval Attache aboard the ship?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I was told the U.S. Naval Attache was aboard the helicopter. ~~Okay.~~ And McGonagle at that point was pretty well PO'd at what was going on and told them to buzz off.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: Were any international distress signals displayed, transmitted, sent during the attack in any manner that you know of?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ None that I know of. I don't think we could have sent any. It would just about been impossible, and also I think, soon after the attack a couple of the oil drums along side of the ship were hit. And the ship was covered ~~with~~ in smoke, a lot of times oil smoke. I've got a pictures that shows where there's a flash fire ~~right~~ along side the ship. It is right below where the flag is as a matter of fact, interesting enough.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: We may like to borrow those and reproduce them if you don't mind, for Hank's publication.

Following the attack, what was the time between the end of it and any attempt to offer aid by anybody, including the helicopter, the Israeli gun boat? Were you on topside by then?

Wilson ~~ANSWER:~~ Well, we were in the afterdeck, but we were inside and I couldn't hear or see what was going on and we obviously don't come out on deck, don't offer more targets or anything like that. So we were told to stay inside, so, time, I wasn't really aware of the time that had passed, sometimes it seemed like an interminable amount of time, other times just a few minutes. But I would guess, it was a good hour, maybe more, before we were offered assistance

by the Israeli helicopter. Someone mentioned that one of the PT boats also offered to help us. I don't know. That's the next question. This was supposedly the Tahmass Israeli gun boat that offered assistance, and the question is, "What was McGonagle's reply to him?"

Farley QUESTION:

Again, I wish I could tell you, I can imagine what it was. FARLEY: It was something similar to "Nuts!" by McAulliffe. Or probably a little more explicit than that. No, I don't know. I wasn't privy to that.

Wilson ANSWER:

WILSON:

You talked about Commander Castle who dropped his calling card on deck to ask if there were any casualties. Any idea why McGonagle told him to "get lost"?

Farley QUESTION:

I think McGonagle was, well the man was aboard the Israeli helicopter, I don't even know if McGonagle knew that it was Castle at the time. even if it was at that point he probably didn't want any more help from Israel. and he was probably in a pretty bad state himself, he was wounded rather badly and what could they do at this point?

Wilson ANSWER:

Did any of the fellows ever talk about the report that JCS had directed an air strike from the Sixth Fleet, with the Sixth Fleet Sky Hawks and they were recalled when the Israelis apologized for the attack?

Farley QUESTION:

I heard from one of the officers, I don't even recall who, that the Sixth Fleet had dispatched some fighter

Wilson ANSWER:

aircraft to assist us, but when the U.S. found out that it was the Israelis, they called them back. And the U.S., I was told, assumed that it had been a mistake, and they didn't want to compound the mistake by starting an air battle between Israel and the U.S. This was the rationale I was given for recalling.

Millington ~~QUESTION:~~ Earlier you had mentioned that about eleven o'clock in the morning of that day you had gone up topside. Was there, had you heard anything when you'd went up there from any of the crew about any overflights or any reconnaissance by aircraft of the Liberty?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Not only had I heard of it, when I went up topside I saw one of the Noratlas overflying us, and it was going very slowly above us, and it would go like this three or four times, and then head back to Israel. So I saw one of the planes--big boxcar-type thing. It went very slowly and they told me later that it had done it a few more times earlier that day.

Millington ~~QUESTION:~~ Did they know the identity of it?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, but even at the time I said it must be Israeli, because what else is flying out here at this point in the war, and also it's coming from the direction of Israel and it's going back to Israel, so it was obvious that it was Israeli. I didn't think much of it, you know, they were just out there checking us out. That's what I would do, too.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ I think you answered this one, too. I'll ask again. Was the entire intercept capability aboard the Liberty wiped out?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson With the attack, oh yes, well the entire third deck was flooded out and that's where all of our intercept material, equipment, recording facilities were, so the entire deck was flooded. So after the attack we had no capability at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ And another question, you said you participated in the bagging of secret material for destruction. Was there any burning or throwing of the bags overboard, or did you get rid of it in any manner?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well again, I was on the second deck, now that is below the main deck, and we were prepared to, but it would have been a bitch getting that stuff topside. Fortunately, as I said, you know, that the stuff we had on the second deck stayed right where it was, and we didn't sink, but there was no burning of stuff while I was there. We really didn't have that much time to have burned it anyway, because shortly after we started bagging it, there was the warning to prepare for torpedo attack and shortly after it had hit we were to go up topside. And the thought, too, was as long as you had the stuff bagged and weighted it's going to go down with the ship so why worry about getting up and throwing it overboard.

They did mention later that we were in rather shallow water, but we couldn't help that, so we just left it pretty much where it was. But there was no burning down there where I was.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Was there any destruction of any crypto equipment that you know of?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Not on the second deck. I was out in the hallway and in the main office where the classified material was kept. There was another room across from there that had some UHF gear inside of it. And I recall, I think, seeing going down later and checking it out and it wasn't destroyed.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Just some names from the incident, do you know any of these people? Jim O'Conner?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, I recall O'Conner.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Commander Armstrong?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, he was the XO.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ John McTighe, McTighe.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I don't know.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ McTighe, is that the way you pronounce it?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I'm not sure, the name sounds familiar but I can't place his face or what he did.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Lieutenant Golden?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Golden, I recall.

Non - Responsive

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ And you mentioned Commander Bennett.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, Bennett I had the most inter-working with.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Okay, that is just one of the many errors.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, that is totally out the window.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Here's one that you may or may not want to answer. Did you ever hear that a submarine recorded on color film the entire incident?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, no, I sure didn't. A submarine? Ours or theirs?

Farley Ours. Wilson: That is very interesting, no I didn't hear that.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Okay, I'll ask you another related question. Would you care to comment on anything you might know about the activities of the U.S. Submarine Andrew Jackson?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I don't know anything about the U.S. Submarine, the Andrew Jackson. Schorreck: (That must have been the one taking pictures.) FARLEY: (Right.) WILSON: I assume so, no, I hadn't heard that story before. That's an interesting one though.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Well, they're all related and we are basing them on the book. Contact X, the Andrew Jackson, which was apparently under the Liberty throughout the Mediterranean, and that was the one that supposedly recorded the incident on film. If you know anything about it, Henry would like to get a copy of the film.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, if I know anything about it, I'd save it and sell it for a fortune later. No, I never heard that story, that's a new one to me.

FARLEY ~~QUESTION:~~ I think Blalock mentions it, too. WILSON: (Did he?) Question, you may not have an answer to; when did NSA become aware of the attack? Do you have any idea of ~~when~~ how they were informed?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I don't really know. I couldn't tell you.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ So you wouldn't know what actions were taken after information of the attack was received by NSA?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson You mean actions in regard to doing something for the safety of the ship or?

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ For the SIGINT group I'm thinking of, to get the troops out of there.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, I don't know. You would have to ask people that were here at the time exactly what took place, I couldn't say.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Do you have any idea as to how and why a Pinnacle message, this is the A-1, top level priority message~~s~~ would end up at NSA "without action," and not be received, eventually by the Liberty. There are apparently two or three Pinnacle messages that were put in the, what is that, a bin with the "immediates," and not go out as a "OI." Any idea how that could happen~~ed~~?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, no, well, I'm not familiar with caveat "Pinnacle" or whatever. Presumably that should mean it would be rushed right off, but why it was held on to, and not action taken is beyond me. I would've thought they would have acted on them rather quickly, with the situation being what it was.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Hank, do you have any more questions on the incident itself before we move on? I have a couple more questions.

Schorreck: Maybe when he gets back. Farley: Alright. Henry? MILLINGTON: No.

Farley: Okay. The next one. When you arrive aboard the America, were you told not to talk to anybody, but ONI people?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, I didn't arrive ~~on~~ aboard the America, I stayed on the Liberty. FARLEY: Okay, good. WILSON: The entire trip back to Valletta Malta, they said I could get off, if I wanted to, but I really, I wasn't wounded, saw no reason to and I

thought maybe if there were any classified gear or equipment aboard or that would pop up, or questions, perhaps I could help them. And the ship was pretty much definitely in good enough shape to, went back to a... I think first of all I think we were thinking of going back to [redacted] but they decided it was in good enough shape to go to Valletta where they had even better facilities. So I stayed on board the ship until the 14th, when I think we arrived in Valletta, Malta. When I arrived there I was given the rush treatment to get out of there, and don't talk to anybody. As a matter of fact, I think... EO 1.4.(c)

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ By whom?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson What's his name? I think he was deputy chief of NSAEUR, or somebody. I can't think of his name, but there was Lieutenant Commander Green with him, a sort of adjutant. Foot was the last name, something Foot, NSAEUR type.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ A Brigadier General? Colonel?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, he was a GS type.

~~QUESTION~~: Farley Oh, a GS type. John Foot?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Something like his last name was something, Foot. It was an unusual name.

QUESTION: Something like Proudfoot, something like Proudfoot. ((Klemfoot))

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Something like that. It doesn't come to me right now. But they met me right there on board ship, they came on board ship when we came into port and asked me, "Are you okay? Can you go back? Do you want to stay here a day ~~to~~ and recuperate?" I said, "No, I'm fine; I've been on board this thing for five days now." Of course they gave me the official story of why were we there in port, why were we there ~~at~~ where we were at that time. There are, we do have some American nationals, some U.S. civilians in the area of the Middle East at the time, and in case any of these civilians were attempting to get in contact with the United States in order to get out of this area, we were in the area in order to intercept any communications they might have. Which I have trouble saying with a straight face. Fortunately, I didn't have to answer any newsmen, you know, about this, I didn't run into any. But that was the story we were supposed to pass on. They took me off the ship and ushered me to the U.S. Consulate there in Valletta. As a matter of fact, while I was there after a very short debriefing, they also had me hand courier something back for them, too. And I was accompanied all the way back to Friendship Airport by this Lieutenant Commander, Lieutenant Colonel, I think he was a Marine Lieutenant Colonel. He was like an assistant to this NSAEUR type, and he was

extremely nervous the entire time of the trip, afraid I was going to say something wrong or some reporter was going to come up to me. I think he was going to have a heart attack, but as soon as we got to JFK we boarded a little helicopter and went down to, because he didn't want me fooling around in customs or anything like that, or going through Kennedy any more than I had to. So immediately boarded a helicopter and went somewhere down to New Jersey, took a hop from there to Friendship. And the only hold-up I got was going through customs in New York when I gave my orders to the customs man and on the back it had USS Liberty on it. "So you were on the Liberty." I said, "Yeah." "How was it?" I said "ah, Not so nice," and walked off. Fortunately he didn't press the issue and fortunately there were no reporters around or anything. So I didn't have any trouble getting through customs or nobody harassed me or hassled me.

Schorreck. ~~QUESTION:~~ You were by yourself?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh I was by myself. The other civilian got on aboard the American, he was wounded, Blalock was wounded, he had some tiny pieces of metal. I guess he was down below when, he was extremely fortunate to get out of there alive. He was down below when the torpedo hit and he had some very tiny metal fragments in his face, and he

had a piece of metal in his back. I guess he had a few cuts on his arms. Of course it was nothing serious, but ~~he~~ for awhile, I think, he was almost in the state of shock. He was okay, but still I thought it was best to him on board in case of infection, or something, to get him on board the America. So he went on and I decided to say behind.

Millington ~~QUESTION~~: When you left Valletta, your route and mode of transportation was what?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson When I left Valletta we left there on a British Airways flight, from there to Rome, and from Rome, Pan Am back to JFK. From JFK, a helicopter down to...

Millington ~~QUESTION~~: Was that a civilian helicopter or commercial helicopter?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yes, a commercial helicopter, commercial helicopter I was in there with a bunch of other people. And from there we went down to Friendship, and the guys drove me all the way home. And I was told later that there had been somebody in touch with my wife the entire time of the incident. They had been very nice about it and they offered to have someone stay with her if she wanted. They kept her informed as much as they could about what was going on. She also said that they were all very nice, very helpful in that regard.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ A certain question that only unusual people would be concerned about. Did the security officer ever ask about the loss of documents, or whether anybody had inventoried the documents?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson The security officer here?

~~QUESTION:~~ Farley No, on board the Liberty. I'm thinking of an NSA Europe security officer, who was concerned about compromises?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No one on board the ship, no, no.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ I mean the NSAEUR man, after he had met you.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Ah, Okay.

~~QUESTION:~~ Farley Asking about the situation aboard with respect to the documents?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson I believe he did ask about the classified material, if I knew ~~that~~ whether any classified material had gotten out and I did tell him that I thought some had gotten out, because the ship came to... at one point when we were rendezvoused by a couple of tugs, they were going to try to repair the hole in the side of the ship, to cover it up, in other words. but when they went down, they saw how large it was, and said there was no way we could do anything. But while they had stopped the forward motion of the ship, things started floating out of the hole, and I was looking out over the side and I saw some Top Secret codeword stuff floating out, and they

sent some men out with the little hooks and picking up all this paper and things like that. Of course these men had no clearance or anything. Then I told them, you know, you have to tell these men that this is classified material and they shouldn't pass it on or do anything with it. What could I tell them, not to look at it? But he said, "Yeah, we realize this," and they got as much as they could. They picked up as much as they could, you know. But I think some of it floated away. And unfortunately I'm sure, none of it was water-soluble, which would have been the ideal thing. FARLEY: That came later, I THINK. WILSON: Yeah, so I stood there looking right overboard the ship and saw some nice little Top Secret documents floating out.

Millington: ~~QUESTION:~~ I don't know whether it was in Ennes' book or just where I had read that but they, what I had read was that one of the tugs that accompanied the Liberty back to Valletta was trailing the Liberty with the idea if possible, if they saw anything visible come out, they'd try to catch it up in the screws of the propeller and see if they could chop it up.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, it's possible. There was a tug accompanying us part of the way, and that could have been one of the things it was trying to do, because there was some of this that had floated out. But I do know that they did

have some. They took a boat or two off the tugs and went out and tried to pick up some of the material that had floated out. Soon after they determined that there was no way they could repair the hole in the side of the ship, we just started up again and I don't think any of the material floated out after that; at least you couldn't see any.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Were you questioned by the investigative group headed by Walt Deeley when they were preparing the post mortem?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, I was, I wasn't questioned really by anyone. When I was on board the Liberty, Admiral Kidd came on board, who was I think, in charge of the Naval investigation. And he talked to me for a while, but it was just in the rather general questions, nothing specific and I think he was just being sociable, really. And I was not talked to by anyone, except when I came back we had a courtesy visit with Dr. Tordella, and that lasted for two or three minutes, other than that, nothing. I had no other briefings at all.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ What you said leads into the next question, do you have any comments on why there was so much confusion, if you want to use that word, as to what actually happened that day in June when the whole incident was discussed by the Court of Inquiry headed by Captain Kidd?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh What do you mean confusion by?

QUESTION: Farley Testimony by McGonagle, and by Bennett and by three or four of the other people, as to what actually transpired in the precise times. Some of...there were discrepancies in just about everybody's testimony.

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh I never read the testimony, or the excerpts of the trial, or anything like that, so I could only make some suggestions since it was such ~~an~~ a obviously hectic time. Times and incidents and things often get confused and cluttered at a time like that. Also, most of the people that ~~were.~~ did have access to the classified material and access to our mission, I'm sure, wanted to protect those sort of things, and sometimes in order to do that your stories might get a little crossed up, trying to protect them. I don't know, other than that I couldn't say, strictly a guess.

Farley: ~~QUESTION:~~ Bouncing back to the production, on the Liberty. When you were on an operational status, do you believe that the Liberty produced some useful intelligence and can you cite any outstanding examples of what type products they published?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh No, I sure wish I could say that we produced a couple of really neat things that were probably unique, but unfortunately, I think the only...at least, I know one of the things that I ~~think~~ thought was really nice, that the

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message that we [redacted], and all and looked like it was good information, and I found out later that it had already been reported by another field station. So looking back on it, I'd have to say that the mission itself was kind of a failure, I don't think we really got anything significant out of it at all, especially since we were on station three days after the war began. If we had been right there when it had happened we might have got ten something worth while but we were "three days late and three dollars short." I'd have to say it was a failure.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Of the individuals you knew aboard the Liberty, those that are in the local area, can you think of any names or any we could interview or who would be receptive to this type interview?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No. the only ones I've told you are the only ones in this area. I didn't get to know too many people on board the ship. I, you know, you're not encouraged to get too palsy with all the crew members, because that encourages more questions, so the only ones I knew were the ones down below, and we only got to know them for a few days before the attack. So especially this late I couldn't really think of any names at all other than ones I told you, Bennett, and Commander Lewis, and, of course, you know Blalock. But no other names pop into my mind that

would be of any use to you.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ We plan to interview Commander O'Connor and Commander Fossett.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Commander Fossett back here, I know, had something to do with this. I would think Bennett would be one of your best sources if you could get a hold of him, Maury Bennett. He played a major role during the operation, and I think, in the aftermath too, helping McGonagle out and clearing up any questions for review boards, and things like that.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You said you hadn't read either book?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, The Assault on the Liberty, the last time I saw Blalock he mentioned it to me, and a friend of mine downtown bought me a copy of The Assault on the Liberty. He got this for me a week or two ago, and I still haven't gotten around to reading it. I don't even remember Ennes. You know, the strange part is I don't even remember him. Millington: He was an Electronics Officer.

Wilson: So I mean, when I see his picture I don't recall. Farley: We have a copy back there I'll show it to you when you get back. Wilson: Oh, I got the copy now. Farley: Oh, have you? Wilson: I just haven't read it yet, that's all. Farley: His picture is on the frontspiece.

~~QUESTION:~~ I can't ask you which version you prefer?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you personally receive any commendations or any recognition for what you did aboard?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, they gave me a Meritorious Civilian Service Award. ~~(Excellent?)~~ I don't feel like I did anything for it.

Farley (You survived!) Schorreck: (That's enough.) Wilson: ~~Yeah,~~ I guess that's something, yeah

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Were you asked to sign any statements or oaths to restrict any discussion concerning the incident?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, I didn't have to sign anything. I was just told in case you are asked, you know, that the official story is this. That was it. Fortunately I just faded out of sight after that. I never heard anything from anybody about it again, so I wasn't really hassled or bothered by it.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Who put the tasking assignment on the intercept operators?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson It was NSA, I mean I don't know specifically who.

~~QUESTION:~~ Schorreck: You didn't, did you get it from NSA and gave it to them or did they get it directly from NSA?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, as far as tasking goes, you know. . . .

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ What frequency were you listening to?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, things like that, that would come from NSA, the analyst back here would decide what frequency you guys look at and what cases you check out and things like that. ~~Those,~~ I think there was a tasking document or tech wire that was sent. "Check these things."

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Would that kind of thing change or was that the ship given those assignments, and then it went over on station and proceeded to follow it?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh I think we received it electrically after we left Rota. I don't know exactly when.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Before you got on station?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh Before we got on station yeah, we had it before that, so we knew basically what the assignments were and what to check out.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ Did you take any packages with you from NSA like, as I said, Texta or anything?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh As a matter of fact, we did. I took a dictionary, of course, and one or two other working aids. There were two or three classified working aids I took, too, in my little black satchel with a lock on it. I was given permission to do that, however. So we did, because it was a rush thing, there was no way to get this material out there by courier so we had to act as couriers ourselves. We did carry a few classified things with us.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ I think you have been billed pretty much, but would you like to put any comments here on the record, or anything you would like to say?

~~ANSWER:~~ Welsh Well, I don't know what I could say. It's something that ~~has~~ had profound effect on me. I was very bitter

after that event happened. I thought it was a waste of a lot of lives and just a needless waste, and it had quite a shocking effect on me. But I also felt almost guilty because I was alive and some were dead, but at the same time I felt relief because it wasn't me. And I also felt like, "gee, I'm spared. Maybe I should do something you know outstanding because I'm spared," right? But every time I think about it, it still has a,...it will always be with me. Farley When you read that book it will come back to you, too. Wilson Yeah, I'm sure that's one reason why I'm holding off reading it. I haven't exactly jumped into it yet, but I'm sure I will. But no, there is nothing much I could say about it. I think it was a...there were foulups in various areas. I don't really think any of them were intentional, or I certainly don't choose to think that unless I'm convinced of it, otherwise, I think that there were just a lot of foulups. They could have prevented it from happening if like the message had gotten to us the day before the attack, we would have moved back a hundred miles; perhaps that would have prevented it. I don't know.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ What do you think about the whole concept in light of not only the Liberty, but the Pueblo, the whole concept of the technical research ship?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Technical research ships? All I know is that I'd never get on another one. And I think that they are just too dangerous in many ways, too tempting for the host countries to take pot shots at, and too dangerous because the mission of the ship itself is a non-aggressive one and therefore you don't have any protection.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Could the same things have been covered by a fixed site somewhere?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Oh yes, nowadays I think particularly they could be that they are advanced in the overhead collection systems, and things like this. I wouldn't, if I had anything to say, I wouldn't assign any more technical research ships, unless there were a couple of destroyers sitting alongside. Then I might be willing to do it. Unless there was someone right near by that you knew could protect you. Then the convenience of being right next door and, you know, immediately on-line intercepting and reporting. There may be some gain in speed, but, as I said, I would never do it again.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION:~~ Not unless the communications worked? Farley Yes. Wilson: Pardon?

Schorreck: Not unless the communications worked?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yeah, right.

~~QUESTION:~~ Farley That fact alone, the lack of reliability of communicating with anybody would be frightening.

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Yes, that's right. Well, we were really totally on our own out there, there was not a soul in sight. From the time of the attack which was two in the afternoon til we first got any assistance from the U.S. was about six thirty the next morning. So we went a long, long time without hearing from anybody. Farley: That's a shame. Wilson: I often felt, I felt a little bitter about that, too, because I felt like those few men that night died and I felt that with some medical assistance they might have been saved, because we only had one doctor and two corpsmen to treat about 100 wounded, it seemed like 100, maybe not that many. So it was a rough night. I helped out a little bit, but all I could do mostly was stay out of the way.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: How was the esprit de corps during that crisis?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Surprisingly, there was no panic; surprisingly it was pretty orderly. When the men were ordered to do something they did it, kept busy. Oh, there was a lot of, a few guys obviously scared to death, crying and shaking of heads, but there was no panic, nobody ran rampant through the ship or anything like that. I guess, the real depression set in later that night, a lot of bad scenes that night. Farley: From the shock.

Schorreck ~~QUESTION~~: Maybe they asked you before I got here, what do you think about the business of it being an accident and

all that kind of stuff?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson Well, no they didn't ask me that, but I did a lot of thinking about it and talked to a lot of the other people about it and to this day it is hard for me to believe it was an accident. I just can't buy it being an accident; there are too many things that tell me it couldn't have been an accident. The overflight of the Israelis that morning, you know, these things have cameras, right? And they can get you very closeup shots. And those were obviously Israeli Noratlas'. And I can't buy it, the big flag flying, us sitting dead in the water, I mean and, the Israelis had obviously flown over this area of the Mediterranean a day or two before. They knew that the Egyptian Navy was dead. I can't buy it. I think there were plans behind it for their own political gain, and getting the U.S. to perhaps change its tune about siding a little more firmly with the Israelis, because, if they had done what they apparently tried to do, which was sink the ship and leave no survivors, who's to say that it wasn't the Egyptians. Right? That's the only way I can look at it, and make an example of it because I just can't buy it being an accident.

Farley ~~QUESTION~~: Henry, do you have anything before we wrap it up?

~~ANSWER: Wilson~~ Millington: No. Farley: Hank? Robert, we want to think you graciously for spending all of your time here. WILSON Sure certainly. No problem. Farley: Boy, you really straightened us out on a lot of questions that we had. WILSON Well, I hope I have been of help. FARLEY We will transcribe this and then let you look at it. And Henry will use it for, as I say to confirm or reject certain information. WILSON: Well, if you think of anything else that I can help you out with. FARLEY We may do, we may ask for, I'm sure we have missed some key questions, but I tried to come up with some, and Hank has been working on it. Henry also. WILSON: Well if I know, if I get an idea of the actual thrust of what you are trying to get at, and things like that, any information I think might help or make things a little clearer for your book, if anything comes to mind, I guess I could give you a call. I don't know of anything right now. Millington: I'll appreciate that. Farley: And, Bob, we will classify this tape whichever way you want it. WILSON Well, I think certainly SECRET should cover it. Yeah, I didn't give you any TOP SECRET material.

Farley ~~QUESTION:~~ You didn't hold back anything did you?

~~ANSWER:~~ Wilson No, I didn't give you any particular [redacted] or anything like that so if I had done that I would have to say TOP SECRET.

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Farley OK.