ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

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CDR James G. O'Connor

22 May 1980

Conference Room #13, Operations Building, NSA, Ft. Meade, Md.

Interviewer: Mr. Bill Gerhard

Mr. Henry Millington

Mr. Hank Schorreck

Mr. Bob Farley

FARLEY: Today is 22 May 1980, our interviewee, Commander Jim O'Connor who was the Assistant Technical Operations Officer aboard the Liberty when the ship was attacked by Israeli forces in June of 1967. The interview is taking place in Conference Room #13 in the Operations Building, NSA, Fort Meade. Interviewers: Mr. Bill Gerhard, Mr. Henry Millington, Mr. Hank Schorreck, and Bob Farley. Commander O'Connor will recall his experiences while he was aboard the Liberty and immediately after the attack by Israeli forces. The classification of this tape and the succeeding tape: SECRET, HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY according to the desires of Commander O'Connor.

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FARLEY: Jim, what we'd like...do you mind if I call you Jim? It would make it easier. What we'd like to do is pick your brain, everything that you could remember about June of '67 as far prior to that as you want to go, and as far after that time as you would like to discuss. But we're trying to fill in a lot of gaps. Bill Gerhard is working on the history...the SIGINT History of the Liberty, and Hank is the chief historian on everything else relating to the Liberty. So I've shown you a list of questions and we'll, pretty much as a format, follow that, Jim. Anything else that you want to talk about or any questions that Bill, and Hank, and Henry have, fine.

QUESTION: During the critical period (May-June 1967) what was your assignment?

O'CONNOR: I was assigned to the US Liberty as the Assistant Technical Operations Officer.

QUESTION: You were aboard the Liberty?

O'CONNOR: Yes, my job mainly was manual morse collection officer and the P&R officer.

QUESTION: What time period was this?

O'CONNOR: Oh, I went on the Liberty in 1966, in September of 1966. I was on from then until 1967.

QUESTION: So you were on the cruise, the Ivory Coast area, then?

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: What was the routine there, what were you collecting?

O'CONNOR: In the Ivory Coast? Not, while we were in port nothing. That was the liberty port, crew relaxation, to get off. I think we were under way we were just maintaining continuity on a lot of cases, just to make sure they were still there, to see if there were new COMMS in the area, that type of thing, pretty much routine.

QUESTION: UAR or African cases?

O'CONNOR: No, not on the Ivory Coast. Sub-Saharan Africa.

QUESTION: Who assigned the mission to the SIGINT element aboard the Liberty?

O'CONNOR: Well, the mission would have come from NSA.

QUESTION: What element in NSA?

O'CONNOR: Let me think, I think it was in G Group. I don't remember it was so long ago.

QUESTION: Were you acquainted with Bud Fossett at the time? or did you meet him later on?

O'CONNOR: I don't know, to tell you the truth.

QUESTION: It could have been the area where Bud Fossett was employed, G04.

O'CONNOR: I think that was it.

QUESTION: There were two or three documents required reading for the people aboard the Liberty. OPINS 2855 which were the Operating Instructions for the Liberty and the

MUSSO document for USN 855. Were most of the people required to be acquainted with what was in those documents?

O'CONNOR: The officers all were, and if I remember correctly, I had all the people in my division read them. But I know I had the chiefs read them and the petty officers.

QUESTION: Can you take us from the Ivory Coast to Rota and then what happened there? Any thing that changed the tasking or redirected you to the Mediterranean? Can you fill us in in that time period?

O'CONNOR: There wasn't I don't think an awful lot that happened. We got a message that told us that when we were ready for sea to leave and head for Rota, Spain so we were out of port in about four hours. We had everybody back aboard and had gotten underway and left and we steamed to Rota, and it took us about two or three days, anyway. And then we were in Rota, the supposition was that we were going down into the Eastern Mediterranean, although nobody had said at that time. But it was pretty obvious to everybody on board that was where we were going.

QUESTION: So you had no orientation briefing?

O'CONNOR: Not up until that point. Before we had left the states we had been here in the building. There was a feeling at that time that there would be a war but it would be

between Greece and Turkey. So we had been all primed for that. But nothing about the UAR and Israel.

QUESTION: What did you do at Rota other than pick up augmentation people and maybe get some more Texta, more documents?

O'CONNOR: We got more Texta, we went into the spaces at Rota, the SIGINT spaces there to find out what they had on that area of the world. We had nothing so anything that they had was better. They gave us most everything they had, dictionaries, working aids, maps, charts. And of course we took on fuel, food.

QUESTION: What type of people did you pick up?

O'CONNOR: We picked up linguists, basically, picked up three Agency civilians and three marines.

QUESTION: What type linguists were they?

O'CONNOR: I believe that they spoke Egyptian or Arabic, but one of them, if my memory serves me correctly, one of the marines was a Russian linguists.

QUESTION: Anything else?

O'CONNOR: If you give me a couple minutes, I'll remember his name. No, not as far as I know.

QUESTION: Hebrew linguists?

O'CONNOR: No.

QUESTION: Anybody have any knowledge of Hebrew?

O'CONNOR: I think some of the sailors did, some of the Jewish sailors, (who were born in Brooklyn probably) but we didn't pick up any Hebrew linguists specifically, as I recall. That's a long time ago.

COMMENT: Yeah, right. Henry do you have any questions on? do you want to pursue that?

QUESTION: You were with the Navy, the Naval Security Group at that?

O'CONNOR: Yes, I was.

QUESTION: You had been previously at NSA?

O'CONNOR: Yes, I had served one tour at NSA, in the old C4 organization, was a computer programmer, went from there to P&R school in Pensacola to end my tour, and then to the Liberty.

QUESTION: Was that a fairly typical situation among officers on the Liberty? the SIGINT officers on the Liberty. Had they been here, most of them?

O'CONNOR: Some of them had been here. Of course some of them had been in quite a few years, and in our line of work in the Navy it's typical for an officer to spend three years in the Washington area, and three years out in the field or at sea. So I would say a good half of the SIGINT officers on board had been in the Agency before, for a tour of duty.

QUESTION: Who was the OPS officer aboard?

O'CONNOR: For the SIGINT OPS? or ships OPS?

QUESTION: Yes. SIGINT OPS.

O'CONNOR: SIGINT OPS was Lieutenant Commander Dave Lewis. He was research operations department head. He was in charge of that facet.

QUESTION: What position did Maury Bennett hold?

O'CONNOR: Maury Bennett was Dave's assistant. He was the Assistant Research Operations Officer. That was what he was called.

QUESTION: Did McGonagle know the mission?

O'CONNOR: Yes, yes without a doubt. He was in the spaces every day. He would come down in the morning, usually about 8:30, and we'd tell him exactly what we had been doing and we're a tasking office, so he knew what our mission was and why we were there.

QUESTION: What was your tasking as you understood it to be? Did you understand it right when you left Rota on the way East or after you got there?

O'CONNOR: I don't remember when we got it in. I think it started coming in when we were in Rota.

QUESTION: What was it?

O'CONNOR: We were targeted mainly against Egyptian targets. I think, low level comms. We could hear a lot of the troops on the battlefield talking back and forth.

QUESTION: Morse?

O'CONNOR: Voice.

COMMENT: Voice!

O'CONNOR: Well, we had voice and morse and we had printer that we were copying and all.

QUESTION: And all of this was directed toward Egyptian traffic?

O'CONNOR: Basically Egyptian, Arabic, if it wasn't specifically Egypt, it was toward the Arabs.

QUESTION: Okay, UAR. No Russian, no Israeli?

O'CONNOR: No, well there was...we had some ELINT tasking to look for certain types of radars, and some of them were probably Russian radars at the time, and not having any Hebrew linguists I wouldn't, we wouldn't have the need to be targeting against Israeli.

QUESTION: Was there any? What am I looking for, William? Taping? Did you have any assignment to tape certain frequencies on any of these methods of collection for processing later on? So that you wouldn't need, say a Hebrew linguist at the time?

COMMENT: Jim, If I may prompt you a little bit, there was a VHF/UHF search position aboard the Liberty and that wouldn't have been in your morse section that you managed. (No) But would you know whether or not that position was operating? That must have been the position

that picked up the voice.

O'CONNOR: Well, we had, yeah we could pick up voice on the standard R390 receiver.

COMMENT: Oh yeah, that's right.

O'CONNOR: Which they had in the spaces. Sometimes if a posit wasn't manned someone would crank up the battlefield to hear, just to hear what was going on. So that's where the voice that I'm referring to.

QUESTION: Did you think it at all odd at the time that your targeting was, out well say exclusively, with primarily UAR?

O'CONNOR: No, I think the political things at that time at least where I saw them was that Israel was an ally and in that case you would not be going against your ally, you would be going against.

QUESTION: You pretty much had defined it along those terms...UAR's on one side and we and the Egyptians, I mean the Israelis on the other?

O'CONNOR: Yeah, I had in my own mind, yes. And I think a lot of the people of the ship had, too.

QUESTION: Was there any tasking against Soviet Navy presence in the Mediterranean, do you recall, maybe an alternate task or?

O'CONNOR: No, I think if there was it would have been in searching

for radars, just to see who was out there, and what type of radar was out there.

QUESTION: Can you clarify that business at all on the way from Rota to station about whether or not there was that sub with you?

O'CONNOR: As far as I know there wasn't. As far as I know there never was a submarine. There was a story, and I had a couple of days to think about it, but supposedly only a couple of us on the ship knew that there was an Israeli submarine out there, and we were going in the area where the Israeli submarine was operating, but they were out there to drop off oh, commando-type guys, frogmen. So it was one of those stories passed behind closed doors, true or not, I don't know. That's the only submarine story I ever heard.

COMMENT: That makes a good one.

QUESTION: Jim, did you know any of the Navy linguists who embarked at Rota? I mean before you stepped on their...?

O'CONNOR: No, not before they came on in Rota.

QUESTION: Okay, how about the others that came with, what were there seven or eight people who augmented the group?

O'CONNOR: Well, let's see we had three marines and we had three NSA civilians. In fact I only remember six coming in. There may have been more.

QUESTION: You know it's interesting that in the official post mortem report they mentioned an Army warrant officer being with the group. Was that true?

O'CONNOR: No.

COMMENT: I thought I was cracking up because I read that and then I went back to read it again. There was a reference.

O'CONNOR: When I saw the question, I said there's a ringer, because we didn't have anybody in the Army.

COMMENT: Yeah, okay. Somebody had drawn...

O'CONNOR: Unless he was super well-disguised.

QUESTION: And there was a reference to "Major Allen Blue."

O'CONNOR: Yes, there was a reference, and again, Pearson's expose to the Major as the guy who never wore his collar devices. No such guy.

COMMENT: Not true, good.

QUESTION: The Liberty was designated a technical processing center. Can you explain what this mission would be and what they did?

O'CONNOR: Well, we naturally carried out the collection assignment that we had as we went along at the various countries. And we collected a lot of signals to be sent back here, or tapes to be brought back here and we had a reporting mission as well.

QUESTION: What type of reports did you produce?

O'CONNOR: Oh, we would produce like the spot reports and that type of thing.

QUESTION: TacReps, did they have TacReps?

O'CONNOR: No they didn't have TacReps in those days I don't think.

QUESTION: Summaries or translations?

O'CONNOR: Translations we put out, summaries, I don't remember putting summaries out. Translations yes.

COMMENT: I think somebody else, Bill, I noticed you screwing your face.

COMMENT: Well, I'm curious about the phraseology "technical processing center." Now the Air force created a TPC or something called "technical processing center" in [redacted] I'm just wondering whether that designation, or I'd like to ask where you got... EO 1.4.(c)

COMMENT: Out of the post mortem report again.

COMMENT: Was that where it was?

COMMENT: Because Commander Fossett called it a...technical research division in the way Commander Fossett called it--the one 855.

QUESTION: Is that the first time you heard it too, Jim?

O'CONNOR: Yeah.

O'CONNOR: Correct. On the ship it was called the Research Operations Department.

COMMENT: Jim's ship obviously had a processing responsibility or

a reporting responsibility and had independent action within boundaries as to what they could report. I don't believe you could have reported Israeli...I don't believe you could have issued Israeli product, if you did receive it.

O'CONNOR: No, no.

COMMENT: That would again come back to NSA.

O'CONNOR: Again, tasking, the building here was very explicit in what we could and could not do.

QUESTION: But you had a reporting digraph, didn't you?

O'CONNOR: Yes, we did.

QUESTION: Well, just to follow on Bill's comment, what raw material was sent back to any field site or to NSA?

O'CONNOR: Well, it would come back to NSA. I don't believe we ever sent anything to a field site. [redacted] so we tried to get that. There would be a lot of signals that would be picked up. There would be some voice that would be sent back to be processed.

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QUESTION: Was there any cipher text, enciphered material?

O'CONNOR: I think there was some picked up, probably in manual morse, oh I know there was.

QUESTION: But you didn't try to mess with that?

O'CONNOR: No, that would come back here.

QUESTION: Okay, we're underway, we're out of Rota on the way, can you give us a breakdown of the group? That is the SIGINT operation, who did what, total numbers, responsibility, names if you can?

O'CONNOR: Of course, Captain McGonagle is the skipper of the ship. As I told you before he knew exactly where our tasking was and where we're going and why, which makes sense...it's his ship. Dave Lewis, Lieutenant Commander Dave Lewis was the Department Head. Maury Bennett was his assistant. There was a [redacted] (b)(6) who was the non-morse officer, at that time, up for the voice position that you referred to earlier. [redacted] is now with the Secret Service. I had the manual morse (b)(6) and P&R division, printer and all that in one area. Lieutenant Jim Pierce was the Comm Officer in the research department. Lieutenant Jim Ennes was the maintenance officer in the department. And I think that pretty well covered all of the officers in there. I don't think I've forgotten anybody.

QUESTION: Did you have any chiefs, Navy chiefs?

O'CONNOR: Oh yes, we had, I can't remember a lot of their names now.

COMMENT: Do we want to expand on that, anybody?

O'CONNOR: I should have brought my roster with me, I could have told you exactly who they were.

QUESTION: Jim, I think you already answered, in part, this question, the ship's crew (the housekeeping personnel) were they aware of the presence of the NSA people aboard and aware of the mission?

O'CONNOR: Well they had to be aware of the presence of the three civilians on board because they were in civilian clothes. They were also aware of the marines, obviously. People on the bridge knew that at least one of the marines was a Russian linguist because he would come up to the bridge a couple times and translate some stuff for us by flashing light or whatever. As far as the ship's mission goes, no, I don't really think they were aware of it. Well...they may have been aware and had their suspicions but I think that is all they had.

QUESTION: Was there a good relationship between the NSA people and the security group people and the ship drivers and the engineers?

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: No problem at all?

O'CONNOR: No, actually the morale on the ship was high, due in large part to the Captain. He insisted for a start that all of the officers be qualified on the bridge under way, and that included the SIGINT, the supply officer, the doctor, so right away every officer worked into the ship's routine. Some of them didn't like it, some of us are crazy and liked to drive those gray things. And even the doctor took his turn on the bridge and was qualified which turned to service and good stead, later on. The ship's company, everybody's got their own areas on the ship to take care of. The Navy SIGINT types had their own area topside. There was a good rapport amongst everybody on the ship. It was a good crew and they stuck together on the beach. They got into a good fight in Rota.

QUESTION: Was that a true story?

O'CONNOR: Well, that's the story that's told. Well, the story, the point is pushed a little bit in there, but what actually happened, at least what they told us actually happened, was that somebody had made a disparaging remark about CT's up in the club, not realizing that just about the whole ship's company was in the club. The ship's company proceeded to take apart the club room. That's basically what happened. We didn't find

that out for four or five days.

QUESTION: You were at sea by then?

O'CONNOR: Yeah, but I talked to one of the fellows who's here in the building. He said his comment was, "hell we needed a good fight at that point."

QUESTION: Was there tension among the group, did they?...

O'CONNOR: Yeah, there was a certain amount of tension, apprehension, because they were heading down into an area where it is becoming more and more apparent that people were going to start shooting at each other, and that they were going to start shooting real bullets and most of us hadn't been in that situation before, we didn't know, one, how close we'd get to it.

QUESTION: You were not told that you would go in there by yourself?

O'CONNOR: Well, we pretty much guessed that. We knew where the Sixth Fleet would steam to, we knew what their operating area was, and we knew where ours was and the Commander of the Sixth Fleet sent a message that he wanted to come over and board the ship as we steamed on by, but the war started.

QUESTION: So you became aware of the war as you were enroute to your station?

O'CONNOR: Whenever, I started the 5th, I think we were out of Rota by that time, probably were underway about a day.

QUESTION: How did you hear about it?

O'CONNOR: I don't remember. Probably we got a copy of somebody's critic or something.

COMMENT: You were lucky that you at least got one message.

QUESTION: What type of support did NSA provide to the Liberty?

O'CONNOR: They didn't have time I don't think to give us an awful lot of support when we got diverted. If you're talking about carrying Texta and that type of thing, we were well supplied for [redacted] We had taken all that.

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QUESTION: But did they give you anything after you had departed Rota? Messages, guidance?

O'CONNOR: There would have been messages, there was guidance, yes, message guidance. I think there was, yeah, there was message tasking, too.

QUESTION: Could you communicate directly with NSA?

O'CONNOR: Not directly. You mean like today, it might bounce off a satellite? No, we couldn't do that.

QUESTION: What was your channel?

O'CONNOR: Well, we did have the satellite dish the TRSSCOM. That was only good for about four hours a day when the satellite happened to be in position and a ship happened to be in position and with [redacted] down the road here and we could all line up and we could pass a lot

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of traffic. We'd get back and forth, but that was four hours of the day.

QUESTION: That was operational traffic, as well as SIGINT?

O'CONNOR: Yes, we could pass almost anything. Actually not the satellite, the moon was in the right position, we'd use the moon to bounce it off. Some people called it moon bounce.

QUESTION: Had there been much trouble with the dish?

O'CONNOR: Yes, when we left Norfolk. I'll try to remember back then... There was a hydraulic line that broke, and the ship fitters in the yard put an elbow clamp on the thing, or an elbow joint, and somehow stripped the threads, and somehow the hydraulic system didn't work when we left. They did work on it in Rota, which was another reason we stopped in Rota. I think it was working when we left Rota.

QUESTION: Was TRSSCOM used only for SIGINT communications or did you pass other general service?

O'CONNOR: No, general service traffic. I say that guardedly, because I wasn't the Comm officer, but you know the nature of the beast you could do that. Normally, we would go through Morocco with our regular traffic.

COMMENT: You go to CRS Morocco, and then Morocco would send it on to NSA through some channel.

O'CONNOR: Our basic way out was through Morocco, anyways.

QUESTION: Was Captain, was Captain McGonagle kept informed of any SIGINT reflections of possible activity by any foreign military force?

O'CONNOR: Anything that we were made aware of, we thought that he should be made aware of, we did. Which was a lot.

QUESTION: Anything that would effect his operation and his piloting of the ship?

O'CONNOR: No, because he had his sailing orders, about which points to steam between, and he didn't have much leeway. He did, on a couple of occasions, he would call us up on the bridge so that we could see. We saw Suez get bombed the night we were on the way in, and he asked us if we knew anything about that or if we had heard anything and of course we hadn't at that point.

QUESTION: What type of material were you intercepting after the word of the Israeli attack against Egypt? and before the attack on the ship?

O'CONNOR: We did have some manual morse, we had printer traffic, which we originated the critic from. We originated two critics on the way in and probably within six or seven minutes of each other. One was...came across the printer but was first indication [redacted] traffic, it was first indication that somebody was going to [redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] And the other, I EO 1.4.(c)
don't know. It was about the same time and that's the one I worked. Dave Lewis was working on the other. So they both, they went out within a couple minutes of each other, I'd forgotten that.

QUESTION: And this was soon after the word that the war was underway?

O'CONNOR: This was the, gee, I don't know maybe the fifth, sixth, and may have even been as late as the seventh.

QUESTION: Did you see the message that NSA sent to the Liberty on the 6th of June directing the vessel to "maintain a high state of readiness," because of the "unpredictability of the UAR" and to report by FLASH any "threatening or suspicious actions?"

O'CONNOR: I probably did, but I don't remember.

QUESTION: But you didn't get any chance to report anything, I guess?

O'CONNOR: Not much.

QUESTION: Before you got on to station you were traversing along the North African coast. Were Algerian targets copied there?

O'CONNOR: I think they were, if my memory serves me correctly, we had gotten some tasking on the way in. Either as we went by geographic boundaries or for time periods, but I don't remember.

QUESTION: I don't know if this question is phrased properly...when

did the Liberty get orders to move farther away from its earlier location near the coast?

O'CONNOR: Sometime after I left. I was air-evacked off the morning after the attack. We had no orders at that point. I'm told that it came about forty-eight hours after the attack.

QUESTION: Do you have any comments on that "critical message," the one that directed the move that was delayed at what place was it? CINCUSNAVEUR delayed by the Deputy Chief of Staff for a couple of days?

O'CONNOR: I don't think that would have happened.

QUESTION: You don't think so, do you have any thoughts on it?

O'CONNOR: That's the first time I had heard it had been delayed at CINCUSNAVEUR.

COMMENT: That's the one that was delayed, I think four hours or so, because CINCUSNAVEUR needed a cite number, a JCS cite number in order to move the ship. And was it two days?

COMMENT: It's called two-day delay in Ennes's book, but four hours, yes I read that in another source.

COMMENT: I think that's in the, that may be in something we had in the past, the rough report, the JCS report. But it was still a delay, and then there were further delays on the part of CINCUSNAVEUR and establishing an OPSCOMM

with the Sixth Fleet, and then there were all kinds of delays with the Sixth Fleet, and they were worried more about, it would appear, the big news conference was being staged on board the USS America at the time.

COMMENT: It would have been nice to have had the message.

QUESTION: Assume for a moment on board the ship that you'd received this message, what would have happened then? The Captain would have taken action?

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes. He was not one to sit around.

COMMENT: Many of the messages that were trying to draw the Liberty out of that particular area were being addressed to senior headquarters, and info copies of those messages were being marked for the Liberty. Now if the commander had had info copies before he had an actual instruction he would or would not have taken action until he had heard from Sixth Fleet.

O'CONNOR: That is a good question, normally he would not. He would wait until his boss, who was Sixth Fleet at that time, told him to do it.

COMMENT: And that could contribute to a delay, too.

O'CONNOR: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: To what extent does the, would the commander of the ship have the option of pulling that ship out? If he thought, if he perceived a direct threat, he had the

option of pulling out of line, didn't he?

O'CONNOR: Not as I remember the sailing orders.

COMMENT: Okay.

O'CONNOR: As I say it was a long time ago. But I don't remember that being there. But again my job was down in the spaces. Was that in there?

COMMENT: I don't know, it is my impression that the commander did have that option if he perceived a threat to the ship, he could pull it out.

COMMENT: Yeah, I think that was stated three or four places. The question is whether he understood that?

COMMENT: Not necessarily would he think there was a threat. Yeah, not until we got hit.

QUESTION: Yeah, right, the question is whether or not is, one: what he perceived, and number two; do you think he would have done it or how would it have looked? Do you think he would have done it or do you think he would have waited to be told to take it out?

O'CONNOR: No, I think if he had perceived a threat, and that were in the sailing orders, he would have acted. Yeah, he was not the type guy who would, if you told him to march smartly around the room...

COMMENT: He would have done it until you tell him to stop.

O'CONNOR: Yeah, he wasn't that type of guy. He had initiative,

as opposed to a guy would be back two days later, he would still be marching.

COMMENT: It seems as though the fellow who was on the America would have been still marching two days later.

QUESTION: In your voyage from Rota to the Mediterranean did you ever hear of any reference to a Contact X? Contact A was the Valdez, Contact X was what we want to find out?

O'CONNOR: Well, yeah I'm certain I did but it would have been on the bridge. And it would have been called Skunk X. Because your surface targets, the ships you track on radar, just to keep track of them, they are designated at the beginning of everyday. You start with Skunk alpha, bravo, and one, two, three, and go through the alphabet and as you finish the alphabet the first time then you start with two letters, alpha alpha, alpha bravo. Say, there are enough ships in the Mediterranean I'm sure I heard that two or three times.

QUESTION: But there was a Contact X?

O'CONNOR: Oh, yeah, but it would have been another ship steaming by that the radar was keeping track of.

COMMENT: I guess we are just about up to the point of the attack. Bill, do you have anything before we get into that?

COMMENT: I'm afraid I might anticipate some of your questions. I don't have anything about what we've talked of.

COMMENT: Oh, go ahead, whatever you say. I won't answer it if you have it down... Ask it, if you have it down.

QUESTION: Do you have a question on eliciting Jim's thoughts on the measures taken to safeguard the ship or the lack of measures to safeguard the ship while it was out there?

COMMENT: No, I don't have that.

COMMENT: Jim may not have any detailed information. I think we should ask.

COMMENT: Jim, you have been asked.

O'CONNOR: Okay, it was pretty obvious we were out there by ourselves. At least to me it was. It was obvious to some of the other officers and some of the chiefs because one of the chiefs who worked for me, was later killed, Doug Smith, he and I had a discussion about that in the morning and we both were of the same mind that we were pretty much out there on the limb, by ourselves, if anything happened. It didn't look like there was anybody around to get to us. But we really didn't think anything was going to happen.

COMMENT: Should I follow up with another one now?

COMMENT: Yes, please do.

QUESTION: In the direct aftermath of the Liberty, are you aware of any measures taken within the TRS program itself to enhance the survivability of these platforms out there?

O'CONNOR: Yes, direct aftermath, meaning maybe a year later.

COMMENT: That would put it in the post-Pueblo period.

O'CONNOR: Yeah, the Pueblo was six months after the Liberty, right.

COMMENT: Henry and I were talking this morning about something we were reading about all the measures taken directly after the Pueblo incident. And we have been looking through what records we do have to see whether or not the bitter experience that you went through on board that ship ever was translated in any positive action taken with respect to some of the other ships. We're aware that there were other ships that came right back into the same area within a month of the crisis situation, only a few months later. Was it the Georgetown we sent down there?

COMMENT: But she had a destroyer with her.

COMMENT: She did? I didn't know that.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I used to know the name, but I forgot which one came with her. On the Belmont, I had a friend down there, they rigged a lot of the equipment on the sides of the ship with high explosives. And they were all pretty nervous about that. Nobody wanted to be the guy who pulled the switch because they said it would blow the plates right out of the place.

COMMENT: That's reassuring to hear this.

COMMENT: That's a different thing. What you just said was a different thing though, right. That was a self-destructive capability, as opposed to sending a destroyer escort. I think the implications are just totally different with those two things.

O'CONNOR: They are. Opposite ends of the scale. ~~The~~ why the ship was rigged with explosives, I don't know, unless there was fear that one would be captured some day. But I wouldn't have been privy to any of that.

QUESTION: Just before the attack what type of armament was on the Liberty?

O'CONNOR: We carried 4 .50 cal. machine guns and we had a few rifles and a few pistols. That's basically it. A few night sticks, hand grenades.

QUESTION: Did you have any sling shots?

COMMENT: It might have helped.

COMMENT: Rubber bands and paper clips.

QUESTION: Another question that nobody seems to have the right answer. Was the Liberty flying the American flag?

O'CONNOR: Yes.

QUESTION: At all times, do you remember?

O'CONNOR: Yes, it certainly was. I was on the bridge when the attack started. We had had a general quarters drill so everybody just happened to be at general quarters. We

were securing for it and I had turned over the bridge watch to [redacted] My general quarters station was officer of the deck and the bridge and I went up to the 04 level to see whether I could see where these airplanes were that we had on the radar, and we had three small high speed contacts closing. I got up there just about the time the first jet came down out of the sun and opened up on us. I got hit. I was standing up there trying to be John Wayne and dive down on the bridge, and but as I fell, I looked. That question was in my mind. And the American flag was up there and it was flying. (b)(6)

QUESTION: It was not obscured by any smoke or any of that stuff?

O'CONNOR: No, well the flag was ahead of where the smoke stack was. We hadn't taken that many hits at that point.

QUESTION: And there was enough wind to have it...?

O'CONNOR: Oh, it was standing straight up.

QUESTION: On that morning, Jim, prior to the general quarters drill had, were you, had you been aware of the over flights that had been, or the reconnaissance that have been made? Was anybody particularly concerned that these were "hostile aircraft?"

O'CONNOR: We were concerned, but as far as hostile I don't think that we thought that there was hostile aircraft around.

There could have been, but we didn't know.

QUESTION: Did, had up to that point had....

FIRST TAPE, SECOND SIDE

QUESTION: Prior to the general quarters drill, had anybody made any comments as to what they felt was the identity of those planes?

O'CONNOR: I think that the general feeling was that they were probably Israeli. I don't remember seeing any markings on them.

QUESTION: What would be the markings, the Star of David? or I don't have any idea.

O'CONNOR: Yeah, it's a very light blue Star of David or was. So it would have been hard to see anyway. The markings for the UAR I could tell you the colors but I couldn't tell you how the planes were marked.

COMMENT: Henry, do you have any more?

COMMENT: No.

QUESTION: Why don't you just continue in this vein, Jim. What you remember about the actual attack and the hour and a half that you were undergoing assault.

O'CONNOR: It's a very long time.

COMMENT: It was probably the longest hour and a half you ever spent, probably.

O'CONNOR: I think it was. I had no concept of time, I guess. People have asked me, on a number of occasions, how long it went on and I said I really don't know because....

~~O'CONNOR:~~ I guess like everybody else I'd have to read the book because there was a lot going on, a lot of shooting, a lot of noise, a lot of smoke, a lot of fires. People trying to get to places and to do things. Could have been thirty minutes, could have been an hour and thirty minutes. When I got hit, I guess, I came down the ladder, fell down the ladder. I didn't have any feeling from the waist down, total loss of feeling so I dragged myself clear across the bridge. And there was a little bit of confusion then, but no doubt that somebody was shooting at us. So I dragged myself back into the combat information center, which was in the room behind the brig, basically, to try to get myself out of the way. So I laid there and managed to bleed and what not. A couple of other people in there doing the same thing. And there was, I guess, a number of bullets flying around. There was one that landed between me and the guy next to me. I guess, that at times like that, you think you are about ready to die. I think I was because at one point I noticed that there was a lot of blood on the floor and then I realized that it was

my blood. And a young fellow by the name of O'Malley, a young ensign, told me that I had two great big holes in my back, and blood was coming out of there. And I told him to take off his tee shirt and he said he didn't know what to do about it. I told him to take off his shirt and stuff it in there. So he did and there was another fellow who did the same thing, Petty Officer by the name of Louie Armstrong, who still to this day every time I see him he reminds me that I owe him a tee shirt. Some how I just got the bleeding stopped and eventually we got down to the chief's quarters. I walked down, I guess, with somebody, a young seaman who was shot in the hand, a fellow by the name of Wilson. And I'm not sure how I walked down because I still didn't have any feeling from the waist down. And it was a case of leaning on one another and what not. But we were very wary about walking because when the PT boats would come alongside, one of the places they would fire would be right through the water tight doors so in case anybody had hidden behind the door or in the passage way they would get them there. I guess the word was kind of passed verbally, and very quickly when they were standing off, and people would make some very fast moves inside the ship. And when they started to

come back in again everybody was to flatten out. They would get out of those (?? fore/torp ??) ships passage ways.

QUESTION: Did the men that were firing at you have visual command of the ship itself, people running around and this sort of thing, were they shooting at individuals running across the deck?

O'CONNOR: I don't know, I didn't see.

QUESTION: Or at just random.

O'CONNOR: I didn't see them. I was inside.

COMMENT: The reason I ask, I was wondering why they couldn't see the American flag.

O'CONNOR: That's a question that has been in my mind. There was a sailor by the name of Meadows who was a quartermaster, after the attack from the fire, he came down from the 04 level supposedly. I forgot who told me the story, but it was on the ship and it was the first night, and the kid was as black as these chairs that we are sitting in. He had been up there, and said he had got too scared to go anywhere, so he was up above where the fires were and he said everytime the flag got shot away or caught fire he would run up another American flag.

COMMENT: They had many opportunities.

O'CONNOR: So if that's true, yeah there was an American flag up

during the whole attack. He said he kept running up bigger and bigger flags because he ran out of the standard battle flag that you steam under.

QUESTION: This was before the torpedo attack or are you talking about the whole affair?

O'CONNOR: Well, of the whole affair, I guess I haven't said too much about the torpedo attack. I've, at the time of the torpedo attack I was still on the, up in the combat information center.

QUESTION: Which was, was that the SIGINT operation or was that above it?

O'CONNOR: No, that was the ship's.

QUESTION: The second deck?

O'CONNOR: This was up in the area of the ship's bridge. The SIGINT operation was all below decks.

QUESTION: Which is the third deck?

O'CONNOR: Well, it was, you go down to the main deck and then the first deck, the second deck and the third deck was down.

QUESTION: So the third deck was the SIGINT operation?

O'CONNOR: Well the SIGINT operation was on the Belmont and the Liberty was a big space was spread out over three decks. It wasn't split up in various areas of the ship. It was all together.

QUESTION: You had all the crypt gear and all the intercept equipment and the files together in one big room?

O'CONNOR: Well, there was a series of spaces, but they were all on the same level. Well, when you entered the SI area of the ship you had to go by a guard and a locked door. And you would get in there and on the first deck was non-morse search development and some administrative space, photography lab. The second deck was all the manual morse spaces and the P&R and we had one other office there, I've forgotten what it was, it may have been just an office. And a Comm center. And the third deck, we kept all of our maintenance supplies and there was a classroom on the second deck that was.

QUESTION: When the torpedo, when the torpedoes hit, you had already been wounded and you were down below?

O'CONNOR: Yes, no I was still up, near the bridge.

QUESTION: So you could see something?

O'CONNOR: No, I was in the combat information center and we had the doors shut and a couple of times references were made to why the door was shut. It was shut because there was fire on the bridge, and I told them to shut the door, not to create a draft through CIC. But nobody every asked me so I never told them. But that is why the door in the CIC was shut.

QUESTION: Did the CIC normally act as a receiving point for any sick that you had?

O'CONNOR: No. CIC on the ship is, and especially on the Liberty was small. It is where your radar was there. You know your radar repeaters were there to track other ships.

COMMENT: Were your voice plotters there?

O'CONNOR: The plot is there and that type of thing. No SIGINT at all on those spaces. My battle station on the ship was not in a SIGINT space, it was on the bridge.

QUESTION: Suppose you had been under attack and you would have had your voice communications that could pick up, you pick up voice communications, who would you tell?

O'CONNOR: Why we would have to go out to Sixth Fleet, in that case, because number one, he was our boss, and number two, he was probably the closest US Navy there.

COMMENT: I am trying to equate what little I know about a CIC on a World War II ship. It had some kind of alarm, but I guess that's the big difference, you couldn't have done anything anyway, not with 4 .50 cal. machine guns you couldn't.

O'CONNOR: And an aluminum super structure. That doesn't stop many bullets.

QUESTION: At any time were any international distress signals displayed or transmitted that you recall?

O'CONNOR: I don't. I tried to get myself out of the way and went back in CIC and there was a lot going on, a lot of fires and what not. So I couldn't say yes they were, or no they weren't.

QUESTION: So when the torpedoes hit you were aware that one of them wiped out the SIGINT operations area? or were you told later?

O'CONNOR: Later I found out what it was. It was a kind of frightening experience to have a torpedo go off. I think it felt like it literally lifted the ship out of the water when it went. And it made, I guess, almost a deafening explosion. It was louder than the bombs and rockets that we had taken. And then we settled back in the water right away just took on a, it seemed like we were just going to roll over. The list we took on. Then it got kind've steady.

QUESTION: It was right in the SIGINT space?

O'CONNOR: Yes, where the torpedo hit, I'm told, the boat was in the manual morse communications spaces.

COMMENT: Which must have put that right about the middle.

O'CONNOR: Yeah.

QUESTION: Was that, was any thought given later as Bill mentioned in his question about changing the location of the SIGINT spaces?

O'CONNOR: I don't know. I don't think so. I think those two ships were pretty well designed in the rehab to put the SIGINT spaces all in one area because the Georgetown, the Oxford, they tell me, the spaces were split and you go outside from point A to point B and it wasn't really the most convenient way to run an operation. When they rehabed the Belmont and the Liberty they said, well get it all in one spot.

COMMENT: You get a torpedo in the one spot and you're wiped out.

O'CONNOR: That's right. So we didn't have that much room back aft to put it. You know it was set out, I guess, if you had to go to sea on a SIGINT ship that was a kind of Cadillac to go on.

QUESTION: Was it?

O'CONNOR: Oh yeah it was a good ship. We had plenty of room to work.

QUESTION: You were pretty well incapacitated, so you didn't know anything about what equipments were destroyed or whether SIGINT documents were lost or should have been retrieved or should have been burned?

O'CONNOR: I don't think there was too much chance to retrieve or burn or anything else, it all happened so quickly. The only thing I know where it was for sure was the [redacted] stuff we had. And we had put that into weighted bags when we left Rota, not because we

EO 1.4.(c)

anticipated having to throw them over the side, which is you know normal deep water destruction method, but just to make room for all the stuff we picked up in Rota.

QUESTION: So they were hanging over the side?

O'CONNOR: No, they weren't hanging over the side, but they were out of the way in these big heavy weighted bags. So the Israeli stuff or the UAR whatever it was that we picked up in Rota and that was anything that we could put our hands on, would be out where we could use them.

QUESTION: You are well aware, I know, of the measures that were taken after the Pueblo, after it was made all over to curtail the amount of baggage, cryptologic baggage, that these ships were carrying around. Would you have any comment on all of the excess baggage you may have carried on your trip to the Mediterranean? For example, did you have all of the case notations for the African development program on board, did you have crypt aids to help you read [redacted] military and all of this kind of or did you drop those off at Rota on the way? EO 1.4.(c)

O'CONNOR: I don't believe we dropped them off, if I remember I think we still had them.

COMMENT: So you were a floating NSA in a sense, insofar as the technical.

O'CONNOR: Yes, for that part of the world.

COMMENT: Insofar as the technical documentation.

QUESTION: You weren't on deck so you didn't see or you weren't aware of any offer to assist on the part of the Israeli gun boats?

O'CONNOR: No, the only story I've heard about that was from a fellow by the name of Addison, who was a first class. He came out of the flooded spaces, evidently he was standing on deck smoking a cigarette in the middle of all this. The gun boat went by and the guy was strapped into the gun on the afterend, and I asked, "What'd you do?" and he said, "I gave him the finger." And I said, "What did he do?" and he said, "He gave me the finger back."

QUESTION: I was going to ask you what was the reply made by McGonagle to the TAHMASS, which is the Israeli one of the boats, to the Commander when he offered assistance to the Liberty? I just wondered what his comment was. Probably the same type gesture.

O'CONNOR: It was in the same vein.

COMMENT: But it was verbal.

QUESTION: Here is something that puzzles me, how could the US Naval Attache from Tel Aviv (CDR Castle) who's aboard the helicopter that hovered over the deck, how could he

not be aware that there were wounded aboard, why was he forced to drop his calling card before anybody would recognize him and then the Captain says "get lost?"

O'CONNOR: Well, I don't think Commander Castle was in the helicopter. Now that is just my personal gut feeling on the thing. As to why his calling card came down I, Lord only knows.

COMMENT: This is right out of the Ennes book.

O'CONNOR: Right, yeah, but I couldn't say Commander Castle was on board the helicopter or not. And yes, there was a lot of dead and wounded laying around the decks of the ship when the helicopter was there.

COMMENT: Well, maybe that's why Ennes felt the same way, then, that he didn't know that Castle was not aboard.

O'CONNOR: Now I think it may have been, but it would surprise the heck out of me.

QUESTION: I take it from what you heard that the helicopter itself was well marked as an Israeli helicopter?

O'CONNOR: Yes, I think it was. And I think that is the first time, well it's the first time I remember anybody seeing any markings of any kind or flags or other than the hull numbers of the PT boats.

QUESTION: After the attack did you see any US aircraft or any aid aircraft?

O'CONNOR: No we had...the word had spread that they would come, that they would rendezvous with us, but they never did...to our knowledge. There were people up on the bridge all night looking for them. And we were just kind of waiting for who ever it was, that had come and gotten us, to come back and finish us off.

QUESTION: Do you have any comments on the report that JCS directed somebody to cancel and recall the airstrike from the Sixth Fleet when the USA allegedly received an apology from the Israelis?

O'CONNOR: No.

QUESTION: And this apology further delayed any aid or assistance from the Sixth Fleet. Were you aware of that?

O'CONNOR: No, not until...

COMMENT: Until you read the book, probably?

O'CONNOR: No, I was aware of it on the America. I had met a couple of the pilots. A number of years later I met another guy who was on that strike. He's a good friend now.

QUESTION: And they were recalled. Wasn't McNamara the one who recalled it? From what we see.

COMMENT: From one of the sources that I read.

O'CONNOR: Dave told me, Dave Griffith, the Navy backseater, he rides in the back seat of these. He told me that their

orders to clear the sea and the skies of anything around the Liberty. They said that their orders were that it didn't matter who it belonged to.

QUESTION: Did you ever hear that a submarine had recorded on film the entire attack on the Liberty?

O'CONNOR: Not before I read your list. I'd like to see the film though.

COMMENT: That's why we are trying to get copies.

O'CONNOR: Let me know if you do.

COMMENT: That's in the Ennes book isn't it?

COMMENT: Yes.

COMMENT: Is it?

COMMENT: Talks about. (Pearson) Was it Pearson, I'm sorry.

COMMENT: Oh yeah, Ennes alludes to the fact that it may, that there is a rumor to that effect, but Pearson comes out and claims that it actually happened.

O'CONNOR: Yeah and I think Ennes says "I knew there was a submarine," and he didn't have the classification to know or something.

COMMENT: There is something, however, that I ran across this morning, Bill. I don't know whether I mentioned it to you or not. I ran across a copy of a message, now this was from, this was on the 9th, the day after, and it was from the air base in Athens. And he was reporting

back, this was from the base back to the Naval Photographic Center in DC. He was reporting that he had just shipped a canister of sixteen millimeter film of the Liberty and he was sending it back to the Naval Photographic Center, well now that is on the ninth. Where did that film come from? I want to try to find this film.

COMMENT: Wasn't there somebody on board the Liberty taking pictures?

O'CONNOR: I don't know that anybody had time to take pictures. Well it had to be because in the book, since I've seen some pictures of PT boats coming by and a picture of one of the jets coming over the ship.

COMMENT: Pictures of the jet coming from the stern...(they talked) up through the super structure.

O'CONNOR: Still, the next morning is when, I think, it was the Davis came along side, it was the first ship, and that was in the morning hours, because I was air-evacked out to the America.

COMMENT: I don't know whether we can equate that to a sixteen millimeter canister of film.

COMMENT: I knew that there was an apparently, well Ennes had talked about some seaman taking still shots, but this was talking about a sixteen millimeter motion picture film.

COMMENT: Where did that officer disembark with the film canister under the cover of night? Where in Rota?

COMMENT: Well, he left Rota with the film, supposedly. And was sent by special plane here, to DC.

COMMENT: We don't know.

COMMENT: Well that's the story, that's the rumor.

COMMENT: But there was some sailor aboard who supposedly had a 35mm and he was shooting the last few shots that he had on one roll. And there was somebody else and I am basing this on the book who was that?

O'CONNOR: I've forgotten but that may be where the pictures in the book came from.

QUESTION: Oh yeah, who said this, Ennes said this?

O'CONNOR: Well Ennes quotes the fellow's name. He didn't give his name. Deliberately.

COMMENT: Yeah, further more this guy himself did not turn that film in and he kept it out to be developed later.

COMMENT: Yeah he did that's what he said.

COMMENT: Can we get copies of that Jim?

O'CONNOR: Somebody tells me that Clyde Wade, the fellow who is in the building now, that after the attack, the day after, I guess, or two days after, somebody came through and took all of the film from all the cameras. You know, they rewound the film and took it. And he said he

never got his film back, I think....

COMMENT: That's right, this is told in one of the books, too.

O'CONNOR: But I wasn't there, but this guy can tell you, because he was there.

COMMENT: I want to make contact with him.

O'CONNOR: I tried to find his phone number the other day, but I couldn't find it. I want to tell him I dropped his name in a couple of places.

COMMENT: He'll be surprised when he hears.

COMMENT: Tell him he has nothing to fear from a couple of broken down historians.

QUESTION: I guess we don't have to talk about the cryptographic equipment or what was destroyed and what was saved. Can you tell us? Maybe you cannot; when did NSA become aware of the attack on the Liberty? Do you have any idea?

O'CONNOR: I have no idea. I was too busy.

COMMENT: Yeah, I can believe it.

O'CONNOR: Too busy bleeding.

QUESTION: When you arrived, did you go aboard the America or did you go back to a shore-based hospital?

O'CONNOR: No, I was air-evacked to the America.

QUESTION: Oh, were you?

O'CONNOR: Yeah. I had to go to the bathroom and the doctor was

working on the fellow on the table above me. I was lying on the floor and I just could not empty my bladder all night and finally it was about ready to burst. I asked somebody for a jug, and it was pure blood and the doctor looked at it and said "put him on the next helicopter by himself." So they took me out that way. Oh, there was a lot of other people on it. But the doctor on the America told me, he said I should be dead, that you've lost over half your blood and I don't know why you're alive.

QUESTION: Did you lose consciousness at all?

O'CONNOR: Twice.

QUESTION: Did you?

O'CONNOR: Both times I was in a stretcher, no once, well once that I remember, okay. I was in a stretcher, stoke stretcher, wire things, one of the most Godawful uncomfortable things in the world. And they lifted me to take me down the steps to the mess desks, which of course was the makeshift hospital. I lost consciousness then. But then as soon as I got leveled back out, and they got me down the steps I came back around. I don't remember going to sleep that night.

QUESTION: Did anybody aboard the Liberty, I mean aboard the America tell you don't talk about it? and this was

probably an ONI representative who said forget it?

O'CONNOR: I don't remember any ONI representatives. I think everybody was too sick. Somebody did probably say not to talk about it. Yeah, it probably was me or some of the other officers because we figured there was going to be a board of inquiry.

QUESTION: You told some of your troops?

O'CONNOR: I said it may have been me. But there could have been an ONI agent...things were kind of confused, at that point. It could have been one of the other officers. Dave Lewis was there.

QUESTION: Subsequent to that, Jim, from the America you went to Naples?

O'CONNOR: Right, I stayed on the America for about 10 days. But I had a lot of internal bleeding. And once they got that stopped, pretty much and I guess then I could tolerate an airplane ride. I went, by then I started to get the feeling back in one of my legs so I could walk with crutches. So I guess I was there 10 days, then I went to Naples, flown off the America. Went off the deck launch, man that's a scarey experience. Almost as bad as getting shot at. The pilot had said when we go off we would, they didn't use the catapult on the wounded, I guess because the shock or the pressure.

COMMENT: Fall off the side.

O'CONNOR: Were in this airplane back at the end of the flight deck, and turn the engines up and they sound like they're going to fall off and we just kind of took off. And they said that you'd feel a sensation of falling, and that is exactly what we're doing. We'd started down, of course you're laying there on your back looking out a window and all you can see is water coming up and finally the airplane started to get a little bit of air and we went up. But I went to Crete and I got picked up there in a C130 and we went to Naples. And there was a group of us, I had forgotten who was in the group now, but there probably was a half a dozen of us who went that day. There were two planes that went. I stayed in Naples, and I started to bleed again in Naples. And the doctor there decided to send me up to Lahnstuhl because there was a urologist up there. They knew at that point that I in time even on the America that I had some kidney damage. As it turned out I didn't have any kidney left when they opened me up. They did that in Lahnstuhl.

QUESTION: Did you lose a kidney?

O'CONNOR: Yes, I lost a kidney, and all the associated stuff with it. I had some nerve damage in my back. I still have.

One of my legs I have not total feeling in to this day. Things went up hill after they took my kidney. I started to get better.

QUESTION: During this time that you were going through this at the treatment facilities, was there any time or times that you can remember when somebody specifically came to you and said now you don't say anything about this except what we tell you to say?

O'CONNOR: No, nobody ever said that to me. I know that I was under an assumed name in Lahnstuhl. They eventually told me what my name was as sort of a joke.

COMMENT: So you could answer, if called.

O'CONNOR: Well, my name was Loveland, Private Loveland. Some nurse said I don't know who in the hell you are but I know you're not an Army private in a private room. And she said you know your shirt's got two silver bars on it over there so I know you're not a private, but I can't find out who you are. I thought it was kind of funny at the time.

QUESTION: So Commander Ennes' chapter on the coverup would not necessarily agree with your estimate of what took place?

O'CONNOR: Well, I, no I don't think so.

COMMENT: One has to assume that the Navy did not want each member on board that ship saying all that he knew about the

cryptologic business of the Liberty.

O'CONNOR: Well, you would have a lot of sailors who did not know. And that probably looks just as bad to the press as a bunch of sailors telling everything they did know. If it ever got in there. But I think a lot of the reason for the assumed names and the places we were, and the women's wards and places like that, was done for two or three reasons. One, a board of inquiry was meeting, and two, most of those people in those hospitals were pretty sick guys. And the last thing they needed was to talk to reporters. You know, that's why I think it was done, but nobody could find out where we were. The whole thing I could tell you a funny story about that. One day a German lady walked into my room, a German National, wanted to know if my name was O'Connor, and I said, "Yes." It turned out that her son lived in my mother's home town. My mother, he was a butcher so she mentioned me in the hospital in Lahnstuhl, that I was there, and this and that, so he wrote to his mother. And she put on her hat and coat and she rushed out to the hospital. Nobody in the Navy could find out where in the hell we were. There was a couple of humorous things that came up.

COMMENT: Before we get into the post mortem, anybody have anything?

QUESTION: Did you ever have anybody come and take a statement for the Board of Inquiry?

O'CONNOR: No, the only person I ever saw was the ship's doctor. He managed to get through to see everybody that was in the hospital. But as far as for the board, I've never even seen their findings of the event.

QUESTION: Is that under lock and key yet? Or has it been published?

COMMENT: There was an unclassified version.

O'CONNOR: In fact Senator Goldwater's staff was getting a copy of that when we went down to talk to them.

COMMENT: The TOP SECRET version has about three hundred pages (seven hundred) seven hundred is it? And the unclassified version is about twenty-six or twenty-seven.

QUESTION: Did you participate in any post mortem at all?

O'CONNOR: No.

QUESTION: Did you ever read any of the NSA report? Post mortem report?

O'CONNOR: No because the places I was, it wasn't available. This is my first time. I would love to read it.

COMMENT: Even through NSG?

O'CONNOR: I never really pursued it.

COMMENT: And they didn't pursue you, evidently.

O'CONNOR: No.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on why there was so much confusion as to what actually happened on board the

the Liberty when it was reviewed by the Court of Inquiry? There is a lot, a lot of conflict here and contradictions. Admiral Kidd's.

O'CONNOR: Yeah, but I mean in what people said and did?

QUESTION: Yes. Was it because they couldn't recall what actually happened or was there, was there, what's the word I want? Any deliberate distortions that you are aware of?

O'CONNOR: No, none that I'm aware of. I think everybody remembers something like that in his own way and a lot of things get burned into your mind in the way you saw them, in your mind, not the way they actually happened. I think that probably would account for a lot of it.

QUESTION: Was it McGonagle who was not sure what happened, when it happened?

COMMENT: Well, McGonagle's recap didn't agree with some of the other ones in terms of the length of time, (I guess that) the length of time, the whole thing took, the severity of it, kind of like an understatement.

QUESTION: Anything else on the Board of Inquiry? Bill, do you have something?

COMMENT: No, unless someone can figure out an easy way for us to obtain a copy of the TOP SECRET version of that.

QUESTION: Do you have any channels, Jim?

COMMENT: That was suppose to be, correct me if I'm wrong Henry, the seven hundred page version is supposed to be under the custody of the Navy's Judge Advocate General.

COMMENT: That's what Ennes says. However, I read that again, and I'm not sure whether he means the whole report or a particular portion. But it certainly, he certainly didn't have any success, if he had any access to it.

QUESTION: While in an operational status do you believe that the Liberty produced some useful intelligence?

O'CONNOR: I would hope it did. That is not really my bag to say. That's the Agency's.

QUESTION: Can you cite any examples? Would you recall any?

O'CONNOR: Not many, other than some translations and maybe some spot reports on things we did. We weren't in what you would call it...a glamour part of the world for that type of thing. The Africans are pretty much routine in their life then, they got up at eight o'clock, and turned their radios on and at five o'clock they turned them off. You know they just....

QUESTION: Was it in Pearson's book where he made reference to "cooking," cooking of messages? Did you ever hear of that?

O'CONNOR: In his book, yes.

COMMENT: Only that. I'd never heard of it until then either.

O'CONNOR: No, I had never heard of it, but I thought it was an interesting way to do it.

QUESTION: Would you, you wouldn't recall whether any of those messages might have passed?

O'CONNOR: No, not the way he wrote about it.

QUESTION: Okay. You read both books. Which version do you prefer?

O'CONNOR: Well, I read Ennes's book, and I read Pearson's book when it was in installments in Penthouse magazine. Ennes, while there was a lot of poetic license and many things happened differently as I remember them. It's more accurate.

QUESTION: You like his better?

O'CONNOR: Yeah, I would say I like his better.

QUESTION: What commendation or recognition did you get?

O'CONNOR: I came out alive. I got a Purple Heart. I really did nothing but lay there and bleed and get in the way.

COMMENT: You were there.

O'CONNOR: The fellows that should have gotten decorated didn't.

QUESTION: That's another question that I was going to ask you. Do you think that they were recognized properly?

O'CONNOR: Oh, I certainly didn't. I don't think the Captain was, I think he was slighted.

QUESTION: What was the feeling of those members of the crew that

you were able to see later when they found out that he was not awarded it by the President in the White House?

O'CONNOR: To this day they are all pretty bitter about that. I don't blame them. I think the whole crew took that as a personal affront and, of course, the ship was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. That particular one, I was at Nebraska Avenue at the time and a couple of the other officers were too, well, one was. I would say one, for sure. And we were told to stay away from the presentation. That we were not to go. Because they did not want to associate the Naval Security Group with the USS Liberty, which I thought was kind of dumb because everybody had read about it in the Washington Post. So we were flat told not to go.

QUESTION: Do you have any comments on the possible coverup by the Navy on this?

O'CONNOR: Well, I don't know what you mean by possible coverups, that could cover a variety of sins.

QUESTION: Do you think that the Liberty was sacrificed, so to speak, because of the situation in the Middle East and that because of what happened, the Navy had to come up with a story that wasn't completely accurate?

O'CONNOR: No, I don't think so. I guess that I would have to say that the international politics probably played a large

role in that. I can't say as I like that. I think that it is just a fact of life.

COMMENT: Bill has a comment on that, I can tell.

COMMENT: No, I really don't, I think Jim has answered it. He can hardly state that unequivocally that the Navy covered up anything. This was a cryptologic ship. I find it difficult in my own mind to separate out that consideration from the charges in Ennes book that there was a coverup. I would certainly hope that the Navy would cover it up as well as they could, at least the cryptologic aspects. When they talk about the military aspects, the newspapers went to town on it, there was very little left to be said on it, on a strictly military side.

COMMENT: I think everybody is talking about the fact that they refused to acknowledge that it was the Israelis that were behind it, that's what it means by a coverup. And the business of the compensation of the crew members, etc., etc.

COMMENT: Well, that's public knowledge.

COMMENT: There is some doubt about who paid who.

COMMENT: That's all public knowledge.

COMMENT: No it's not. It is not public knowledge of who paid who. Did the Israelis pay a cent? Or did our government pay.

O'CONNOR: I could tell you what I know about that.

COMMENT: Fine.

O'CONNOR: I was at home and there was a committee called the "Friends of Riley," I think, after the attack. His parents or somebody was going to sue the State of Israel for millions and millions, millions of dollars. And so when I got home from the hospital, by way of the circuituous route I told you, my phone started to ring, it was lawyers for these people wanting me to sign up and this and that. I got called some very nasty names on the telephone and I hung up on them a couple of times. I said you know that was my job and that was his job and that was what you get paid to do and that is why you're there. You know we didn't sign on for a law suit. So in the long run, that's a fact of life. But we had moved back to Maryland, my wife and I, they let me out of the hospital to go to graduate school. And I got a letter from the State Department one day that said we intend to sue the State of Israel in your name. And we the United States Government intend to sue the government of Israel in your name for X amount of dollars. So I pick up the telephone. Gee, I wish I could remember the guy's name now. I called the guy in the State Department and said surely there must be some

mistake. And he said no, not if your name is O'Connor, that is right and the dollar figure is right. I said to him, "What is this all about?" And he said well we're doing this. He said you could get yourself a lawyer and you could file suit like Riley and friends and some other people had done. He said, or you could just let us do it. And I said what's the difference? Well he told me. The lawyer would take about 33% and had to work through his office because his office was the one that did it. Or I could just let him do it for free. So I wasn't too convinced so I said sure go ahead. And I didn't hear too much from them for a long, long time until one day in the mail I got another letter.

TAPE TWO, FIRST SIDE

O'CONNOR: Time had gone on and we really hadn't thought too much about it. And my wife called me at work and said that there's a letter here from the Department of State. I said, "Well, open it up." And she opened it and there was a letter in there and a check. It said that the suit had been settled with the State of Israel and it was for the dollar figure that they had set before,

cause, I could hear a gasp at the other end of the line and I said how much is there. And she said all of it. Well, it wasn't an awful amount of money but at that point in time it was a lot of money. But the law suits were done through the State Department.

QUESTION: And this is public knowledge?

O'CONNOR: Evidently anybody could call up and they would tell them, yes, this was going on and this is how it was being done, the whole thing.

COMMENT: The Israeli Ambassador in town was very active chasing this around town.

QUESTION: Did they pay for the damage to the ship?

O'CONNOR: I don't know, I don't think they ever did, but the fellow in the State Department told me that there were seven separate law suits filed. There was a suit for the families of the dead. There was a suit for the wounded. There was one for damages, damage to the ship. Another one for medical care for the wounded. Another one for transporting the wounded, like when I started to get so bad, down in Naples, they flew a plane and a doctor and nurse down and picked me up right away and got me up to Germany. I think that's six. He told me there was seven, but I don't remember what the seventh was. And I guess one by one they got

settled. I talked to him one time and he hinted, but never came out and said, which ever suit it was that they were working on then was directly linked to the purchase of fifty F4s by Israel, once they had settled that suit they could buy the F4s. Shortly after in the paper I saw they had bought fifty F4s. I said before international politics probably plays a hell of a lot in this.

QUESTION: What did you think about, do you think the whole thing was worth it? Do you think those technical research ships are worth it?

O'CONNOR: I don't know. I guess I would have to defer to whoever directed the program in the Agency and what the intelligence community got out of it. And we basically were at the other end of the line, producing. But as far as a sailor goes, is it worth it to go to some of those ports, sure. They are places that you'd never go any other way. Well, they must of had some value because we had a lot of ships. I know there is talk in some quarter of bringing them back, which makes me shudder...just a little bit.

QUESTION: You wouldn't care to go aboard another one?

O'CONNOR: If it was armed, I'd love it.

COMMENT: Armed, yes or escorted.

COMMENT: No, armed. Next time I want it to be my turn.

COMMENT: Henry, you have a list of questions there?

COMMENT: No, I think most of them have been touched on. I think it was interesting, and I guess it was in Ennes' book. He is very, and I think rightly so, careful to point out the charge that was given to the Naval Board of Inquiry. They were not asked to find out who did it. They were asked to find out if any US personnel were responsible for this action. That is, could it have been avoided or was there anything done that could have perhaps lessened the damage or loss of life. But, again, he was pointing out, they were not asked to say...the Board of Inquiry was not asked to determine the responsibility for the attack. It was to determine was the Navy in any way, was it short sighted or was there any thing that the Navy could have done that would have lessened or minimized this damage.

COMMENT: Find a scapegoat, in other words, if they could.

COMMENT: Well, I'm not so sure. I think it was the kind of thing they examined what McGonagle did and what the crew did. And they found I think that he did all he could do and in fact more than....

COMMENT: The fact that they have six hundred pages under a TOP SECRET security classification would seem to indicate

that they did have some findings which had to do with the Navy's measures to safeguard the ships of the Sixth Fleet, at the time.

O'CONNOR: Well, you know they could have found other things too, down there, I would imagine. You know think for a minute, that if we had sold that torpedo to Israel we had been torpedoed by one of our own torpedoes. I don't know if that happened, but that could have very well happen. Or it could have been an American plane that shot us up. It wasn't, but.

QUESTION: But you were never questioned at all by anybody on the Board?

O'CONNOR: No, never.

QUESTION: No even when, wasn't Admiral Kidd aboard the America, wasn't he wandering around there for a while?

O'CONNOR: Admiral Kidd came on the Liberty, I think the day, well, the next day. But I think I was probably gone by the time he came on the ship.

QUESTION: So it was sort of a morale, morale visit, rather than an inquiry visit?

O'CONNOR: I don't think it was a morale visit, from what people told me, he came on, he wanted to see what had happened, what was going on and how people were. He wasn't out there to show the flag, but I think he was out there

probably to show some concern.

COMMENT: That's what I meant, just to see how the troops were.

O'CONNOR: A lot of times you get people come in just to, you know how are you, and really show the flag. But I don't think that was the case with him.

COMMENT: Henry, do you have anything else? Bill?

COMMENT: I'm very glad Jim is here, talking to us.

O'CONNOR: Yes, so am I.

COMMENT: We'd like to express our gratitude to have you back in one piece and our sympathies for what you went through. We salute you. Jim thank you very much for taking your time to sit in on this. I hope we have covered everything, if not we'll be back to you. If you think of something that you should have on tape, let us know and I'll come over and we'll tape it again.

O'CONNOR: Okay.

Thanks!

This tape and the previous tape on the Liberty incident by Commander O'Connor are classifed SECRET HVCCO by Commander O'Connor.