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INAME: CWALINA, Benjamin **Text w/Tape:**

Non - Responsive

IPLACE: NSA, SAB2, M62

IVIEWER: FARLEY, Bob

[Tape 1, Side 1]

[The classification of this tape is TOP SECRET UMBRA.]

Farley: Today is the 9th of May, 1980. Our interviewee, Mr. Benjamin J. Cwalina. Mr. Cwalina was a security officer in M5 in terms of damage assessments and SIGINT compromises. The interview is taking place in the M62 area in SAB II, NSA. Interviewer...Robert Farley. Mr. Cwalina will relate his experiences as a member of the task force charged with completing a damage assessment on documents aboard the LIBERTY when it was attacked by Israeli forces in June, 1967. Ben, what we would like to do is just give a run through on what you remember about the incident. I have prepared a few questions and that way we can get into what actually happened.

Farley: Ben, what was the reason for your involvement in the damage assessment in, then, the LIBERTY losses?

Cwalina: After the LIBERTY incident occurred they were bringing the ship home

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and there was, of course, the concern of the actual compromise of documents. Based on the reports that we saw, and information we had no idea exactly how many documents were lost or if they could all be accounted for. There were many documents, of course, on the ship, plus the crypto part of it. And no one knew exactly what was on board' cause of the incident, the way it occurred and no one could, at that time, was concerned really with the damage assessment. So, the PROD people, S people and M5 got together and decided to send a damage assessment team down to Norfolk, Virginia to take a look at the situation. No reports came in specifically giving any kind of actual assessment or enough information to do any kind of accurate assessment of the damage to the national security. Therefore, it was agreed that a special group of people would be sent down to Norfolk to physically take a look at it for themselves.

Farley: What was for the date for (C% Idbina)? The incident was in June of '67.

Cwalina: Right.

Farley: So, was it toward the end of '67, maybe a couple months afterwards?

Cwalina: No, it was still, (C% Idbina), within a week after the LIBERTY arrived in Norfolk, which the history books I am sure have. It was still, in summer time, I remember it because of the heat and the heat going down and all. It was still late summer or early fall. Immediately after the LIBERTY would have arrived from, to Norfolk.

Non - Responsive

Farley: Thank you very much, Ben. That's great. In the case of the LIBERTY, when were you told that a damage assessment was going to be required?

Cwalina: Actually, the moment it happened, we had gotten a message, in fact, it came from P04, that one of our ships -- the LIBERTY -- was under attack. We did not know who. The obvious fault was that the Russians were attacking it. And "oh, my God, here comes World War III". It was by a phone, based on, I assume, the initial report coming through the NSOC at that time. Again, it was such a serious compromise that the normal procedures would not have to be followed in this type of situation on something like this, a magnitude like this. A lot of paperwork that is normally done is not done. We can do things verbally and everybody is advised and handles the situation as it comes through. So, the system works in that we can handle it without a lot of red tape.

Farley: Ben, were you part of a task group?

Cwalina: Yes.

Farley: An M5 task group or was it a Agency...?

Cwalina: It was an Agency task group, and I was the only M5 representative to go down and take a look at it. And quite truthfully, looking back on it, it was sort of more a courtesy because, again, it was such a magnitude that M5 really, say we look at it...is it a possible compromise? It was so big that it was obvious situation. And as I remember, sort of as a courtesy they asked M5 to be involved because the thing was so big it wasn't necessary for M5 to say, well, yes, a compromise probably occurred. It was such a big situation. So, it was more or less a courtesy to have a M5 representative go down with that task force that was from PROD and from S.

Farley: Was there a chief of the group or a man in charge, do you recall?

Cwalina: I...yeah, there would have been something, somebody I think from PROD. But I can't specifically remember, and I don't remember anybody really grabbing out and taking charge. Really it was NSG people were sort of in

charge. It was like NSA what is your opinion type of thing. It was you know, I can't remember any specific person saying that "I am the man in charge".

Farley: Would you know whether there was anybody from DOD or CIA, other agencies?

Cwalina: No, I...if there was CIA he was never introduced to us. I don't think there was anybody because everybody that was involved had to be COMINT cleared and I don't remember anybody except the NSA and NSG people really.

Farley: How much of this assignment or mission did you accomplish locally before you went to Norfolk?

Cwalina: Just to read up on all the documents and information that came in. Of course I was strictly concerned with the loss of documents and I remember reading about that. It wasn't really anything to do...preparation here. It was just a matter of reading the documents on the incident and us going down and...play it by ear type of situation.

Farley: So that, one of the questions that I have is, were you provided a complete, and I put that in quotes, "complete" inventory of the documents aboard the LIBERTY?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: How about crypto equipment? Would you have seen any listing of crypto equipment?

Cwalina: There was probably, there were messages I am sure and I probably did but, again, I was not interested in the crypto. There were general messages type of thing. But I did not see any specifics.

Farley: If you would have answered yes on the inventory, I was going to ask the question, "How are you sure that the inventory was complete?" But that, so we didn't really know what we were looking for then?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: Type of thing?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: Okay. Did you conduct any interviews while you were in Norfolk? With any of the crew members?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: None at all?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: How about those, two of the three civilians who were aboard...Bob Wilson and Blalock?

Cwalina: No, never even met them. No nothing.

Farley: A question on the recovery of the material? Do you want to go over that in some detail if you would?

Cwalina: Yes. Okay, this TDY trip that I went on and other Agency personnel... as I remember was, gee, about eight to 10 people were actually involved and I would include the NSG people and us. From PROD, from S and myself from M5, plus, of course, the Navy people that were there on the ship and I guess the workers...there must have been 15 people or so, give or take a couple. I went down, it was a one day TDY, one day down in the morning and flew back that night. It was just a matter, really, of a few hours involved on the ship. Got there early in the morning and we met onboard the LIBERTY. They had us in the, I guess the officers lounge, meet (sic) there until everybody showed up. As I remember, in the morning everybody showed up, no problem. We then were taken on a sort of like a sight seeing tour of the ship just for our own information, and I will never forget that. Especially down in to where the torpedo had hit. Down in the lower level in the big...course, now, it was new steel plate there, but where the torpedo had entered, exploded and at least two men were completely disintegrated, right there. They couldn't identify many parts of them. It was quite an experience. Anyhow, they then took us up to where the COMINT material was. As I remember it, and, of course, a thing like this you will never forget, the intercept area was on, I guess it was the second level. I don't remember specific what level. But I can remember seeing all the intercept equipment there and on the floor, there were in large duffle bags. Must have been a 100. Some of them stacked on top of each other, black and dirty and sooty bags was everything that was in the LIBERTY that was of a COMINT nature. They just were shovels, as we were told, just scooped it in the duffle bags. And just laid it there until they would get back and somebody would decide what to do with it. So, nothing but these oily sooty bags to see. Some of the Navy personnel got into jump suits with rubber gloves to open it, we didn't because just of the nature of the situation, was pretty dirty and hard to handle. They pulled, as I remember, about six to seven bags from different spots there to an open area, we sort of stood on a higher level and just looked down, and they just split the bags open and dumped the contents on the floor one at a time for us to look at to see what we should do considering the damage assessment. The obvious thing is...the best situation is to physically look at every document retained, that was found, so that we can then do a page by page inventory and look at to see what was supposedly on the ship. And then PROD and S people and do a, that's the only way that you can really do a damage assessment. However, when we opened the bags and the

documents were still coated by soot, there was seawater there and parts of human bodies, which was quite an experience. In these bags, I'd say we opened six or seven there, we even got down to the floor, now, we did not touch them they opened them for us. The whole group agreed that it would be almost an impossible task to go through everyone of these canvas bags to do a page by page check. Any small documents, pages were just covered by soot, crumpled, bad condition, of course, torn. The larger thicker documents, the TECHINS and Operator's Manuals, the outside was covered but if you opened it up the inside pages were intact. So, we did about seven of them, and there were some people, in fact, the NSG people which I don't remember said "let's throw all the damn stuff away." Forget it. I heard some of the PROD people say, "well, we got to do some type of inventory." It's obvious that the small pages the individual documents you can not, it would be almost impossible to do. But the large documents, it was just the outside cover in those situations. And you wouldn't really need to do a page check. You could see a whole document and that would be better than doing nothing. Everybody was supposed to make their recommendation and decide what to do. I recommended that the guy do as good as inventory as possible. That really was the end of our situation, only lasted really, I guess an hour or so to take a look at it and then we left.

Farley: Ben, were there any documents in any of the safes or that had been packed in the safes? Did they open any of the drawers?

Cwalina: No, everything that was there, as I remember, they just put in duffle bags. If there were things in safes they didn't bring them out and say here it is. As I said everything was in duffle bags, it's almost like there had probably would not have been really anything put away because no one expected the attack so it's like no one put anything away. Everything was open and was chaos. During that situation. We were not shown any, let's say, documents that were not dirty to some extent.

Farley: Did you notice whether any of the material had been in the water that might have been recovered by some of the tugboats or people who were sent out to take them off the water?

Cwalina: Yeah. We were shown some of the documents that had been out of the hole. As, I think it is been well documented, that there were documents coming out of the hole and they put nets as I remember and sometimes a destroyer or some other ship came behind it. And as they were telling where to, I think they went to Rota, Spain. They were supposedly picking it up. What they didn't they could physically see the screws on the ship were sure, you know documents where they were sinking. As far as they were concerned, and, of course, they, there was no Russian ships apparently in the area an also, what was not picked up was pretty well lost at sea and not worried about.

Farley: Who was the representative from the LIBERTY on that the investigative group? Was it somebody who was knowledgeable about SIGINT or

classified documents?

Cwalina: Ah, it was the...well, I think it was the NSG people there who were from the ship but, yeah, I don't remember, of course, their names.

Farley: Did anybody ever make the comparison about what percentage of material we recovered? I know it's difficult when it's in bags as compared to neat folders.

Cwalina: No, I think we just based on looking at the seven bags...what was in 'em, and looking at the whole thing, that the vast majority was still there on the ship.

Farley: Okay.

Cwalina: Yes.

Farley: I don't know whether you can answer this one Ben, but try. What was the loss? Was it critical? Was it not as bad as we thought? What was the assessment of the group?

Cwalina: Quite truthfully, we thought it was no damage really, what so ever.

Farley: Okay.

Cwalina: It was probably the best situation that could happen under the circumstances, the open sea, there, in fact quite truthfully as I remember it was without really any comment at all was written off as really no compromise.

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Farley: That was my next question, what was the ruling regarding the compromise?

Cwalina: Yeah, it was. We wrote it off at M5 and, as I remember [redacted] and all, and G group at least verbally, course I don't know what they all put in, exactly what they put in the paper. But we wrote it off in M5 really based on what we got from PROD is a damage was very minimal to the national security which means that there was really, that it looked like no compromise actually occurred of any COMINT or SIGINT documents or crypto.

Farley: What was the highest classification of documents aboard?

Cwalina: Well, it was obviously TOP SECRET CODEWORD. I don't remember any compartmented. So, it was just plain TOP SECRET CODEWORD.

Farley: Ben, what was the recommendation of the damage assessment task force?

Cwalina: It came out to do as good an inventory as possible when they were destroying the documents. Now, I understand, we were told and there is, and I remember seeing it, an actual list of what they found in the bags. I don't know if that's M or somebody should have that. But what they did, as I understand is they brought all the canvas bags out to a furnace area. They had a conveyor belt leading to the furnace. They would split the canvas bags, dump all the contents on the conveyor belt, have properly

cleared people on each side doing a (sic) inventory as the documents slowly went to the furnace. So, they did and I saw a document, you know, if all the TECHINS listed...You know, again, it was maybe a page, you didn't know if it was in total but, it obviously looked like it. What they would do is just get the name of the document, say TECHINS 1055. You know who knows if every page is there but obviously the thing was still bound. I, you know, I would think so, there was a, that was a inventory. In fact we were quite please with it because we were worried that they would say the hell with it and just write it off as it is not worth doing. But they, NSG I think, I know M5 didn't put any pressure on, and, of course, we would not have it would have had to been NSA that put the pressure on. I don't know if pressure actually came or if NSG on themselves said, well, we better do it. I know they initially were, ah let's throw it away. And just say no compromise and you know just don't worry about it. But somebody fortunately, said let's do it the right way or as good as we can do. And just take a physical look at documents and just write as they went down, and I think it came out quite well.

Farley: Ben, did you ever discuss the situation with anyone else like I am thinking Clarence (B% CLUMFOOT) who was involved from the European point of view?

Cwalina: Yeah, he...no...course, he was still over in Europe and I never saw him. Just when I came back my own M5 people. The way it was handled and everything it was, again, M5 at this point, we were initially involved in the beginning, and that's pretty much it on compromises.

Farley: Did you ever read any report that might have been prepared by NCEUR security people?

Cwalina: I can't remember.

Farley: Because they get the first crack, then they do assessment.

Cwalina: There was messages I am sure from (B% CLUMFOOT) that I saw and he, I am sure he had said something about the documents. That's probably where we first got the information because initial messages were, you know, "worry about the crew and the situation". There were just minor reference to the documents. So, probably the first important stuff came in from NCEUR concerning, but at that time and truthfully, sad to say, I found in most M5 cases, I was the expert on compromises. I had a free reign and Ben said

it was okay don't worry about it and case closed and let's go on with the next thing.

[redacted]

Farley: Ben, in retrospect have you ever seen any reports that a compromise could have resulted from any loss of documents from the LIBERTY?

Cwalina: No.

Farley: None at all?

Cwalina: There was, never have seen, heard, or anything. I am fairly sure, unless somebody has something to contrary, that no compromise occurred as far as SIGINT or COMINT documents. Course, everybody, now, is writing books and saying things. But to see a document or anything, I am sure that nothing, just the nature of those documents pouring out of a hole in the middle of the Mediterranean with only American ships. There is no way the Russians would have been able to get anything.

Farley: Did you read either of the books, Ennis' book or Pearson's book?

Cwalina: No, none of them.

Farley: One concerns the presence, possible presence of a U.S. submarine the ANDREW JACKSON which might have been below in case that something happened? Below also to work on the [redacted] but the possibility of picking up documents that might have been blown out of the hole. Ever hear?

Cwalina: Nah, Nothing. Never heard of that.

Farley: That's interesting.

Cwalina: Yeah.

Farley: Ben, you want to put anything else on the record? I think we have covered it pretty thoroughly but, ah...

Cwalina: No, ah...I'd say from a compromise standpoint, the LIBERTY turned out in our favor. It is a shame, it really is, the lessons learned from the LIBERTY were never passed on with the PUEBLO. And even that was not passed on to MAYAGUEZ. It is like we learn these things, write them up, and everybody then sticks them in the bottom of the drawer and forget it until the next crisis and then it's the same thing all over again. It is very

discouraging sometimes and ah...to have this happen and nobody learns a lesson.

Farley: Okay, that's right. Ben, I can't think of anything else. Can you?

Cwalina: Nope, no thanks.

Farley: Thanks much for your time, we'll put it on the record and I am sure Bill Gerhart and Henry Millington will use this as background information. Part of the response to the Freedom of Information Request from Congress. Mucho Gracias.

[END OF INTERVIEW]