

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of Cryptologic Heroes The Crew of the U.S.S. Liberty



The Story of Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

It is imperative that we remember that our past successes, as well as the triumphs of the future depend not only on the many hardworking analysts, linguists and engineers and technicians who labor far from the battle front, but on those brave and intrepid souls who risk their lives in an effort to "get in close."

General Michael V. Hayden

Both sides in the decades-long Cold War utilized an array of intelligence gathering tools and organizations to gain critical knowledge of the other side's plans and future intentions. In the 1960s, the U.S. Navy began to deploy a series of AGTR (Auxiliary, General, Technical Research) type ships to conduct seaborne signals intelligence missions. The program had proved its worth, particularly during incidents like the Cuban Missile Crisis.

On the morning of June 8, 1967, the U.S.S. Liberty, the fifth of the AGTR ships configured for these missions, was hard at work off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula. Captained by William McGonagle, a seasoned navy veteran who for most of his career had served aboard support vessels, the ship was 455 feet long, could make a maximum of 18 knots, and was manned by a dedicated crew of over 200, many of whom were cryptologic professionals from the Naval Security Group. The Liberty was first deployed in 1965, and by 1967, both ship and crew had established themselves as valuable assets to the U.S. Navy and intelligence community.

The morning of the eighth, the ship was conducting normal operations, not knowing that this would be a day of untold horror and death. 1967 had not been a good year for geopolitical issues in the Mideast. Several Arab nations and the state of Israel were about to engage in what would come to be known as "The Six Day War." Understanding that conflict was imminent, word was sent out for all U.S. Navy ships to pull back 100 miles to avoid being caught up in the coming hostilities. Regrettably, the Liberty never received the warning to pull back, and remained offshore performing its mission.

That afternoon, the ship was attacked by Israeli naval and air units. To this day, historians debate about the circumstances that led to the attack. The devastating assault left 34 men dead and 171 wounded—two out of every three men on board were either killed or injured. The attack also caused extensive damage to the ship. A torpedo left a hole in the starboard side measuring 24 feet tall by 39 feet wide, and naval investigators later counted a total of 821 shell holes and countless other machine-gun and shrapnel holes. The 67-minute attack would prove to be the deadliest assault on a U.S. ship since World War II. Those who paid the ultimate sacrifice that day were a true cross-section of America. The fallen were from 20 different states; the oldest was 43, the youngest 19. Two were Marines. One, Allen Blue, was a civilian.



Despite the unfathomable death and destruction that surrounded them, the members of the crew who survived the attacks performed brilliantly that day. The ship's physician, Lieutenant (Dr) Kiepher, related that Captain McGonagle "at that time was like a rock upon which the rest of the men supported themselves. To know that he was on the bridge

grievously wounded, yet having the conn and helm and ... calling every change of course, was the thing that told the men 'we're going to live.' When I went to the bridge and saw this, I should say that I knew that I could only insult this man by suggesting that he be taken below for treatment of his wounds. I didn't even suggest it." Working quickly, the damage control teams were able to get below to secure the watertight doors and miraculously keep the ship afloat. Kiepher again noted, "Any time we needed one volunteer, we'd get ten. If anything had to be done . . . there were hands everywhere." Due to the work of the crew, the ship was saved. However, the Liberty's legacy would soon come to an end. In late July, the ship departed Malta for Norfolk, where it was eventually removed from active service and eventually sold for scrap. The ship was no more, but the courage and bravery demonstrated by the Liberty's crew on that tragic day truly will forever be remembered as an example of the finest attributes of the U.S. Navy and the cryptologic service.

The Israeli government apologized officially for the attack and paid compensation for the lives lost and property damage. The United States officially accepted the apology and Israel's explanation of the circumstances.

There is a reasonable assumption that those who engage in cryptologic work normally conduct their business far from the front lines. However, while many do their important work from "garrison," it is also the case that when soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines go into battle, cryptologic professionals go with them, and, like them, often find themselves in harm's way. In short, in time of war, cryptology can be a dangerous and deadly way to make one's living. The Liberty incident reminds us that those who produce intelligence on behalf of their country are frequently asked to risk or give their lives for their country. Those who paid the ultimate sacrifice that day will never be forgotten.

CT3 William B. Allenbaugh, USN Baltimore MD
LCDR Philip M. Armstrong, Jr. USN Detroit MI
SN Gary R. Blanchard, USN Wichita KS
SN Francis Brown, USN Albany NY
CT2 Ronnie J. Campbell, USN Sevierville TN
CT3 Jerry L. Converse, USN Puyallup WA
CT2 Robert B. Eisenberg, USN St. Paul MN
CT3 Jerry L. Goss, USN North Vernon IN
CTI Curtis A. Graves, USN Gross Pointe Farms MI
CTSN Lawrence P. Hayden, USN Houston TX
CTI Warren E. Hersey, USN Philadelphia PA
CTSN Alan Higgins, USN Weymouth MA
SN Carl L. Hoar, USN Mt. Vernon OH
CT2 Richard W. Keene, Jr., USN Batavia NY
CTSN James L. Lenau, USN Washington MO
CTC Raymond E. Linn, USN Zanesville OH
CTI James M. Lupton, USN Shreveport LA
CT3 Duane R. Marggraf, USN Fond du lac, WI

CTSN David W. Marlborough, USN Waterville, MA
CT2 Anthony P. Mendle, USN Mendle, CT
CTSN Carl C. Nygren, USN Williamsport, PA
LT James C. Pierce, USN Clinton, NC
ICFN David Skolak, USN Gary, IN
CTI John C. Smith, Jr., USN Ithaca, NY
CTC Melvin D. Smith, USN Almanac, NC
PC2 John C. Spicher, USN Terentum, PA
GMG3 Alexander N. Thompson, Jr.,
USN Philadelphia, PA
CT3 Thomas R. Thornton, USN Springfield, OH
CT3 Philippe C. Tiedtke, USN Santa Cruz CA
LT Stephen S. Toth, USN San Diego CA
CTI Frederick J. Walton, USN Niagara Falls NY
Sgt Jack L. Raper, USMC Cedartown GA
Cpl Edward E. Rehmeyer, USMC York PA
Allen M. Blue, NSA Yakima WA

