

Abstract

Background:
The 1967 USS *Liberty* is largely unknown by both the American public and even many historians of the era. The *Liberty* incident was officially noted as an attack of “mistaken identity” by the Israeli Defense Force on the United States Navy yet remains controversial to this day.

Methods:
Research methods for this project include the utilization of both primary and secondary sources that pertain to the incident. Drawing sources that have differing views I attempt to showcase various positions on areas of disagreement relating to the *Liberty* incident.

Results:
Through my research, I have found significant areas of disagreement between assertions made by both the U.S. and Israel governments and survivors and senior government officials associated with the *Liberty* Incident

Conclusions:
The results of this project indicate that further attention should be given to survivors and firsthand accounts of the incident

Introduction

When I first heard the story of the USS *Liberty*, I became extremely interested in learning more about the events that transpired and began reading about the incident in my free time. Thus, when I registered for Modern American Military History with Dr. Snead, I was already eager to research this topic.

While my primary fields of study are engulfed in the Colonial American period, I have had a strong interest in American military history since I was a child. This would especially be the case with the U.S. Navy as my father is a retired Naval officer and I grew up living on different military bases around the United States. Furthermore, I am ethnically half-Jewish and have relatives who have gotten citizenship to the state of Israel. A friend of mine who at the time was an active-duty sailor in the Navy had become acquainted with many of the survivors from the *Liberty*. Thus, I was able to get in touch with various *Liberty* survivors including Philip Tourney and Ron Kukal. In the last year, Phil and I have been able to build a close friendship and we have communicated with one another often. It has been an honor to have had Phil help me in my research.

As a Christian, I believe we should continually seek for truth. Both Tourney and Kukal attest their survival to God’s Grace, and it has been an honor to develop a relationship with these strong Christians. When conducting this research, I often thought of Proverbs 18:15 which states, “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

Methods

In my research, I utilized both primary sources such as government documents and various statements from senior government officials involved. I also utilized many secondary sources, many of which disagree with survivors’ assessments. I was also able to get into contact with multiple *Liberty* survivors including Philip Tourney and Ron Kukal. In the last year, Phil and I have been able to build a close friendship and we have communicated with one another often. In my research, I do not attempt to conclude a possible motive for the attack rather I describe the details of what happened and allow readers to draw their conclusions. My research is meant to showcase differing views of the incident while also providing an unbiased account of what transpired.



Figure 1. The U.S. Navy electronic reconnaissance gathering ship USS *Liberty* (AGTR-5) receives assistance from units of the U.S. Sixth Fleet after she was attacked and seriously damaged by Israeli forces off the Sinai Peninsula on 8 June 1967. Unknown author – U.S. Navy photo USN 1123118. June 8, 1967. Public Domain



Figure 2. Picture taken of the damaged U.S. SIGINT ship USS *Liberty* (AGTR-5) which had been damaged on 8 June 1967 in the Mediterranean Sea by Israeli forces during the Six Days War. The picture was taken from the U.S. aircraft carrier USS *America* (CVA-66). To the right is the guided missile cruiser USS *Little Rock* (CLG-4), flagship of the 6th Fleet. Unknown author. June 8, 1967. Public Domain



Figure 3. Cdr. W.L. McGonagle in his cabin on board USS *Liberty*, June 1967. Unknown Author. N.d. Public Domain.

Cdr. McGonagle the commanding officer of *Liberty*, would be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the attack.



Figure 4. “Pictured are Motor Torpedo Boats of the Israeli Navy” by קודקוד צדוב is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0



Figure 5. “Israeli Air Force Mirage IIICJ 158 at the Israeli Air Force Museum in Hatzerim” by Oren Rozen is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

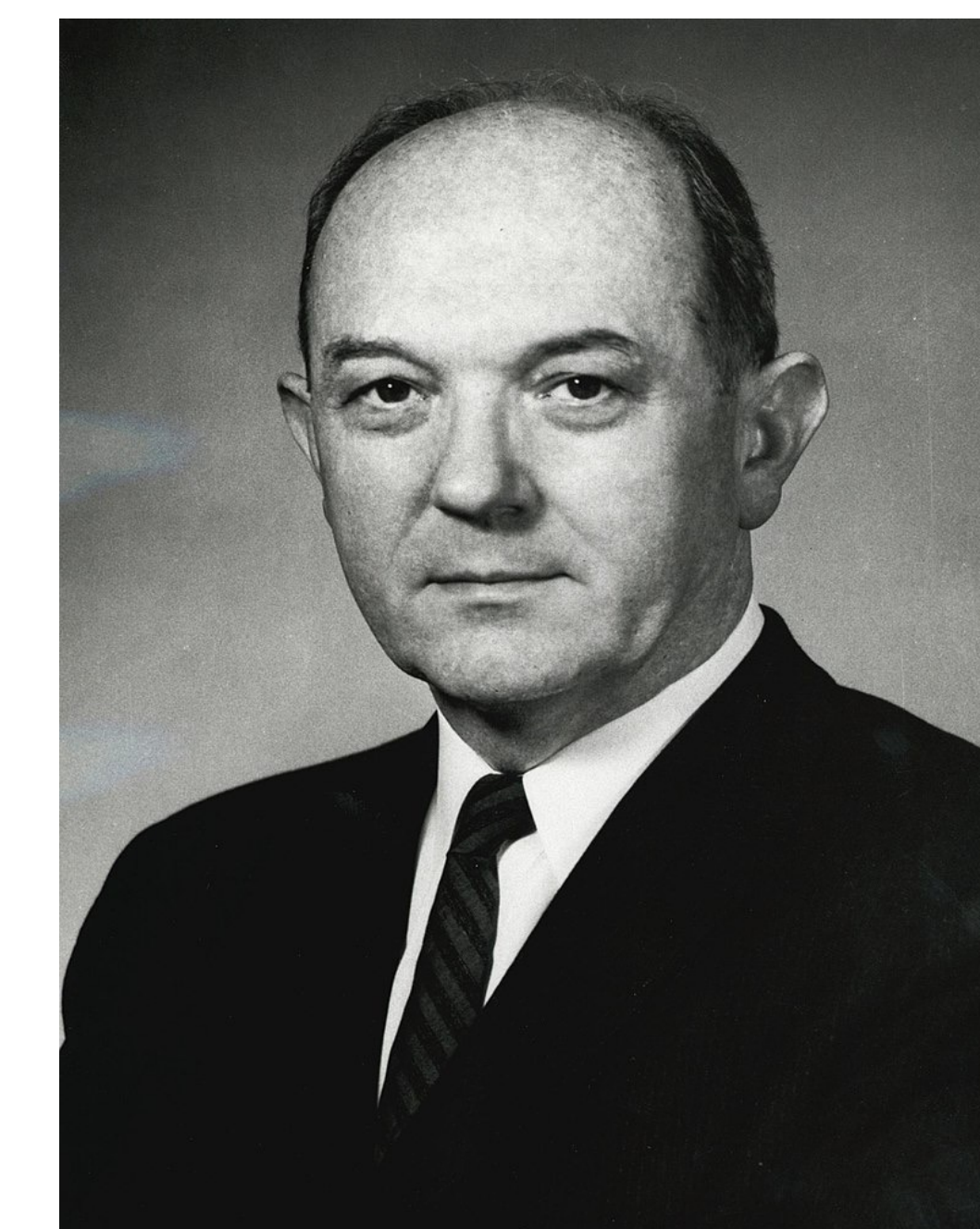


Figure 6. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State of the United States 1961–1969. U.S. Department of State. N.d. Public Domain

In his memoirs, former Secretary of State Dean Rusk asserted that he was “never satisfied with the Israeli explanation. Their sustained attack to disable and sink *Liberty* precluded an assault by accident or by some trigger-happy local commander. Through diplomatic channels, we refused to accept their explanations. I didn’t believe them then, and I don’t believe them to this day. The attack was outrageous.”

Conclusion



Figure 7. USS *Liberty* AGTR-5. Painting, Oil on Silk; Artist Unknown; C. 1967; Framed Dimensions 21H X 25W

The USS *Liberty* Incident remains one that is extremely complicated. The disparity between survivor accounts and official government reports remains concerning especially considering those involved in government investigation claim that the investigation of the incident was ordered to be rushed.

Future Work

1. Interview more survivors of the incident, both Israeli and American, to gather further perspectives on the incident.
2. Conduct further research on possible motives if the attack was intentional as some assert.
3. Conduct further research on the modern political implications of the incident.
4. Conduct comprehensive research on the history of diplomacy between the United States and Israel.

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