



The Mission

ROLLING THUNDER® INC. FLORIDA CHAPTER 1

Volume I Issue 7

June 2018

All Packed Up and Ready To Go

Rolling Thunder XXXI - Cocoa, FL To Washington, D.C.



Florida Chapter 1 members and Dutch Veteran Guests just prior to leaving on May 23, 2018.

Upcoming In July

- ◆ INDEPENDENCE DAY – JULY 4TH
- ◆ Bastille Day – July 14th
- ◆ National Whistleblower Appreciation Day – July 30th

June Birthday's

COLLEEN WARD	12th
TY BARKER	14th
TERRY SCHMELZLE	17th
JIM JUSTICE	28th

In late spring of 2016, Mr. Henk van Boxtel, a veteran from the Netherlands, contacted Florida Chapter 1 about riding with us to Washington D.C. to attend the 2018 Rolling Thunder demonstration ride. We exchanged numerous email's, coordinated schedules, and made hotel reservations for him and an additional twelve riders. They put their motorcycles on a container ship bound for Miami, and several weeks later flew into the Sunshine State. Wasting no time, they packed up their bikes and began a multi-week sightseeing vacation, eventually visiting sites from Key West to New York.

VFW Post #4206 hosted a breakfast for them prior to leaving for D.C., and Chapter 1 later escorted them to Space Coast Harley-Davidson, then to "Trip's" leathers in the Renninger's Flea and Farmers Market so they could have some new patches sewed on.

In Holland, riders typically ride in the 50 to 60 MPH range, but on our trip to D.C., the average speed was 70 - 75 MPH, and they kept up !

(Continued on next page)

Accident/Injury? Call Us



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(Rolling Thunder XXXI continued)



**“PUBLICIZE
THE POW/MIA
ISSUE AND TO
EDUCATE THE
PUBLIC...”**

The Mission of Rolling Thunder® Inc.

THE MAJOR FUNCTION OF ROLLING THUNDER®, INC. IS TO PUBLICIZE THE POW/MIA ISSUE: TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC THAT MANY AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR WERE LEFT BEHIND AFTER ALL PREVIOUS WARS, AND TO HELP CORRECT THE PAST AND TO PROTECT FUTURE VETERANS FROM BEING LEFT BEHIND SHOULD THEY BECOME PRISONERS OF WAR-MISSING IN ACTION. WE ARE ALSO COMMITTED TO HELPING AMERICAN VETERANS FROM ALL WARS.

(Rolling Thunder XXXI continued)



Dutch Veteran Riders at Space Coast Harley-Davidson



Before dinner is server



In the Pentagon parking lot



Florida Chapter 1 and Dutch guests (Hyatt Banquet)

Netherlands Carillon

The 50 bells of the Netherlands Carillon hang in an open steel tower, a symbol of Dutch regard for American aid during and after World War II. The carillon's peaceful setting, with its floral libraries and sculpted lions, is the perfect place to listen to the music of the bells.



"From the People of the Netherlands to the People of the United States."

This simple dedication on the Netherlands Carillon expresses the gratitude of the Dutch people for American aid received during and after World War II, between the people of two countries, a friendship so rooted in a common allegiance to the principles of freedom, justice, and democracy that it can weather any temporary differences of opinion.



Was It An Accident? Or, Was It Deliberate?

What happened to the USS Liberty, and the blatant cover-up that followed

Units of the Israeli Air Force and Navy savagely attack U.S. Naval Vessel

On the 24th of May 1967, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, ordered the **USS Liberty (AGTR 5)**, an intelligence-gathering vessel, to depart Abidjan, Ivory Coast, for the eastern Mediterranean, via Rota, Spain. The U.S.S. *Liberty* was commissioned in May 1945 as a victory ship and later converted into a technical research ship (December 1964). She had an overall length of 455 feet, a maximum speed of 18 knots with an allowable personnel complement of 9 officers and 151 enlisted men, along with an additional 6 officers and 128 enlisted men from the Naval Security Group.

The ship arrived in Rota on June 1st, 1967 to take on technical operators, materials, and supplies. The *Liberty* departs Rota the following day in route to a point 13 miles off the Gaza Strip – well within international waters.

On June 5th, 1967 at 7:45 in the morning (local *Liberty* time), all hell breaks loose. The state of Israel begins an attack on Egypt, and simultaneously puts out false reports that Egypt had attacked them first. *Liberty's* captain, Commander William McGonagle, asks Vice Admiral William Martin at Sixth Fleet headquarters to send a destroyer as an armed escort and auxiliary communication center, noting that *Liberty's* "self-defense capability is limited to four .50 caliber machine guns and small arms".

The next day, on the 6th of June, Admiral Martin replies "*Liberty* is a clearly marked United States ship in international waters, not a participant in the conflict and not a reasonable subject for attack by any nation . . . Request for escort denied." However, shortly before midnight on the 7th, the Office of the U.S. Defense Attaché in Tel Aviv sends a coded message to U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) that Israel intends to attack the *Liberty* if her course is not changed.

Just after midnight on June 8, 1967 the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Reconnaissance Center (JRC) orders *Liberty* to go from 12½ to 20 nautical miles off the coast. An error by the U.S. Army Communications Center at the Pentagon results in the message never reaching the ship. An hour later, the JRC sends another order to *Liberty* to approach no closer than 100 miles to the coasts of Egypt and Israel. Due to misrouting, it took 16½ hours for the message to reach *Liberty*... too late to avoid her fate.



Unmarked Noratlas (NORD 2501) used to surveil Liberty

It's now 6:00 AM *Liberty* time when two Israeli Nord 2501 (flying boxcars) reconnoiters *Liberty*. Within minutes, reconnaissance aircraft report to Israeli naval headquarters that "GTR-5" is written on the ship, identifying it as an NSA intelligence vessel. Three hours later, unidentified jet aircraft approach *Liberty*, then veer off towards Gaza.

At 10:00 AM, two unmarked, rocket-armed, delta-winged jets circle *Liberty* three times. *Liberty* officers can count rockets and see the pilots, but see no identifying marks on the plane. The jets radio Israeli headquarters that the ship is flying an American flag.

Thirty minutes later Israeli "flying boxcars" with Israeli markings circle *Liberty* at about 200 feet. Twenty minutes later, Pinchas Pinchasy, the naval liaison officer at Israeli air force headquarters, reports to Naval Headquarters that the ship cruising slowly off El Arish is "an electromagnetic audio-surveillance ship of the U.S. Navy, named *Liberty*, whose marking was GTR-5."

Crewmembers on the deck of *Liberty* are getting anxious. At 11:00 & 1130 AM, Israeli reconnaissance aircraft again circle the ship. What they didn't know was at 12:05 in the afternoon, three Israeli motor torpedo boats leave their port in Ashdod at high speed headed toward *Liberty*.



USS Liberty (AGTR-5)

Continued on the next page

Liberty (Continued)



Three Israeli Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB's) closing in on Liberty

They are followed by Israeli air force fighters, loaded with 30mm cannon ammunition, rockets, and napalm. Ten minutes later at 12:15 and again at 12:45, Israeli reconnaissance aircraft again circle the *Liberty*. At 1:41 the Israeli torpedo boats spot the *Liberty* and call for an immediate air strike.



Mystère III C jets attack with napalm and rockets

At 1:58 in the afternoon on the 8th of June 1967, two unmarked delta-winged Mirage jets attack the *USS Liberty*. After taking out the gun mounts, they target the ship's antennae and bridge with heat-seeking missiles. Within minutes, a wave of three unmarked Dassault Mystère III C jets attack with napalm and rockets. *Liberty* tries to contact Sixth Fleet headquarters, but five of *Liberty's* six shore circuits are jammed. Radio operators do manage to send a distress signal from CDR McGonagle: "Under attack by unidentified jet aircraft, require immediate assistance." The air attack lasts for about 22 minutes, involving 30 to 35 sorties, killing ten men and wounding around 60. One Israeli pilot reports to his base: "Great, wonderful, she's burning, she's burning".

Halfway through the attack Captain Joe Tully of the *USS Saratoga* acknowledges the distress call made by *Liberty*, and dispatches four F-4 Phantom jets, and informs *Liberty* that help is on the way. Within minutes, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara orders the rescue jets to return to the *Saratoga*. "Tell Sixth Fleet to get those aircraft back immediately." Rear Admiral Geis relays the message, and tells *Saratoga* to re-launch jets in 90 minutes.



USS Saratoga (CV-60)



F4B's dispatched from Saratoga to aid Liberty

Continued on next page

Liberty (Continued)

Beginning around 2:24 PM, three French-built 62-ton Israeli motor torpedo boats approach *Liberty* in attack formation. Because the Israeli fighters had destroyed the American flag, Captain McGonagle orders the signalman to hoist the “holiday ensign”, the largest flag the ship has.

At 2:35 the torpedo boats launch five German-made 19-inch torpedoes at *Liberty*. One torpedo strikes starboard directly into NSA area, accounting for 25 of the 34 men who would be killed. Torpedo boats then circle, machine-gunning the ship with armor-piercing projectiles for another 40 minutes.



Israeli MTB's ordered to sink the Liberty



USS Liberty charred, battered, and adrift. USS Davis in background

After the order to “prepare to abandon ship” comes over the loudspeaker system at approximately 3:15 PM, the lifeboats are lowered into the water. Israeli torpedo boats move in closer and fire on them, as well as those still on deck, making them all unusable. “I watched with horror as the floating life rafts were riddled with holes,” recalled Lieutenant Lloyd Painter, in charge of the evacuation. After destroying the life rafts, the Israeli boats departed. Next, two Israeli SA-321 Super Frelon Hornet assault helicopters carrying soldiers in battle dress circle the ship several times, then depart. Fifteen minutes later the Israeli torpedo boats return, then quickly leave. At 4:00 PM *Liberty* regains its transmitter (still has no receiver though) and transmits: “Flash, flash, flash. I pass in the blind. We are under attack by aircraft and high-speed surface craft.” Quickly thereafter, she transmits: “Request immediate assistance. Torpedo hit starboard”.



Israeli SA-321 Super Frelon Hornet's

At about the same time, NSA Deputy Director Louis Tordella is informed by Deputy Director of Joint Reconnaissance Center, Captain Vineyard, that “consideration was then being given by some unnamed Washington authorities to sink the *Liberty* in order that newspaper men (on-board *America*) would be unable to photograph her and thus inflame public opinion against the Israelis”. Tordella makes an “impolite” comment about the idea, writes a memo of the conversation for the record, and stores it away. That ‘unnamed Washington authority’ making the comment to “sink that goddamned ship” was reported to have been made by President Lyndon Johnson himself.

Rear Admiral Lawrence Geis, commander of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, protests decision to recall rescue planes to Secretary of Defense McNamara. At that point President Johnson comes on the phone and says he didn’t care if the ship sunk, he would not embarrass his allies. Admiral Geis tells Lt. Commander David Lewis, head of the *Liberty's* NSA group, of the remark, but asks him not to repeat it until after he dies. It is a promise Lewis will honor.

USS *America* (CV-66) also in the Mediterranean, had been in position to assist in communications between United States

Continued on next page

Liberty (Continued)

diplomatic posts in the Mideast and to aid in the evacuation of American dependents from the area if necessary.

However, the first word that reached *America* and the Department of Defense in Washington gave no indication as to the identity of *Liberty's* attackers. In a matter of minutes, F-4B Phantom interceptors were in the air to ward off any possible attack against task force units. Two A-4 Skyhawk's equipped with Bullpup missiles were loaded and launched together with fighter cover. As the planes sped towards *Liberty's* position, however, word was received from Tel Aviv that the attackers had been Israeli and that the attack had been made in error. The planes outbound from *America* were recalled with their ordnance still in the racks, with the A-4s landing ashore to unload their ordnance.



Douglas A-4 Skyhawk onboard America

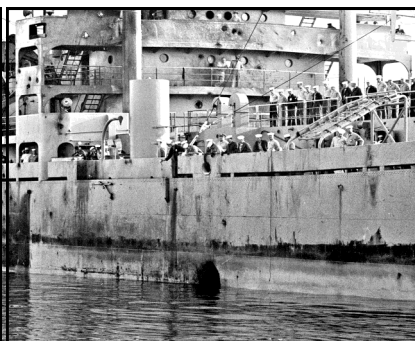
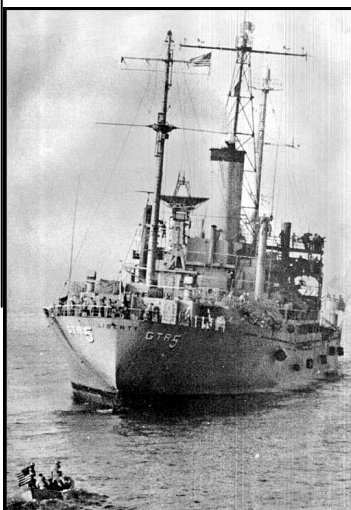


Crew from America look on as helicopters transfer the seriously injured from Liberty. USS Little Rock (CLG-4) in background

Admiral Martin dispatched two destroyers, *Davis* and *Massey*, with Lt. Cmdr. Peter A. Flynn, MC, USN, one of *America's* junior medical officers, and two corpsmen from the carrier on board. The destroyers rendezvoused with *Liberty* at 06:00 on 9 June, and the medical personnel, including a second doctor from one of the destroyers, were transferred immediately to the damaged *Liberty*.

Two helicopters from *USS America* rendezvoused with *Liberty* and began transferring the more seriously wounded to the carrier. An hour later, about 350 miles east of Souda Bay Crete, *America* rendezvoused with *Liberty*. The carrier's crew lined every topside vantage point, silent, watching the helicopters bring 50 wounded and nine dead from *Liberty* to *America*. As *Liberty* drew alongside, listing, her sides perforated with rockets and cannon shell, nearly 2,000 of the carrier's crew were on the flight deck and, spontaneously moved by the sight, gave the battered *Liberty* and her brave crew a tremendous cheer.

One June 14, 1967 *Liberty* arrives in Malta. A total news blackout is imposed. Rear Admiral Kidd warns crew: "You are never, repeat never, to discuss this with anyone, not even your wives. If you do, you will be court-martialed and will end your lives in prison or worse." Secretary of Defense McNamara informs media that, "Department of Defense will have no further comment".



Damaged and listing, Liberty makes way to Malta for repairs.



Epilog:

The USS *Liberty* incident was an attack on a United States Navy technical research ship, USS *Liberty*, by Israeli Air Force jet fighter aircraft and Israeli Navy motor torpedo boats, on June 8, 1967, during the Six-Day War. The combined air and sea attack killed 34 crew members (naval officers, seamen, two Marines, and one civilian), wounded 171 crew members, and severely damaged the ship. At the time, the ship was in international waters north of the Sinai Peninsula, about 25.5 nautical miles northwest from the Egyptian city of Arish.

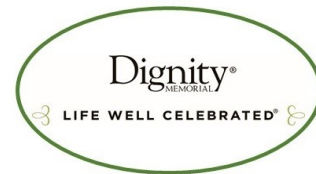
Israel apologized for the attack, saying that the USS *Liberty* had been attacked in error after being mistaken for an Egyptian ship. Both the Israeli and U.S. governments conducted inquiries and issued reports that concluded the attack was a mistake due to Israeli confusion about the ship's identity, though others, including survivors of the attack, have rejected these conclusions and maintain that the attack was deliberate.

In May 1968, the Israeli government compensated the families of the 34 men killed in the attack. In March 1969, Israel paid a further compensation to the men who had been wounded. On 18 December 1980, it agreed to pay a settlement for the final U.S. bill for material damage to the *Liberty*.



Captain William L McGonagle, Medal of Honor recipient, died in March, 1999 and is interred in Arlington National Cemetery. A complete list of those crewmembers who died on Liberty can be found on our website at this URL ->

<https://www.rollingthunderflorida1.org/uss-liberty.html>



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Rolling Thunder®, Inc. Florida Chapter 1 is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (4) organization, and everyone donates his or her time because they believe in the POW/MIA Issue.

We meet the fourth Sunday of each month at 2:00 PM at the Veterans Memorial Center and Museum, Sykes Creek Boulevard in Merritt Island, Florida.

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