

Attack on *Liberty*

The billboard on I-95 simply states, “Help the USS Liberty Survivors, attacked by Israel, www.HonorLibertyVets.org.” Here is an explanation of why this is nothing more or less than anti-Jewish hate speech, as well as an explanation of what the USS *Liberty* incident was about.

On 8 June 1967, in the midst of the Six Day War, the Israel Air Force and Navy attacked the US Naval vessel *Liberty* off the coast of Sinai, killing 34 American crew members and wounding 171 others. The official Israeli and American explanation was that it was a case of mistaken identity; the Israeli government apologized and paid reparations. However, numerous conspiracy theories have circulated claiming that the attack was intentional.

There is no explanation that can neutralize the raw narrative that Israeli forces bombed a US Naval vessel and killed 34 crew members. Raising the incident in the context of a freeway billboard is simply a tool to promote hostility toward Jews and Israel. The billboard does nothing beyond impugning Israel (“attacked by Israel”), while falsely implying that it represents the voices or honor of American veterans. A billboard on I-95 is not going to elicit another Congressional hearing on the incident, but it will affect viewers’ attitudes toward Israel.

There are thousands of [recorded instances](#) of “friendly fire,” in which military forces kill and maim their own soldiers or allies, either through some unlikely chain of unfortunate events, equipment failure, or just as likely a long string of stupid deadly screw-ups or SNAFUs (to use the military term). Rarely is there a claim that this was done intentionally, because those involved understand that the fog of battle and the other circumstances lead to such

incidents.

One of the thousands of recorded friendly fire incidents occurred near Kandahar, Afghanistan, in April 2002, when four members of Princess Patricia’s Canadian light infantry regiment were killed (and others injured) after a US Air National Guard major dropped a bomb on them from an F-16 jet fighter. The pilot claimed he was confused. There was no American apology. Could it be that a trained American warrior could not tell the difference between Princess Patricia and the Taliban? Was this the

first salvo in an effort to conquer Canada, or payback for one of those many historical Canadian atrocities? Is “accident” really enough of an excuse to these dead Canadian patriots? Don’t they deserve a better explanation? Are Canadians placing billboards along



their freeways demanding an investigation into America’s attack on the Princess Patricia’s regiment, in the name of HonorPrincessPatriciasRegimentVets.org, with the lead line “attacked by the United States”?

There is a long history of American military cover-ups concerning war dead. I have directly heard from WWII veterans that they occasionally covered up (lied about) the circumstances of the deaths of soldiers under their command. The letter to the bereaved family would say, “your son died a hero in the battle of such-and-such,” when the truth would have been, “your idiot son got drunk and drove a jeep into a tree.”

But it is worse than that. There are hundreds of famous *intentional* “surprise” attacks in the context of wars or conflicts – Fort Sumter, Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, Dresden,

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London, Bay of Pigs – as well as hundreds of memorable terrorist attacks. While we can talk about them and memorialize them, generally we don't use them to stir up anti-Dixie or anti-Japanese or anti-American sentiments at this point. We can have our judgments, but there is no point in complaining about the Japanese today due to their attack on Pearl Harbor or the British for their treachery in 1812.

The billboard, sponsored by known anti-Semites, was followed by several letters to the *New Haven Register* from collaborating anti-Semites from California, Colorado and Massachusetts, whom I can only guess are not daily readers of the *Register*. Talk about conspiracy.

You don't have to accept my classification of those writers as "anti-Semites." You can Google them and see what else they have written and draw your own conclusions.

The billboard sponsor and supporters claim that the US Naval and other personnel have a "right to know what really happened." That proposition is dubious. The USS *Liberty* was operating under the command of the National Security Agency (NSA), not the Navy, and it is the ethic of the intelligence services -- formalized in law -- that personnel do not have a right to know the details or purpose of their mission, particularly when the mission is classified. (The military also has a similar ethic.) Whether releasing the truth about the incident at this point would be harmful to national security is a judgment that is left to the Obama Administration and Congress. Military and intelligence secrecy is inherently at odds with democratic ideals, but it is ubiquitous; this one case is not remarkable. The slip of a lip can sink a ship. The billboard sponsors do not seek the investigation of or release of classified information about any of the large number of casualties related to botched intelligence operations – just this one, which just happens

to involve Israel. If their cause were about the public's right or the veterans' right to know, it should be a wide claim, not focused on Israel.

The billboard inspired anti-Semites to write to the *Register* and to discuss the incident in other media. Statements from those letters include "the U.S. government at the time bowed down to Israel," "Israel lobby's lock-hold on Congress," "what Israel is doing to the Palestinians," "the ADL's loyalties are with Israel and not America," Israel's "atrocities," "the extrajudicial killing of an unarmed Palestinian man at a checkpoint," suggesting that this is



nothing more than an anti-Israel free-for-all. Those statements have nothing really to do with the incident of the *Liberty*. There is no real concern for the naval personnel, no concern for promoting international law, no concern for Palestinians or Egyptians, and

probably no real concern for the truth. Just an opportunity to bash Israel. Indeed, mainstream veterans' groups have refused to recognize or support this off-the-wall outfit which purports to be the voice of veterans but is really just another congeries of anti-Semites, a "Swift Boat Veterans for the Truth: anti-Israel edition." Their only consistent aim is to promote hostility toward Israel.

Having said all that, I agree with the claim of these anti-Semites that Israel's attack on the *Liberty* was not an accident and that the American government covered it up, with Israel's cooperation. Israel's bombing of the ship was in self-defense and was in itself lawful under conventional international rules of war, and was proportional. The USS *Liberty* -- the most technologically-sophisticated communications spy ship in the world -- was collecting data for a secret operation that included "leaking" Israel's Order of Battle to the Egyptians, Syrians and Jordanians. Conveying Israel's battle plans to its enemies during the war would likely have cost Israel many fatalities and

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possibly brought military failure. The US committed an act of war against a friendly nation, which may have been illegal under American law. We know this today through declassified materials, published accounts of the Israeli, American and British personnel involved, and the recordings of Arab leaders (Egypt's Nasser and Jordan's King Hussein) discussing the information leaked to them by the Americans (via the British in Cyprus) – recordings intercepted by Israeli intelligence.

Israel's attack was surgical and designed to minimize fatalities – and indeed, only 34 persons were killed, despite Israel's capacity to blow the ship out of the water, and despite the remarkable fact

that no air cover or rescue support was provided the *Liberty* by the US Navy, even though American forces were only minutes away. Specifically, Israel made sure the crew knew it was about to be attacked so they could seek cover (which they did at the right moment), and then dropped chemicals on the deck to destroy the communication equipment the *Liberty* was using to sabotage Israel. Immediately after the attack to destroy the communications equipment, by all accounts, Israel offered assistance to the survivors.

Today, any computer science or math student can readily grasp how the *Liberty* was able to discern Israel's battle plans, but in 1967 this cutting-edge technology was classified and beyond the imagination of most Americans (including those on the ship). It was an act of genius for Israeli intelligence to figure it out in 1967 (or at least clever spying to learn what the *Liberty* was doing), though it seems obvious 50 years later to people who understand the power of big data à la Twitter and Google.

It is not clear if the White House was aware of the American act of war against Israel, or if it was a rogue NSA operation, but it is clear that the Administration wanted the incident suppressed. Why exactly that served American purposes is open to speculation. Whether it was the intelligence agencies, the Democratic White House, or the oil industry that most wanted this story squelched is unclear. The use of British intelligence to circumvent America's own laws is a well-documented and continuing practice, which American Administrations do not want to discuss; perhaps this was what the Administration was hiding.

By the same token, why Israel collaborated in the cover-up is also open to speculation. Perhaps Israel was just trying to accommodate the American administration. Or perhaps Israel's leaders did not want "everyone" to know how utterly alone Israel



really was during the war, to the point that even the United States betrayed them. Recall that this incident occurred after the United Nations capitulated to Egyptian threats and withdrew its peacekeeping forces from Sinai, and America and its allies failed to keep their commitment to insure free international maritime passage, which was critical for Israel and for the rule of law. The White House had talked about organizing or leading an international naval flotilla to assert freedom on the seas, but failed to deliver, which was a major contributing factor to the outbreak of war. Perhaps Israel did not want to have to explain how it figured out what the American ship was really doing, or perhaps Israel thought it could continue to extract a price for keeping America's secret. Or maybe Israel simply did not want to be subject to endless conspiracy theories.

It is clear, though, that the billboard is part of an anti-Jewish conspiracy.

