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Ordered Ship to Move Before Air Attack

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Navy ordered the USS Liberty to pull back to 80 miles off the Egyptian coast shortly before the communications vessel was attacked by Israeli jets and torpedo boats, report Pentagon sources.

Senior officers indicated the order was issued to lessen the chances of attack. They said it was not clear whether the Liberty's captain, Comdr. William C. McGonagle, had received the order or had begun to comply when the Israelis launched their assault last Thursday.

Military men, attempting to find out just what did happen to the Liberty, also revealed that two Israeli jets flew over the ship about 30 minutes before the attack. They added it is not clear what bearing the fly-overs had on the subsequent attack.

It had been reported earlier that the Israeli jets launched their attacks without making any initial passes. Such approaches usually are used to determine the identity of a suspect ship.