

ISRAEL, IN ERROR, ATTACKS U.S. SHIP

10 Navy Men Die, 100 Hurt
in Raids North of Sinai
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An American naval vessel was mistakenly attacked by Israeli planes and torpedo boats today in international waters about 15 miles north of the Sinai Peninsula. Reports tonight listed the toll as 10 dead and 100 wounded. Twenty of the wounded were hurt critically.

The vessel, the Liberty, was on a peaceful, though war-related mission. Pentagon sources said she had been dispatched from Spain to the war zone to provide additional communications to facilitate the evacuation of American citizens from the Middle East and North Africa.

Pentagon officials said it was too early to tell whether indemnification would be asked from Israel for the loss of life and the damage to the Navy ship.

President Johnson, in a letter to the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, noted that the

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United States Government "found it necessary" to make a prompt and firm protest to the Israel Government which, to its credit, had already acknowledged its responsibility and had apologized.

The White House, meanwhile, announced that the Hot Line communications link between Washington and Moscow, first installed in August 1963, had been utilized for its first serious business during the Middle East crisis.

The President's Press Secretary, George Christian, said that only this morning Mr. Johnson used the line to the Kremlin to tell of the attack on the American ship so that the Soviet Union would understand why carrier-based aircraft of the Sixth Fleet were scrambling and speeding toward the damaged ship.

Reports from the stricken vessel were still sketchy late today. She was steaming north at about eight knots to rendezvous with two Sixth Fleet destroyers. The Liberty and each of the destroyers had Navy doctors and corpsmen aboard.

Phil G. Goulding, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, gave the following account of the incident:

The Liberty, listed as a technical research ship, left her base at Rota, Spain, on June 2 to "assure communications between United States Govern-



U.S. Navy via Associated Press Wirephoto

ATTACKED IN MEDITERRANEAN: U.S.S. Liberty, which was mistakenly attacked by Israeli planes and torpedo boats north of Sinai Peninsula yesterday. Israel apologized.

ment posts in the Middle East and to assist in relaying information concerning the evacuation of American dependants and other American citizens."

She arrived off the coast of the United Arab Republic in the morning to take on her duties and was attacked in mid-afternoon, about 8:05 A.M., Eastern Daylight Saving time.

Mr. Goulding said he was not sure of the weather conditions at the time of attack or whether there was any communications between the Liberty and Israeli forces. The ship was clearly marked and flying the American flag, he said.

Last night, Pentagon officials said the Liberty was first attacked by a number of Israeli jets that made six strafing runs, followed 20 minutes later by three torpedo boats that fired at least two torpedoes.

The Liberty fired at one of the torpedoes with her .50-caliber machine guns and it passed harmlessly 25 yards astern. The other torpedo hit the ship on her starboard side. Damage to the vessel was said to be widespread but superficial.

Asked why the Liberty was so close to the area of conflict, Pentagon officials said there were technical factors dictating the best location of the ship for her communications mission.

They did not amplify. They said they did not know whether the Israeli or Egyptian Governments had been notified in advance of the intention to move a vessel so close to the Sinai area. They noted, however, that the two countries regard their territorial waters as extending only 12 miles to sea and that the Liberty was 15 miles out.

One report circulating in the Pentagon was that Israeli troops in the peninsula had been bombarded by Egyptian vessels and that Israeli units were ordered to silence the offshore firing. This could not be immediately confirmed from American sources.

The Liberty, Mr. Goulding said, was believed to be armed only with four .50-caliber machine guns. It was not known

whether she fired on the attackers.

Senator Jacob K. Javits said the attack was a "tragic fallout" of the war. The incident might have been a lot more dangerous in its implications if it had been caused by Soviet or Arab forces, the New York Republican said. "With Israel," he said, "we know it was a mistake."

Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Democrat of New York, called the incident "a miscalculation that could take place any place in the world."

Senator Abraham Ribicoff, Democrat of Connecticut, said

the incident was "compelling evidence of the pressing need to bring the violence to an end. We are dangerously near the precipice of total war."

The Liberty is a modified World War II victory ship that was outfitted with equipment for "research in communications and electromagnetic radiation."

Such ships are sometimes used to eavesdrop on radio traffic. A Defense official was asked whether the Liberty might also have been sent to intercept tactical radio messages from Israeli and Egyptian field commands.