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Medal of Honor Is Given Skipper of U.S.S. Liberty



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MOVED: Capt. William L. McGonagle, the former commander of U.S. intelligence ship Liberty, wiping away tears during Medal of Honor ceremonies in Washington yesterday. He received award for saving ship and lives of many of his men during surprise attack in Mediterranean.

WASHINGTON, June 11 (UPI)— The Navy presented the Medal of Honor today to the skipper of the U.S.S. Liberty, which was nearly destroyed by Israeli warplanes and torpedo boats in the Mediterranean Sea last year.

The nation's highest award for valor went to Capt. William L. McGonagle, 43 years old, of Cohasset, Mass., who was cited for keeping the heavily damaged communications ship under control for 17 hours despite his own serious wounds.

The citation said that Captain McGonagle had displayed "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty."

At times, it said, he commanded his ship while lying on the deck to keep from fainting, sometimes directing the vessel by watching her wake.

The Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius, who presented the medal, said that Captain McGonagle "was responsible for saving the lives of many of his crew and for saving the ship."

Thirty-four Americans died when the ship was attacked last June 8-9 at the time of the Arab-Israeli War. Israel later apologized and said it was a case of mistaken identity.

The citation, signed by President Johnson, said that Captain McGonagle had refused to relinquish command of the Liberty until a later rendezvous with an American destroyer and had then refused medical aid until convinced that other seriously wounded members of his crew had been cared for.

See also CIA 6 May 65, on awarding of medal to Francis Gary Powers.