

Exhibit 4-28

UNCLASSIFIED

both reached the top of the ladder to proceed down, a bomb hit near the whaleboat on the starboard side, immediately aft of the bridge. Armstrong and O'Connor were thrown back onto the bridge and other personnel in the pilot-house were blown from their feet. McGonagle grabbed the engine order annunciator and rang up all head flank speed — an order for maximum speed. At the same time, he ordered Lieutenant Maurice H. Bennett to report to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) via the high-command radio circuit (hicom) that the *Liberty* was under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and required immediate assistance. This Flash message, giving the *Liberty's* position as 33-25E, 31-23N, was received by the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Saratoga* (CVA-60) and relayed to Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; Commander, Sixth Fleet; and Commander, Task Force 60 (CTF 60).¹¹ *Liberty's* transmission was not made without difficulty. During the attack and intermittently thereafter, the hicom voice circuit was subjected to loud jamming regardless of frequency. This electronic interference was described as a steady carrier without modulation.¹²

(U) After being blown back onto the bridge floor, Lieutenant O'Connor realized he had no feeling in his body from the waist down. To get out of the way, he dragged himself into the combat information center (CIC) behind the bridge, where several others had also sought safety. Lying face down, O'Connor soon noticed that there was a lot of blood on the floor and then realized it was his. About this time, Ensign O'Malley stepped into the CIC and helped stop O'Connor's bleeding by stuffing a T-shirt into the holes in his back.

(U) A few moments after the bomb blast on the starboard side, Commander McGonagle was hit by flying shrapnel and knocked off his feet, but, though shaken up, he remained on the bridge, totally in command.

(U) For the next five or six minutes, aircraft made criss-cross attacks on the *Liberty* at about one-minute intervals, hitting her with rockets and machine-gun fire. A final count entered into the Court of Inquiry's record, showed 821 separate hits on the ship's hull and superstructure. The attacking aircraft were later identified as French-built Dassault Mirage jet fighters whose armament consisted of two 30mm cannon, two 1,000-pound bombs, and four rocket pods (18 rockets each).

(U) During the first or second strafing run, the ship's public-address system, the electrically powered intercom system, and most sound-powered phone circuits were severed or destroyed.

(U) In the first minutes of the air attack the *Liberty* suffered a complete loss of external communications because of badly damaged radio transmitting equipments and antenna systems. In spite of this, emergency restoration of hicom voice capability was completed within minutes. All U.S.S. *Liberty* communications immediately thereafter were via the hicom voice network.¹³

(U) The coordinated strafing, rocket, and incendiary air attacks created three major fires topside that covered large areas of the *Liberty* with flames and heavy smoke. Eight men were killed or died of injuries received during the air attack: two killed or mortally wounded on the bridge, two killed at machine gun 51, one killed at machine gun 52, one died from wounds received on the main deck starboard side, and two died of wounds received on the O1 level portside. Throughout the topside area, 75 men had been wounded by shrapnel and shock of exploding rockets.

(U) During this period, the *Liberty* gradually built up speed from five knots; her exact speed was not known but it is doubtful that she exceeded 11 or 12 knots while under attack.

Torpedo-Boat Attack (U)

(U) At about 1424 hours, look-outs sighted three high-speed boats approaching the *Liberty* from the northeast on a relative bearing of approximately 135° at a distance of about 15 miles. The boats appeared to be in a wedge-type formation, spaced about 150 to 200 yards apart, and closing in a torpedo-launch attitude at an estimated speed of 27 to 30 knots. Commander McGonagle ordered a sailor from the bridge to man the starboard gun and take the boats under fire. Using the hicom circuit, the *Liberty's* radioman reported the approach of the torpedo boats. This was received and relayed by the U.S.S. *Saratoga* to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy Europe and to the Commander, Sixth Fleet.¹⁴

(U) It was then that the Commander noticed that the *Liberty's* American flag had been shot down. He immediately ordered a signalman to hoist the "holiday ensign" — the largest flag aboard (approximately 7 x 13 feet) — from the yardarm, the normal flag halyard having been destroyed. There was smoke from the burning whaleboat and other topside fires in the vicinity of the bridge.

(U) Commander McGonagle passed the word, "Stand by for torpedo attack." He held his course, since turning away from the boats would bring the ship closer to land, and turning toward them would