

Review of "The Liberty Incident Revealed" by A. Jay Cristol
By Joe Meadors, USS Liberty Survivor

Cristol's work reads more like a poorly written legal brief than a highly-touted, impeccably-researched work of historical accuracy. Barely 38 words into the opening flyleaf he claims there were 171 wounded during the attack. I can only assume he is not including the 34 who were killed in that number.

After decades of researching the attack on our ship you would think he would have learned there were 174 Purple Hearts awarded to the survivors. A small point? Obviously to him and to those who have heaped praises upon his work. Not to those of us who survived the attack.

That same mistake is repeated by the NSA Historian in the NSA 60th Anniversary Book. Then again, the NSA historian isn't the best source authority when it comes to the USS Liberty. He has the USS Liberty already on station when the Six Day War broke out when, in fact, we didn't arrive until the fourth day of the war. That NSA historian is cited by Cristol as claiming "the attack was a tragic mistake." He doesn't know how many were wounded during the attack, he doesn't know when we arrived on station and he hasn't interviewed a single USS Liberty crewman but he does know that "the attack was a tragic mistake."

Another fact missing from Cristol's work is that among the awards won by the officers and crew of the USS Liberty are the Medal of Honor, two Navy Crosses, eleven Silver Stars, twenty Bronze Stars, nine Navy Commendations, 208 Purple Hearts, 294 Combat Action Ribbons, the Presidential Unit Citation and the National Security Agency Exceptional Service Civilian Award which makes the USS Liberty arguably the most decorated ship in US Navy history for a single event.

In his advertising Cristol claims he interviewed every living USS Liberty survivor. A legitimate historian interested in telling the complete story about the attack would have.

Cristol did not.

I personally invited Cristol to attend a USS Liberty reunion in order to address and interview the crew. He refused. To date not a single crewman has indicated to me that he was interviewed by Cristol and some have told me that interviews Cristol claims to have conducted with them didn't happen.

If he wants to create a complete history of the USS Liberty attack why doesn't he interview the survivors?

Why does he refuse to attend a USS Liberty reunion?

On page 1 he tells us that the air attack was initiated when the Mirages dropped out of the west from 10,000 feet and began their strafing run. If Cristol had bothered to interview USS Liberty survivors instead of just claiming he did he would have known that that is not how the attack began.

We had just secured from general quarters and were on a westerly course. LtJg Lloyd Painter noticed very high speed contacts coming up our starboard side traveling so low that they were visible on our surface search radar.

Thinking that this would be just another circling of our ship as had occurred so many times that morning a number of us (including me) ran up to the Signal Bridge to watch the aircraft.

They flew at very low level up our starboard side. When they got a bit ahead of our ship they turned left. Instead of continuing on their anticipated circuit, when they got almost dead ahead of us they turned and began their initial strafing attack. They didn't initiate their attack from 10,000 feet out of the western sun. They initiated it at low-level out of the east. The author would have known this if he had only interviewed the USS Liberty survivors instead of just claiming that he did.

On Page 2 of his book we see another example of Cristol's stunning research. There he subjects the reader to the myth of the 10 US government investigations claiming that the evidence and testimony submitted during those investigations support the conclusion that there is no evidence the attack was deliberate. Those "investigations" didn't ask for nor receive any evidence and testimony about the intent of the attackers. They could just as easily have concluded that Mary had a little lamb or the cow jumped over the moon.

None of those reports are based on an investigation of the attack on the USS Liberty.

The report that comes closest to being an investigation of the attack is the report prepared as a result of the 4 days of testimony taken during the US Navy Court of Inquiry.

One glaring omission from that report is the testimony of Lloyd Painter who testified before the court about his witnessing the torpedo boats deliberately machine gunning our life rafts in the water. Painter's testimony has been removed from the record. Not redacted. Removed. A fact nowhere to be found in Cristol's work.

Dare I mention the "missing" written statements provided to the Court by some 65 USS Liberty crewmen at the request of the President of the Court? Strange that there is nothing about this in Cristol's "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" account of the attack. Even ADM John McCain who is the convening authority of the court provided a qualified endorsement for the record of the Court.

Why Cristol claims the evidence and testimony supports his theory of “mistaken attack” is open to conjecture -- as is his decision to interview few if any of the living USS Liberty survivors all the while allowing the myth that he interviewed all of us to continue unchallenged by anyone except the USS Liberty survivors ourselves.

Why Cristol claims his book is “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” when it is not is open to conjecture as well. He opines that we are just “motivated by hidden agendas” and we “wish to keep alive conspiracy theories.”

In fact, our agenda has never been hidden.

If Cristol had bothered to attend our reunion he would have spoken with countless USS Liberty survivors who would have told him that during the attack:

- We were attacked by unmarked aircraft;
- Our radios were jammed on both US Navy tactical and international maritime distress frequencies;
- Life rafts we had dropped over the side in anticipation of abandoning ship were deliberately destroyed by machine gun fire from the attacking torpedo boats;
- Attacking torpedo boats slowly circled the torpedoed and sinking ship while firing upon USS Liberty crewmen who ventured topside to help our wounded shipmates; and,
- Two flights of rescue aircraft that had been launched from Sixth Fleet aircraft carriers were ordered recalled while we were still under attack and calling for help.

Our efforts are focused on ensuring the attack is completely and publicly investigated by the US government. Nothing more and certainly not less.

The investigation we are advocating for will have evidence and testimony given under oath with the penalty of perjury attached. Cristol operates under a far less stringent standard than we do.

He has the luxury of claiming he is presenting “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” in a format that doesn’t hold him accountable for anything he says.

Given he is a retired US Naval aviator and US Navy JAG officer sworn to protect the US constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic one has to wonder why Cristol has gone to such lengths to destroy his reputation and credibility in the US Navy community by writing what clearly is an apology for the forces who attacked our ship when all he has to do is support our effort to ensure the attack is subjected to the complete and comprehensive public Congressional investigation that routinely follows an attack of this kind but that has been denied the attack on the USS Liberty.