

'SS Liberty' Sails to Challenge Israel

July 30, 2008

Military.com|by Bryant Jordan



Forty-one years after the American surveillance ship USS Liberty was napalmed, torpedoed and strafed by Israeli naval and air forces during the Six-Day War, another "Liberty" will be setting out from a Cyprus port in August to try to break through the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The "SS Liberty" is one of two ships -- along with "SS Free Gaza" -- that will be carrying an international group opposed to Israel's blockade of Gaza. Israel imposed the blockade just over a year ago.

Karin Pally, a spokeswoman in Los Angeles for the group Free Gaza Movement, said the ship was named in honor of 34 Sailors and Marines killed in the attack and to help bring the Gaza issue home to Americans.

Jim Ennes, an officer aboard the original Liberty and author of the book *Assault on the Liberty* said he was invited to take part in the protest sailing to Gaza but was not able to make it.

Until contacted by Military.com for comment, Ennes was unaware that organizers had named one of the ships after the Liberty, but he said he is "absolutely" pleased with the move and wishes he could be there.

Israel attacked the Liberty on June 8, 1967, later saying they thought it was an Egyptian vessel -- though survivors and others have long said the Israeli pilots and sailors knew exactly who they targeted.

The U.S. Navy began telling families of the American dead that the attack was accidental even before it convened an official board of inquiry, which about 10 days later delivered that same finding, according to Navy documents.

Six years ago the legal affairs adviser to the board, retired Capt. Ward Boston, broke his silence to say the investigation was a sham, and that the final version was altered to exonerate the Israelis. Boston died in June.

Pally said the two ships will include about 40 passengers from 16 countries, including Israel and the United States.

"Everyone is committed to non-violence," she said of the participants. "The Free Gaza Movement has arranged with a third party security expert to completely secure and search the boats before they leave Cyprus to make sure there are no weapons or anything dangerous aboard."

The larger of the two ships, the SS Free Gaza, will be equipped with a Web cam and will be posting streaming video to their Web site -- www.freegaza.org -- during the voyage, Pally said.