

CYANIDE

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CYANIDE

FADE IN

EXT. PASADENA OFFICE BLDG – DAY

1979

Two MEN in suits get out of a car and go to the office building. They examine the sign for Pasadena Productions and go to the elevator.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE

The RECEPTIONIST looks up as the two men enter.

RECEPTIONIST

Good morning! May I help you?

MAN

Mr. Wilson?

RECEPTIONIST

Your names?

MAN

Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones.

Skeptically, the receptionist buzzes the intercom line.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Wilson, two men are here to see you...

No, they don't have an appointment...  
(hangs up)  
Mr. Wilson will see you.

Silently, the two men go through Wilson's door.

INT. WILSON'S OFFICE

TERRY WILSON sits at his desk as the two strangers enter. On his desk is a mock-up of a movie poster, which depicts a ship under attack.

CLOSE UP – POSTER

Lurid naval battle scene. Title: ORDERS FROM ABOVE

He looks up from the poster at the men. They sit down silently and look at him. Wilson squints at their bad manners, sizing them up.

WILSON  
How can I help you gents?

MAN  
(looks at poster)  
Forget about making that movie...

Terry Wilson stares, blinks and then glances down at the poster and back at the speaker.

WILSON  
This movie? Are you nuts? Who the hell are you?

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE

The two men leave Wilson's office and go to the elevator. The receptionist watches them get in and disappear. She picks up the phone and punches a button. She hangs up and goes to Wilson's door and knocks quietly. Then she pushes the door open.

INT. WILSON'S OFFICE

Terry Wilson is in his chair with two bullet holes in him. The receptionist faints and hits the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. PASADENA OFFICE BLDG – DAY

Police cars are in front of the building. An ambulance pulls away silently. A motorcyclist pulls up and parks. BUDDY RODGERS gets off and looks back at the ambulance. He stares up at the offices.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE

Buddy appears as the elevator door opens. A uniformed COP stops him. Other POLICE mill around the office.

COP  
Name?

BUDDY  
Buddy Rodgers. I kinda work here.  
What's going on?

COP  
Homicide. Sergeant?

A DETECTIVE looks up from his notes.

DETECTIVE  
Yeah.

COP  
Guy works here.

The detective gets up and looks at Buddy.

DETECTIVE  
What sort of work?

BUDDY  
Technical advisor on a movie they're  
getting ready to make...

DETECTIVE  
What kind of movie is that?

BUDDY

War movie.

DETECTIVE

Who pays you?

BUDDY

The producer. Terry Wilson. He okay?

DETECTIVE

(shakes head)

He was murdered a couple of hours ago.

(waits)

What the hell was this movie about?

Buddy stares at the detective and then looks away.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE HELSTROM'S HOUSE

Buddy sits across a coffee table from GRACE HELSTROM.

BUDDY

Mrs. Helstrom, thank you for seeing me.

GRACE

Call me Grace, Buddy. John Stembro is an old friend... He's still with NSA?

BUDDY

Yes, ma'am. Grace. He is.

GRACE

I remember when we couldn't even say those initials. Secrets! What have all those secrets gotten us?

BUDDY

More secrets, I guess.

Grace shakes her head.

GRACE

I hate secrecy. I really do. There's only one reason for it... John said you worked with him? You were in the secrets business, too?

Buddy nods.

BUDDY

I kept most of them, Grace. Except one.

GRACE

That got you some time in a psychiatric hospital, John mentioned?

BUDDY

Two years, Grace... It was a big, bad secret.

GRACE

I'm sorry, Buddy. I truly am. And I'm surprised that they let you go.

Buddy nods again and sips his coffee.

BUDDY

John told me that you worked for Johnson... that maybe you'd talk about, uh...

GRACE

I was his speechwriter. One of several. I know what you want to talk about.

Grace reaches for the carafe and refills her mug. She gazes out her picture window and then back at Buddy.

GRACE (cont'g)

I don't want it to be a secret anymore!

BUDDY

Well, that's been my philosophy, too. I have to tell you, Grace, I'm putting

you at risk just by visiting here with you... John may have told you that a movie about this just got canceled in LA...

GRACE

He did. He warned me that talking to you could have a downside.

SCENES OF JFK IN THE WHITE HOUSE, FORMAL STATE DINNERS, DANCING

GRACE (cont'g – VO)

Lyndon arranged for Arthur Krim to be the finance chairman for the party. Arthur was an attorney and a movie producer and he was good at his new job. Kennedy was suspicious of him because he knew that Arthur was also a very high-level Israeli agent.

ARTHUR KRIM is socializing at a formal dinner party. His attractive wife, MATHILDE, kisses him on the cheek and laughs with another guest. The Kennedys and Johnsons are in the background.

GRACE (cont'g – VO)

By '63, Kennedy was getting rather aggressive toward the Israelis. He told them he would not allow them to have nuclear weapons... No way. The Israeli prime minister was so furious that he quit! Did you know that? Ben-Gurion wouldn't have the US president giving him orders!

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

Buddy shakes his head.

SCENES OF BOBBY KENNEDY WITH JFK, AT THE JUSTICE DEP'T

GRACE (cont'g – VO)

Jack and Bobby wouldn't let up. He had Bobby order them to register their

various lobbies as foreign agencies,  
which would have wrecked their ability  
to raise funds and pressure politicians...  
it all came to a head in October. Then,  
a few weeks later...

#### ZAPRUDER FILM ROLLS SILENTLY

GRACE (cont'g – VO)  
Lyndon told his girlfriend, Dolly,  
gal from Austin, that Jack wouldn't  
be humiliating him anymore. Told her  
that in Ft. Worth, the night before  
it happened.

#### LBJ TAKING THE OATH ON AIR FORCE ONE, SITTING IN THE OVAL OFFICE

GRACE (cont'g – VO)  
So, Lyndon's president. The Israelis  
were off the hook. Their A-bomb  
factory was safe, their lobbies were  
safe... Arthur Krim was raising tons of  
money for the '64 election. Goldwater  
didn't have a prayer...

#### INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

GRACE (cont'g)  
Lyndon reversed most of what Kennedy  
was doing. Not just about Israel.  
Main thing was Vietnam. All of his  
advisors were pro-Israel, because he  
was, too.

#### QUICK CUTS OF ADVISORS

GRACE (cont'g – VO)  
Walt and Eugene Rostow, Abe Fortas,  
Arthur Goldberg, Sol Linowitz, Abe  
Feinberg, and of course, Arthur Krim.  
Hell, they say Lyndon and Lady Bird  
were Jews. That would explain a lot...  
The advisors all wanted the Vietnam War.



Buddy considers this.

BUDDY

How come?

GRACE

The more spending on Vietnam, the less noticeable were the money and weapons going to Israel. The more distracted we were by the war, the less we'd care about the Middle East. We became very distracted by Vietnam – right? So, a few years later, we saw the whole plan unfold. The grand prize. 1967... That's when Arthur and his pretty wife, Mathilde, took control of Lyndon.

BUDDY

How'd they do that?

GRACE

Sex. Mathilde wasn't Jewish but she had been an Israeli agent for twenty years, doing jobs for Begin and his Irgun gangsters in Europe. She was a high-powered medical researcher, a Ph.D. But she was a member of Irgun, back when they were assassinating diplomats and killing British soldiers. She married a Jewish terrorist and moved to Palestine. When they divorced, she married Arthur, who was twenty years older, after they met in Israel.

BUDDY

You mentioned sex.

GRACE

Well, Lyndon was their assignment. Arthur gave him money and Mathilde gave him sex. And Lyndon gave Israel whatever they told him to give. He'd

have probably done it anyway, but they were the ones who actually told him what to do. I saw it over and over...

EXT. KRIM HOUSE – DAY

LBJ drives his Lincoln convertible up to the Krim house in Johnson City, Texas. Mathilde rushes out the kitchen and kisses Johnson through his open driver's window. Arthur emerges and waves.

GRACE (cont'g – VO)  
Arthur even built a house on Lyndon's ranch to make their getting together more convenient. It was known as "Mathilde's house."

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

BUDDY  
That's hard-core.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE – NIGHT

LBJ knocks briefly at a door marked "Room 303," opens the door and enters. A SECRET SERVICE AGENT stands guard at the door.

GRACE (VO)  
Lyndon provided them a suite in the White House. Arthur was usually running United Artists in LA, but Mathilde spent a lot of time with Lyndon in DC...

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

BUDDY  
How'd Lady Bird deal with that?

GRACE  
Pretty well, actually. She understood his appetites. No hard feelings.

BUDDY

1967 was the grand prize...

GRACE

Well – that was the idea, anyway. The following year would have been the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israel's founding. Israel would have gone from the size of New Jersey to maybe Montana, like overnight. By now, twelve years later, it would have stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates, with the help of our military, of course. What they call "greater Israel." But you guys really screwed that up...

BUDDY

I was just a passenger.

GRACE

But you were there. The damned ship didn't sink. Wrecked everything. Twenty years of plans up in smoke.

Buddy finally nods.

BUDDY

We should have sunk. Don't know why we didn't. Shoulda gone down in a few minutes.

GRACE

Are you hearing me, Buddy? No one outside of the Israeli government and Lyndon's circle understood what a catastrophe that thing was. I'm not sure you do! I'm telling you that you were supposed to be the end result of twenty years of planning.

Buddy looks at her.

BUDDY

Yeah. That was the plan. They called

it Operation Cyanide.

GRACE

Was that the big, bad secret that put you in the laughing academy?

BUDDY

Yeah.

GRACE

I want to know what happened, Buddy. Why were you declared insane?

Buddy thinks about it. He looks at his cup.

BUDDY

The truth doesn't make you free, Grace. It can put you right in the nuthouse.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABIDJAN DOCKS – DAY

IVORY COAST – MAY, 1967

A US Navy ship, 455 feet long, eleven thousand tons, is berthed at the docks in the capital of Ivory Coast in west Africa. The ship looks like a freighter, which she used to be before a major refit by the NSA two years earlier. The ship bristles with forty-five antennae and radar dishes. Her designation, GTR 5, suggests she is meant for "technical research" but the fact is that this is a super spy ship designed to intercept and decipher other nations' radio signals.

OFFICERS and MEN in white uniforms make their way through crowds of AFRICANS who have come to view the big gray ship.

VIEW OF STERN

"LIBERTY"

BUDDY (Cont'g – VO)

They pulled into Abidjan for supplies and to give 'em some shore time, after the cruise over from Norfolk. Then they

heard that they were being sent, all of a sudden, to Spain.

EXT. ABIDJAN DOCKS – NIGHT

The LIBERTY lies quietly at the pier in the darkness. Suddenly, lights blink on, seen through the portholes.

INT. LIBERTY

Lights come on in the passageway as a SAILOR brings a message into a cabin. Two officers lie in their bunks.

LT. JIM O'CONNOR, the command duty officer, wakes up and takes the message, reads it. He gets up and turns on the light, waking the other officer, LT. JAMES ENNES. O'Connor leaves the light on and Ennes covers his head and tries to go back to sleep. Then O'Connor returns. Ennes looks at him with irritation.

O'CONNOR

You might as well get up – we're going to sea.

ENNES

What's going on?

O'CONNOR

That was a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Whoever heard of the Joint Chiefs taking control of a ship? We're to get underway ASAP and make our best speed for Rota, Spain.

ENNES

What for?

O'CONNOR

They didn't say. They just said we'd get further orders at Rota. The captain expects to sail at 0700, less than three hours from now, and he expects to do it with all the crew aboard and fresh groceries, too. It will be a busy three hours but

Captain Magoo usually gets his way.

Reveille is played over the ship's announcing system. A clock: 0420. Sleepy YOUNG OFFICERS appear with towels and shaving kits. LT. GEORGE GOLDEN, the ship's engineer officer, stands half-dressed in the passageway.

GOLDEN

Okay, you college pukes! I told you smart-assed college pukes we were goin' to war. This uneducated Smoky Mountain Jew is the only one here who knows what the hell is going on!

EXT. LIBERTY – NIGHT

CAPTAIN WILLIAM MCGONAGLE stands on the quarterdeck in his underwear, barefoot, speaking into his telephone. He gestures to SAILORS and OFFICERS who are startled to see him undressed and at this early hour.

MCGONAGLE

This Williams, US Embassy? Good, Captain McGonagle on the Liberty. I have a change of orders, Williams. Those groceries you were bringing this afternoon have to be on board in two hours. Yes, I know, but this is the highest priority.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Lt. Golden supervises the lighting off of the ship's engines. He observes gauges on the boilers as pressure builds.

EXT. LIBERTY – NIGHT

The ship's vehicles are hoisted aboard and secured for sea. The grocery truck arrives and work parties carry groceries below. It is still dark when the PILOT arrives, goes aboard. Lines are singled up and cast off.

LIBERTY departs Abidjan in the dark.

INT. LIBERTY WARDROOM

The OFFICERS are seated around the table for a late breakfast. Lt. O'Connor reads from a message.

O'CONNOR

New message from the Joint Chiefs:  
"Proceed best possible speed to Rota, Spain to load technical support material and supplies. When ready for sea proceed to operating area off Port Said. Specific areas will follow."

GOLDEN

We're going to see the Pyramids. That'd put us about a hundred miles from Israel.

The officers look at one and other. A few eyebrows are raised.

GOLDEN (CONT'G)

Rota... What's that, three thousand miles? About eight days of hard steaming.

LATER

As the officers eat and drink coffee, a SAILOR brings another message. O'Connor reads it. He clears his throat.

O'CONNOR

From the Joint Chiefs again. After leaving Rota we are to proceed at best speed to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean where we shall patrol a prescribed dog-leg pattern thirteen miles off the Gaza Strip!

The officers stop eating and stare at their plates and coffee cups.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

As the ship makes its best speed north, their new destination worries the crew. Some SAILORS neatly coil lines on the spotless deck.

SEAMAN 1

Man, we're goin' into a stinkin' war -  
I just know it!

SEAMAN 2

Join the navy, see the world...

SEAMAN 1

That's not a part of the world I ever  
wanted to see.

A BOSUN'S MATE overhears.

BOSUN'S MATE

Belay that! I haven't heard about any  
war starting.

Seaman 1 shuts up.

LATER

The bosun's mate approaches CPO MELVIN SMITH.

BOSUN'S MATE

There's been a lot of heavy drinking,  
Chief. You remember what that woman  
prophet up in DC said before our last  
trip? What was her name?

CPO SMITH

Jeane Dixon.

BOSUN'S MATE

Yeah. She said the USS Liberty was  
going to sink.

CPO SMITH

You sure she really said that?

BOSUN'S MATE

(shrugs)

The crew believed it. They were so



afraid the night before we got to Monrovia that a lot of guys slept on the main deck because they were too afraid to sleep below.

CPO SMITH

Well – we didn't sink.

BOSUN'S MATE

Didn't make 'em feel any better. They think the ship is doomed.

LATER

CPO Smith stops Lt. O'Connor by the whale boat. Near them is a group of SAILORS, who are talking among themselves.

CPO SMITH

The men are getting pretty tense, Lieutenant... They're worried we'll get too close to a war, with no protection.

They both eye the sailors, who don't look at them. O'Connor nods.

O'CONNOR

Keep them busy, Chief. Remind them that at least we're not going to Vietnam.

INT. LIBERTY COMMS CENTER

CPO RAYMOND LINN and Lt. Ennes drink coffee from Navy cups.

ENNES

Chief, I heard you were supposed to retire this month... After thirty years? What are you doing on this cruise?

CPO Linn nods.

CPO LINN

True, Mr. Ennes. 1937... Imagine! I

conned Norfolk into one more trip, one more liberty port. So they let me come on this one. I'll catch an embassy flight back from somewhere up ahead and make my retirement party.

Ennes raises an eyebrow.

ENNES

It's nice to know someone with pull!

CPO LINN

Mr. Ennes, you can imagine what I've done and seen in thirty years. Made it through the war, barely. Jap subs, kamikazes, you name it. But this is different...

ENNES

I don't see how it could compare with what you survived back then, Chief.

CPO Linn sits at his desk, checking messages for errors.

CPO LINN

This is different. I've never seen anything like this. You know, it's crazy to send an unprotected ship on an intelligence mission in a war zone. Spies just don't prance around like that in broad daylight near the front lines.

ENNES

I'll bet the Joint Chiefs will pull us back if a war starts. If shooting breaks out, we should get a change of orders within two hours.

CPO LINN

I hope so, but I wouldn't bet on it. I keep thinking that we will be a sitting duck, just begging to get our ass shot

off, and I wouldn't even be here if I hadn't cried about how I wanted one more trip. I'd be home taking rocking chair lessons. Wouldn't it be ironic if I got killed out here?

ENNES

Killed? Hell, Chief – all we do is listen. This isn't a fighting ship.

CPO Linn nods doubtfully as he checks his messages.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROTA US NAVAL BASE – DAY

The LIBERTY maneuvers to a berth among other USN ships.

Waiting to meet her are three MARINES and four CIVILIANS, one of which is Buddy Rodgers. They watch as the ship is smoothly berthed by McGonagle.

BUDDY (VO)

They stopped in Rota, Spain to pick up supplies and some Russian and Arabic linguists. Which was where I got on.

Buddy and ALLEN BLUE watch as lines are thrown to DOCKHANDS.

BLUE

I just got back from my last trip, just in time to take my wife to the hospital to have a baby. She's still there! As soon as the baby was born I got called away on this trip! Hardly had time to say goodbye. Jesus! If I'd known working for the government would be like this, I'd have gone to work for General Motors.

LATER

Fuel lines are attached to the ship. Trucks arrive, are unloaded and replaced by more trucks. Long lines of perspiring sailors carry food and supplies below.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE

GRACE

You were a linguist?

BUDDY

Russian. Anyway, things started getting a little crazy in Rota... The Liberty had a very squared-away crew, you know, you could see it in the condition of the ship. But in Rota they started acting like a bunch of squirrels. They were scared of the Gaza Strip...

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY GANGWAY – DAY

LT. COMMANDER PHIL ARMSTRONG, the ship's executive officer, and three other officers head down the gangway. Armstrong waves to Ennes.

ARMSTRONG

Jim, it's going to be a long, dry summer. We're making a booze run.

Ennes shakes his head as he watches the four men squeeze into a tiny Spanish taxi. Soon they are followed by LT. LLOYD PAINTER and LT. DICK KIEPFER, who get in two taxis.

EXT. ROTA LIQUOR STORE - DAY

The first taxi's trunk is being loaded with cases of Johnny Walker Red as the two taxis arrive. Armstrong and the other three squeeze back in and depart as Painter and Kiepfer get out and go inside.

INT. LIQUOR STORE

Painter and Kiepfer consult their shopping list.

PAINTER

Okay, Senor - let's have two cases of Spanish Terry brandy, two cases of Jack Daniel's, four cases of Canadian Club, and a nice assortment of wines, brandies and liqueurs...

The PROPRIETOR disappears to fill the order and a tall, well-dressed AMERICAN walks into the store. He stands by the cash register. The proprietor returns with a dolly full of alcohol. He computes price.

PROPRIETOR

Senores, that will be one thousand seven hundred pesetas...

PAINTER

How about US dollars?

The American civilian becomes agitated as the proprietor accepts cash from Painter.

STRANGER

You can't take dollars! You can't take American money!

Painter, shorter but more powerful, ignores the stranger. Kiepfer, six and a half feet tall, whispers to Painter.

KIEPFER

He's drunk.

The proprietor gives Painter his change in pesetas and pushes the dolly full of liquor out to the taxi. The stranger produces an ID card and badge and waves them at the Americans.

STRANGER

Look! I'm a US government agent! You can't spend American money in this country! I'm going to have to put you under arrest!

EXT. LIQUOR STORE – DAY

The officers help load the liquor into their waiting taxis. Then Kiepfer squeezes his large frame in among the cases. Painter gets in his lead cab as the stranger follows them.

STRANGER

Help! Help! Call the police!  
Arrest these men! Help! Police!

Painter leans out his door and yells back to Kiepfer as PEOPLE gather.

PAINTER

This guy is nuts!

KIEPFER

He's drawing a crowd!

Painter taps his driver's shoulder.

PAINTER

Back to the ship!

Kiepfer gestures to his driver.

KIEPFER

Follow that cab.

As the cars start to move, the stranger steps into the street, in front of Painter's cab. He throws himself onto the hood of the tiny car.

STRANGER

Help! Help! Call the police!

Painter's driver stops and becomes excited and starts waving his arms and yelling in Spanish. Painter extricates himself from the liquor cases. The stranger gets off the hood as Painter approaches him with a shrug and a look of apology.

PAINTER

Look, mister, we don't want to cause  
any trouble...

Painter gives the stranger a hard knee to the groin. His eyes roll back as he falls unconscious to the ground. Painter waves at Kiepfer.

PAINTER (cont'g)

Let's go!

Kiepfer struggles to get out of his cab and goes to the fallen man, fumbling with his belt and checking his pulse.

KIEPFER

Wait! He could be hurt!

PAINTER

Well, I guarantee he's hurt...

Kiepfer glances at the gathering crowd of astonished Spaniards.

KIEPFER

Esta bien! Ayudame con sus pantalones!

Some of the men come forward and help Kiepfer pull down the stranger's trousers. Kiepfer observes his swollen scrotum.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

He'll live. Let's go!

The officers get back in their taxis and depart.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY WARDROOM

Lt. Ennes eats his dinner as he watches a movie. A MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

Lieutenant, the officer of the deck requests your presence on the quarterdeck.

EXT. QUARTERDECK – DAY

A CPO from the naval base speaks to the officer of the deck, CPO JOE BENKERT. They both salute Lt. Ennes as he approaches.

BENKERT

Trouble in town, Mr. Ennes.

CPO

Sir, I must ask you to recall your men. They're all crowded into the one little club and are getting out of control. It's hot, there have been fights and now they're throwing beer bottles. I'm afraid there's going to be real trouble if you don't get them back aboard.

EXT. ROTA CLUB – DAY

SAILORS go in and out of the club. We can hear yelling and the sound of crashing beer bottles from inside.

EXT. QUARTERDECK – DAY

ENNES

Chief, the men are pretty restless after our trip over from Norfolk and up here from Africa. We've got a risky assignment ahead of us. I can't recall everyone just because some of them are hard to handle... That could create a real explosion.

The CPO is unconvinced. He sighs and shakes his head.

ENNES (cont'g)

I'll give you some men to beef up your shore patrol. They'll help you bring back individual offenders.

Behind them, the taxis of Painter and Kiepfer appear. Painter gets out and goes to Kiepfer's cab.

CPO

Maybe that'll work, Lieutenant.



He salutes and heads down the gangway.

EXT. DOCKS – DAY

Painter and Kiepfer wait apprehensively as they watch the CPO leave. Then they watch as four SAILORS with sidearms go ashore and Ennes as he goes below.

KIEPFER

He's going to go back and watch that movie.

Kiepfer approaches the CPO, who salutes.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

Trouble with the liberty party, chief?

CPO

Yes, sir. A little trouble at the club. Nothing we can't handle.

Kiepfer is relieved that the shore patrol was not looking for him and Painter.

KIEPFER

Well, before you leave I'd like to borrow your men for a few minutes. We just got back with some of the ship's welfare and recreation liquor and we need some help stowing it below.

CPO

Yes, sir.

The shore patrol party carries the contraband liquor aboard.

EXT. QUARTERDECK - LATER

Weary, bloody and beer-soaked SAILORS stumble back aboard, some in the custody of the shore patrol, complaining of being abused. CPO Benkert is still on duty as officer of the deck. Ennes reappears.

ENNES

Yes, Chief?

BENKERT

Big trouble, Mr. Ennes. Some nut is loose in the deck force sleeping compartment with a loaded gun. He says he'll shoot anyone who comes near.

INT. DECK FORCE COMPARTMENT

Ennes and Benkert inch their way into the darkened compartment to find a young BLACK SAILOR cowering in a corner, frightened and unarmed.

ENNES

Seaman, what's the problem?

BLACK SAILOR

It's the Mexicans, sir. They gonna beat me up again.

ENNES

Again?

Ennes looks at Benkert, who shrugs.

ENNES (cont'g)

Do you have a weapon, seaman?

BLACK SAILOR

(hesitates)

In my bunk, sir.

ENNES

Okay, seaman, let's have it. I promise you'll get leniency if you have been bullied. The chief here will put you in a safe place to sleep.

The sailor takes them to his bunk and hands over a snub-nose .22. Benkert leads him away to a safer place.

EXT. QUARTERDECK – NIGHT

Ennes reappears on the quarterdeck to find a harried Benkert.

ENNES

What now, Chief?

BENKERT

Shore patrol is insisting we recall the whole crew. But I think they're already here.

SAILORS come aboard in groups of ten and twenty, many ill, arrogant and belligerent. They are restrained by others. The shore patrol escorts some bloodied sailors aboard.

EXT. DOCK – NIGHT

As the men make their way aboard, someone curses. Pandemonium. Fifty MEN, whites, blacks, Chicanos, launch wild attacks on each other. It is a violent brawl.

Two taxis arrive with the ship's officers, led by the XO, Phil Armstrong, who jumps out and wades into the brawl, swinging his fists.

ARMSTRONG

Wade into 'em! Hit 'em! Slug the sons of bitches!

The other officers join in the riot and soon the sailors are shocked. They abruptly stop fighting. They stand in silence for a moment, confused and frustrated. They sullenly make their way aboard and down below. The officers follow silently up the gangplank.

EXT. QUARTERDECK – NIGHT

Armstrong stands alone with Ennes. He leans on the railing and stares across the dock.

ARMSTRONG (cont'g)

You have to hit 'em. You have to wade in and just pound the crap out of 'em. It doesn't do any good to tell people to stop fighting. You have to knock 'em senseless.

Ennes doesn't argue but is skeptical.

ENNES

They were all pretty happy and hard-working until we got here... Now, it's gone to hell.

ARMSTRONG

They're scared. Once we leave here, we don't know when we'll get mail, liberty, groceries or anything else. And with orders to Israel on top of that crazy Dixon prophecy, half the crew is convinced we're going to sink.

A CHIEF PETTY OFFICER runs to the quarterdeck.

CPO 2

Hey! There's a riot below!

They depart quarterdeck.

INT. LIBERTY PASSAGEWAY

Armstrong rounds up most of the officers and some CPOs and leads them down to the Research Operations Department.

INT. RESEARCH OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

Armstrong and his posse find a hundred drunken men surging toward their imagined enemy, the deck-force sailors who sleep in a forward area.

The officers yell orders to stop but are ignored or unheard. The mob thunders through the empty mess hall. Armstrong fights to get to the front of the mob, blocks the door and collars the ringleaders.

ARMSTRONG

What the hell do you think you're doing?

Many of the sailors are more powerful than Armstrong but none is willing to defy the executive officer.

The drunken men sullenly retreat to their sleeping compartment, urged by some half-drunken officers and chiefs.

OFFICER

You! Snap it up there!

SAILOR

Sir, why don't you leave us alone so we can get some sleep?

OFFICER

Shut up and get in your bunk! You're on report!

Ennes leaves the room last and turns off the lights. Soon all is quiet and the men are asleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK – DAY

The LIBERTY is prepared to depart. Lines are singled up. Diesel smoke rises from the stack.

An official-looking black limo is driven onto the pier.

EXT. QUARTERDECK – DAY

Lt. Painter and Captain McGonagle watch the preparations to cast off. The limo stops by the gangway. An AMERICAN gets out.

MCGONAGLE

What's this? Is that the pilot?

PAINTER

I don't know, Captain. It doesn't look like the pilot.

They watch as the American climbs the gangway. He reaches them.

US AGENT

Take me to the captain.

MCGONAGLE

I'm the captain. What can I do for you?

US AGENT

I'm the senior agent here for the United States. You're going to have to stay here, Captain. Two of your men beat up one of my agents yesterday and I have ordered a full investigation. We know it was either officers or chiefs from this ship.

Painter tries to appear preoccupied with the details of getting the ship ready for sea.

MCGONAGLE

I'll be happy to cooperate in any way I can, but I'm afraid we can't hold an investigation today. I have orders to go to sea.

The agent loses some of his confidence. He looks around and sees that the PILOT has arrived. Men stand ready to cast off the mooring lines and a crane is in position to remove the gangway.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)

We are getting underway immediately. I suggest you leave the ship at once unless you intend to hold your investigation at sea.

US AGENT

This is very serious, Captain. It must be taken care of. When will you be returning to Spain?

MCGONAGLE

I am not at liberty to discuss ship movements, sir. If you have a charge to file against a member of my crew, you should send a written complaint through official channels. Meanwhile,

please excuse me, as I intend to get  
this ship underway.

McGonagle escorts the agent to the gangway, salutes smartly, and turns to  
Painter.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)  
Raise the gangway, Mr. Painter. I'll  
show the pilot to the bridge.

Painter wipes the sweat off his face as the crane lifts the gangway. He watches  
the black limo go to the end of the pier and stop. It stays there as the LIBERTY  
departs and moves past the sea wall that encloses the harbor.

EXT. STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR – DAY

The LIBERTY passes through the strait in the late afternoon.

INT. LIBERTY BRIDGE

Captain McGonagle sits in his command chair, watching Gibraltar go by.  
The HELMSMAN stands at the controls.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)  
Maintain a speed of seventeen knots.  
Ninety-five degrees.

HELMSMAN  
Seventeen knots, ninety-five degrees,  
aye, Captain.

Lt. Ennes enters bridge with binoculars.

ENNES  
Captain, lookouts report three  
destroyers following us off our  
starboard quarter.

McGonagle nods dourly.

MCGONAGLE  
Soviet, no doubt. At least one of  
them will stick with us all the way.

Of that we can be sure.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

JUNE 2

SLOW ZOOM

In the distance, three destroyers come into view. As they grow larger we can make out the red flag on the nearest one. Finally, we zoom in on the pilothouse of the guided missile destroyer 626/4 and can see men inside.

INT. SOVIET DESTROYER PILOTHOUSE

Two SOVIET OFFICERS look through binoculars. LT. KOVALENKO looks through a large and powerful, gimbal-mounted telescope.

Another officer, COMMANDER LEONID PESHKOV, leafs through his copy of Jane's Fighting Ships. The OFFICER with the telescope squints.

KOVALENKO

(Russian)

Designation: GTR-5. Course:  
ninety-five degrees... Speed: 17 knots.  
Pretty good for an old fat freighter.

PESHKOV

Distance?

KOVALENKO

Approximately six thousand meters.

PESHKOV

Maintain that distance.

KOVALENKO

Yes, Captain.

Peshkov finds the LIBERTY's description and translates from English.

PESHKOV



GTR-5... General Technical Research.  
The fifth such model... Known as the  
USS LIBERTY. Over a hundred fifty  
meters in length, eleven thousand tons,  
crew around three hundred... Hmmm.  
She's no longer the old fat freighter,  
formerly known as SS SIMMONS VICTORY...  
"mobile bases for research in communi-  
cations and electromagnetic radiation...  
considered to be electronic intelligence  
ships."

Peshkov closes the big book.

PESHKOV (cont'g)

Gentlemen, we are following the most  
powerful and sophisticated spy ship  
in the world... Our intelligence  
service has informed me that these  
technical research ships are under  
the control of the National Security  
Agency, not the navy. The NSA spent  
over forty million dollars to create  
this vacuum cleaner of all radio  
signals. The large dish you see near  
the stern sends a ten thousand watt  
microwave signal to the moon which  
reflects the signal back to the NSA  
receiving station in Cheltenham, Mary-  
land. The signal cannot be intercepted.

KOVALENKO

Forty million dollars? Does our new  
Moskva carrier cost that much? What  
are her armaments?

PESHKOV

Four fifty-caliber machine guns. She  
is able to repel natives in canoes  
who might try to board.

KOVALENKO

Is she headed for Gaza?

PESHKOV

Undoubtedly.

KOVALENKO

Where is her protection?

PESHKOV

It must be somewhere. I would want to protect a forty million dollar investment...

KOVALENKO

Of course, Captain. Anyone would.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

The LIBERTY plows through the sea at top speed.

INT. LIBERTY

Lt. Ennes passes Petty Officer JONES in the passageway and notices his bloodshot eyes, clammy skin and a hunted look.

ENNES

Jesus, Jones – what's the matter?  
You look like hell.

JONES

Oh, I haven't been sleeping too well, Mr. Ennes...

ENNES

Why not?

JONES

Oh, I'm having pretty bad nightmares, I'm always trapped in a compartment of a sinking ship after a torpedo attack... You know, after that woman prophet said we were going to sink and

all...

ENNES

But that was about the last trip,  
and nothing happened.

JONES

Uh, huh. I know, but I just can't  
help thinking about it. A lot of us  
can't.

ENNES

Yeah, okay. Look, go see Dr. Kiepfer  
and tell him what's going on.

JONES

Okay, Mr. Ennes. I will. Thanks.

INT. WARDROOM – LATER

Ennes has coffee with Kiepfer, the six foot six buyer of liquor, who turns out to be the ship's doctor.

ENNES

Did my yeoman come see you about his  
nightmares?

KIEPFER

Jones? Yep. He thinks the ship is  
cursed. A lot of them do. I gave  
him tranquilizers and sleeping pills.  
But he's terrified that he's going  
to drown in a water-filled compartment.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY PILOTHOUSE

JUNE 3

Captain McGonagle and Lt. Commander Armstrong confer.

ARMSTRONG

I'd like to step up our training, sir.  
Might take the men's minds off our  
new assignment.

MCGONAGLE

Are they apprehensive?

ARMSTRONG

Affirmative, Captain. More drills  
should help their confidence.

McGonagle nods.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

The klaxon horn sounds repeatedly. Soon the men appear in helmets and life preservers and hurry to their general quarters assignments. Fire crews haul hoses and rush to imaginary fires, damage control teams practice filling holes and using giant timbers to support bulkheads around supposedly flooded compartments. Led by Ensign JOHN SCOTT, they locate and repair imaginary flooding and weakened bulkheads in minutes.

From his vantage point, Lt. Cdr. Armstrong watches impassively.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

JUNE 4

The LIBERTY hits rain and high winds as it cuts through the rough sea.

LATER

The Soviet destroyer 626/4 encounters the same conditions, six kilometers behind.

INT. SOVIET DESTROYER

Commander Peshkov sits at the wardroom table, studying Jane's Aircraft book, cigarette in mouth. Lt. Kovalenko enters and sits with him.

KOVALENKO

(Russian)

You wish to see me, Captain?

Peshkov squints at Kovalenko through his smoke.

PESHKOV

This intelligence ship we are following... she is totally alone and unprotected, according to our own intelligence reports... She is making flank speed straight for the Sinai, for what purpose? To listen to the Arabs?

KOVALENKO

But isn't that her role, Captain?

PESHKOV

It is a new role, a recent routine. For only two years, she has been plodding up and down the West African coast, accomplishing – what?

KOVALENKO

Her role in the Cold War, as we perform ours?

PESHKOV

Her role off Sinai will be totally superfluous. Unnecessary.

KOVALENKO

Captain?

Peshkov refers to his Jane's All the World's Aircraft.

PESHKOV

The NSA, the same agency that owns the Liberty, is flying directly over the Sinai, over Egypt, Israel and so forth with even more advanced listening devices than the Liberty: EC-121 Lockheed Constellations. They are up there now, around the clock.

There is no need to place a forty million dollar dinosaur in harm's way. The EC-121s hear the same signals and possess much better communications with headquarters. The Liberty will have to approach very near land to function properly. Too near.

KOVALENKO

Perhaps we do not understand her true mission, Captain.

Peshkov nods vaguely as he smokes and looks at the EC-121 photos.

CUT TO:

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT

JUNE 5

The Research Operations Department is the heart of the LIBERTY. This large collection of offices just below the waterline houses the ANALYSTS and REPORT WRITERS, approximately thirty men, one of whom is Buddy Rodgers. He sits at a desk with headphones on, taking notes.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE

GRACE

You were listening to Soviet radios?

BUDDY

They had about thirty ships in the Eastern Med. There was a report that they might invade Israel.

CUT TO:

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT

It is a busy place, with desks and plotting tables along the walls and more desks and filing cabinets in the center. Once out of Norfolk the walls and ceiling are now lined with Playboy centerfolds and hundreds of other erotic cutouts.

On a cork board is posted a large chart of the Mediterranean Sea with LIBERTY's route plotted. Also on the chart is a plotted track labeled Contact A, which is approaching LIBERTY. To the right of LIBERTY's track is an X.

Ennes and O'Connor look at the chart.

ENNES

What is Contact A?

O'CONNOR

The JOSE VALDEZ. Another spook ship, a lot smaller than us, heading back to Norfolk.

ENNES

Smart. What's the X?

O'Connor looks at it and shrugs.

An ANALYST at a nearby desk pulls off his headphone.

ANALYST

That's it, guys. War has just broken out! Israel is attacking everyone – Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq. They're really kicking ass.

Other ANALYSTS and REPORT WRITERS at their desks cheer mildly.

REPORT WRITER

Science and technology versus ignorance and superstition!

The others nod in agreement. Ennes raises an eyebrow at the partisan attitudes.

O'CONNOR

Well? They're our allies – right?

The klaxon horn sounds loudly. All hands rush to General Quarters.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

The General Quarters drill is repeated. Phil Armstrong watches intently and looks at his stopwatch as all hands smoothly execute the drill.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Captain McGonagle dictates to an AIDE.

MCGONAGLE

Send this to Vice Admiral Martin,  
commander Sixth Fleet: LIBERTY  
requests destroyer escort be sent  
to remain within five miles of  
LIBERTY to serve as both an armed  
escort and an auxiliary communication  
center...

INT. WARDROOM

The officers sit around the dining table, drinking coffee. Phil Armstrong, the executive officer, reads a memo.

ARMSTRONG

From the Skipper:

“Effective immediately, two men will  
be stationed on the forecastle as  
additional lookouts/gun crews...  
Lookouts and forecastle gun mount  
personnel are to man mounts and defend  
the ship in the event of surprise air/  
surface attack while regular General  
Quarters teams are being assembled...  
Any unidentified surface contact  
approaching the ship on a collision  
or near-collision course at a speed  
of twenty-five knots or more is to  
be considered acting in a hostile  
manner and Condition of Readiness One  
is to be set immediately... Any



unidentified air contact approaching the ship on an apparent strafing/ bombing/torpedo attack is to be considered hostile... It is better to set General Quarters in doubtful cases than to be taken by surprise and be unable to fight the ship. Take immediate action as may be required by the situation, then advise me of what steps have been taken.”

INT. RESEARCH OPERATIONS DEPT

O'Connor and Ennes look at the chart of the Mediterranean. The JOSE VALDEZ has passed LIBERTY, headed west. Contact X is now on an intercept course.

ENNES

(loud)

Anybody know what Contact X is?

No answer. O'Connor looks at Ennes.

O'CONNOR

Looks like it's just us and X out here.

CUT TO:

INT. PILOTHOUSE

JUNE 6

A MESSENGER enters and hands a paper to Captain McGonagle, who is seated in his command chair. McGonagle reads it aloud to Armstrong and Ennes.

MCGONAGLE

This is from Admiral Martin, replying to my request for a destroyer escort:

“Liberty is a clearly marked United States ship in international waters, not a participant in the conflict and not a reasonable subject for attack

by any nation. In the unlikely event of an inadvertent attack, jet fighters from the Sixth Fleet carrier task force can be overhead in less than ten minutes. In addition, the commanding officer has the authority to withdraw from danger. Request for escort denied.”

McGonagle stares silently ahead. Armstrong looks at Ennes as another MESSENGER enters.

ARMSTRONG

Ten minutes? From five hundred miles away?

McGonagle takes the paper.

MCGONAGLE

From US Navy Europe to Admiral Martin and us:

“To facilitate area command and control and any possible requirement for protection during Mid-East hostilities, USS Liberty will be under operational command of COMSIXTHFLT from 7 June. Operate Liberty in accordance with JCS directives to derive maximum benefit from special capabilities. Ship’s operating area may be modified for safety reasons as dictated by local situation. Please note that none of Liberty’s daily position reports have been received for four days.”

The two messengers carefully look at each other.

ARMSTRONG

I thought we were working for the Joint Chiefs of Staff...

MCGONAGLE

We're working for Admiral Martin now.

ENNES

Why isn't anyone receiving our  
position reports?

Captain McGonagle stares out ahead.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

JUNE 7

The LIBERTY speeds through calm waters. It is sunny and clear.

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT

Ennes and O'Connor look at the operational chart and note how close the LIBERTY is getting to the Gaza Strip. Contact X's route has merged with LIBERTY's but the track discontinued some miles back.

ENNES

Jim, what is Contact X?

O'Connor seems embarrassed.

O'CONNOR

(unconvincing)

I don't know.

ENNES

I must not have the right security  
clearance...

O'Connor shrugs uncomfortably.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

Close-up on the water. A periscope sticks up two feet from the surface and leaves a wake as it speeds through the water. A mile ahead can be seen the stern of the LIBERTY.

INT. PAINTER'S STATEROOM

Painter, Armstrong, Kiepfer, Benkert and Ennes sip forbidden liquor.

BENKERT

The BBC says the war's about over –  
the Israelis are just mopping up...

PAINTER

So we come six thousand miles to  
watch the war and we finally arrive  
just as it's grinding to a halt.

ARMSTRONG

You can be glad we're late. Out here  
all alone, we're an easy target. I hate  
to think where we would be now if we'd  
been sitting off the Gaza Strip when the  
war broke out.

BENKERT

We'd be on the bottom.

They all nod thoughtfully.

ARMSTRONG

Well, you can bet those Sixth Fleet  
jets wouldn't be much help anyway.  
These old freighters were meant to  
carry freight, not to survive a  
serious attack. When these ships  
went down in World War Two, usually  
all it took was one well-placed bomb  
or a single torpedo. We probably  
wouldn't last long enough for our  
jets to make the trip.

BENKERT

And then woe is the attacker!

ARMSTRONG

No chance. We would be damned lucky  
to get a written apology. Meanwhile,

our government would carefully paint the entire affair with subdued colors so that the great American public would not get too upset. This would be called “keeping everything in perspective.”

Some of the others frown uncertainly at Armstrong’s cynicism.

INT. MCGONAGLE’S CABIN

As nightfall approaches, McGonagle consults with LT. CDR. DAVE LEWIS, who is in charge of the Research Operations Dept.

MCGONAGLE

Dave, I’m uncomfortable with our orders to operate within sight of the war. I’m prepared to exercise my prerogative to move away from possible danger. How would it affect our mission if we stayed farther out to sea, say, fifty miles from Gaza?

LEWIS

It would hurt us, Captain. We want to work in the UHF range. That’s mostly line of sight stuff. If we’re over the horizon we might as well be back in Abidjan. It would degrade our mission by about eighty percent.

McGonagle sits quietly in deep thought.

MCGONAGLE

Okay, Dave. We’ll go all the way in.

Lewis gets up and leaves.

McGonagle picks up his phone and punches a button.

MCGONAGLE (cont’g)

This is the captain. My night orders for the officer of the deck

are amended as follows:

Keep gun crews/lookouts alert. Call me for all challenges received, or in the event air or surface contacts approach in a suspicious manner.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE

BUDDY

There was a big-time code-breaker at the Pentagon, Frank Raven. He was the one that cracked the Japanese Purple Code before Pearl Harbor. He had opposed sending the Liberty to Gaza. He got our orders changed to put us twenty miles off Gaza, but we never got the message. It was mistakenly sent to the Philippines...

GRACE

Uh, huh.

BUDDY

Then, the chief of naval operations, David McDonald, got nervous and decided we should stay a hundred miles offshore. We never got that message either. We just kept going.

GRACE

So, the two most important messages ever sent to the Liberty never got to you? I mean, when messages are sent, don't you have to acknowledge the message? Let the sender know it was received?

BUDDY

(nods)

Actually, there were three more.

The Joint Chiefs sent them directly to the Liberty, rather than through the three echelon chain of command. It said that we were to pull far out to sea. It was classified Top Secret. But the Liberty couldn't receive Top Secret messages! Five messages, not one got to us.

GRACE

(sardonic)

Diddled by the dangling dong of destiny?

BUDDY

Somebody really wanted us very close to Gaza. The Joint Chiefs' orders to stay farther out were deliberately not passed on to us by the commander in chief of the navy in Europe, Admiral John S. McCain.

GRACE

Buddy, that's what I'm trying to tell you. McCain was very close to Arthur Goldberg, who was Lyndon's personal advisor. He was also the main advisor to the Israeli Embassy...

BUDDY

Goldberg, the Supreme Court judge? The UN ambassador?

GRACE

That's where McCain and Goldberg got friendly, at the United Nations... He became Goldberg's protégé.

BUDDY

McCain's deputy in London, Rear Admiral Joe Wylie, begged McCain to pull the Liberty away from shore but McCain claimed he didn't have the authority!

GRACE

McCain didn't have the authority to follow orders from the Joint Chiefs of Staff? You see what I'm saying, Buddy. McCain was following the orders of Arthur Goldberg, a much higher authority.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE UPSTAIRS

Lyndon Johnson, in pajamas, bathrobe and slippers, leaves his bedroom and goes down the hallway to Room 303, taps and enters. The SECRET SERVICE AGENT pretends he doesn't notice.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

JUNE 8

The LIBERTY slows. In the distance is the Gaza Strip.

INT. BRIDGE

Lt. Ennes relieves Ensign John Scott from his watch as officer of the deck. Scott scans the shore with his binoculars as he briefs Ennes.

SCOTT

Fabulous morning, Jim. We now have ammunition at all four machine guns. Men are on duty in battle dress in the two forward gun mounts, which makes our readiness condition Condition Three, modified. The Old Man is taking no chances! The guns behind the bridge are unmanned. In case of trouble the lookouts will man the guns while General Quarters is being set.



ENNES

Pretty scary.

SCOTT

There's still a lot of shooting around here. Passed Port Said during the night. Don't know what was happening but the sky over the city was filled with smoke and fire. About an hour ago, 0600, we were circled by a flying boxcar. Real slow and easy. And a little bomber keeps flying up and down the beach. Haven't seen any fighting here, though.

Scott hands Ennes the binoculars and retires from the bridge.

On the bridge, everyone is alert and doing his job. SIGNALMAN, QUARTERMASTER, HELMSMAN, ENGINE TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, two LOOKOUTS.

Ennes steps outside and looks up at the flag.

EXT. BRIDGE – DAY

Ennes sees the flag, which is fouled in its lines. He steps back in.

INT. BRIDGE

Ennes motions to the signalman.

ENNES

The flag is dirty and badly tattered from our hard cruise. Have it replaced.

SIGNALMAN

Aye, sir.

Ennes goes to the adjacent radar room and looks over the RADAR OPERATOR's shoulder at the scope. He returns to the pilothouse. Signalman RUSSELL DAVID, huge and black, enters and salutes.

DAVID

Sir, I'd like to keep that flag up

there! I have only one flag left,  
besides the oversize holiday colors.

ENNES

We must fly the new flag. We are  
operating in a dangerous area and can  
afford to show only our clearest,  
brightest colors.

EXT. BRIDGE – DAY

An angry Signalman David hauls up a five foot by eight foot American flag high  
on the ship's mast.

EXT. WEATHER DECK – DAY

The crew assembles for Morning Quarters. Philip Armstrong, in crisp khakis,  
stands apart to receive the reports of his department heads. Dave Lewis  
assembles the reports and presents them to Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG

Department heads, remind the men  
that we are near a hot, shooting war.  
We don't expect trouble but anything  
can happen in a war and everyone must  
remain alert. I have scheduled a  
General Quarters drill after lunch...

Armstrong returns the salutes and departs.

INT. BRIDGE

Ennes speaks into his telephone.

ENNES

Stan, how's the gear working?

INT. TRSSCOMM ROOM

SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER STAN WHITE holds his phone to his ear.

WHITE

Lieutenant, all is well. The

equipment will be ready as scheduled by 1400 hours. The moon will be in a good position to talk to Cheltenham.

INT. BRIDGE

ENNES

Well done, Stan.

He puts the phone down. The quartermaster spots McGonagle.

QUARTERMASTER

Captain's on the bridge!

Ennes salutes McGonagle.

ENNES

Sir, Ensign Scott said we were overflowed by a flying boxcar at 0600, and a small bomber is patrolling the beach.

McGonagle nods. The radar operator appears at his door.

0900 HOURS

RADAR OPERATOR

Sir, we are at Point Alfa.

ENNES

Right ten degrees rudder.

HELMSMAN

Right ten degrees rudder, aye, sir.

(pause)

My rudder is right ten degrees, sir.

Passing course one seven zero.

A lookout on the open bridge above calls out.

LOOKOUT (OS)

Airplane passing astern, sir!

ENNES

Steady on course two five three.

HELMSMAN

Steady on course two five three, aye,  
sir.

Ennes and McGonagle watch an unmarked French Mirage III fighter-bomber pass on the starboard side and several miles ahead, turn left and vanish.

MCGONAGLE

Did you see any markings?

ENNES

No, sir.

MCGONAGLE

Prepare a message reporting the  
sighting to be forwarded to higher  
authority.

(quietly)

Did you order a speed change from  
fifteen to five knots at Point Alfa?

ENNES

Thank you, sir. Reduce speed to  
five knots.

HELMSMAN

Reduce speed to five knots, aye, sir.

Ennes steps outside and looks up.

EXT. BRIDGE – DAY

The bright new flag stands out in eight knots relative wind.

Looking down on the forecastle, we see off-duty sailors sunbathing.

INT. BRIDGE

1000 HOURS

Ennes is on watch. Both lookouts call out.

LOOKOUTS (OS)

Jet fighters approaching from astern!

Ennes grabs the telephone as he looks down on the forward gun mounts. The gun crewmen are lounging about, talking with swim suited shipmates.

ENNES

You gun crews, wake up and keep a sharp lookout! Unidentified aircraft are in the area!

The men return to the gun tubs.

1030 HOURS

LOOKOUT (OS)

Aircraft to starboard!

Ennes watches the flying boxcar through binoculars as it passes the right side, turns left ahead twice and passes back by on the port side. It turns left again and repeats the circling pattern around the ship. McGonagle joins Ennes and they go outside to watch.

EXT. BRIDGE – DAY

MCGONAGLE

Well, they certainly know who we are by now, don't they? It's good they are checking us out this carefully. This way there won't be any mistakes. Probably send a boat out this afternoon to take a closer look.

The plane flies very low and when it banks the wingtip threatens to hit the water. Ennes' view through the binoculars shows the Israeli Star of David on the wing. The engines are very loud.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)

(shouts)

Watch him! If you see those bomb doors start to open, order an immediate hard right turn!

The boxcar passes overhead, causing the ship to shudder.

1100 HOURS

The flying boxcar passes overhead again. The American flag stands straight out.

1130 HOURS

Again, the flying boxcar conducts the same pattern around the ship with a low-level pass overhead. The flag remains straight out.

INT. BRIDGE

Ennes stands near the helmsman. LT. STEVE TOTH, the navigator, enters and goes to Ennes.

TOTH

Point Bravo, Mr. Ennes.

ENNES

Steady on course two eight three.

HELMSMAN

Steady on course two eight three,  
aye, sir.

The ship makes a thirty degree turn.

ENNES

(to Toth)

At Point Charlie, we reverse course  
and retrace this dogleg pattern  
every ten hours until further orders.

Toth nods.

TOTH

Twelve and a half miles off Gaza...

ENNES

Did you send the sighting reports on  
that flying boxcar?

TOTH

Captain won't release 'em. First, he wanted to look through Jane's. Then he wanted to see the reporting instructions. Now he's quibbling about the wording.

ENNES

So, no one knows about these overflights...

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE

Grace shakes her head slightly.

GRACE

So, you all were about ninety miles closer to Gaza than the Joint Chiefs wanted you? Wasn't there another way to communicate with you?

BUDDY

Sure. Admiral Martin could have used the radiotelephone on his flagship for immediate voice contact. He chose not to use it. He also had direct two-way teletype communications with scramblers. But he chose not to use that either. He eventually drafted an order, sent it by land-based teletype and it went to Morocco, about five hours later, and wound up at the army base in Ethiopia, where it was sent to a naval station in Greece, where it sat for three hours.

GRACE

This is actually worse than Pearl Harbor.

BUDDY

It was for us.

CUT TO:

INT. BRIDGE

A smiling Lt. Painter enters the bridge to relieve Ennes.

PAINTER

Lieutenant Painter, reporting for duty.

ENNES

Right, Lloyd. We've been overflown about five times since 0600 by an Israeli flying boxcar. There were three unmarked jet fighters earlier, a little bomber patrolling the beach and there was just a big explosion in El Arish, over there...

PAINTER

Yep. I heard that one.

ENNES

Next stop, Point Charlie, at these coordinates. Then reverse course back to Bravo and Alfa...

PAINTER

Got it. Don't forget the General Quarters drill after lunch. You need to relieve me for that little thing.

ENNES

Roger. I'll just go get a quick sandwich.

Ennes leaves the bridge.

EXT. LIBERTY DECKS – DAY

1310 HOURS



The klaxon horn sounds General Quarters. Men in battle gear rush to their assigned posts. Ennes makes his way back up to the bridge.

LOUDSPEAKER  
SECURE FOR POISON GAS ATTACK!

The men respond quickly, rapidly sealing all doors and other openings.

The flying boxcar roars overhead amid all the activity.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Ennes enters the pilothouse, now shuttered by heavy steel battle coverings. He peers through small peep slots in the steel.

Captain McGonagle evaluates the gas drill and makes notes.

LATER

The battle coverings are raised and sunlight comes into the pilothouse. McGonagle, Painter and Ennes look down on the off-duty men who are sunbathing or examining the two seldom-seen machine guns.

MCGONAGLE  
It's good that we have sunbathers on deck. It helps to show that we're peaceful.

He flips on the announcing system. His voice echoes.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)  
This is the captain. The gas drill was very well executed. I want to remind you of our potentially dangerous position and of the need to respond promptly to all alarms, as one of them could be genuine. There is a shooting war to our left, as you can see, and a large fire at El Arish. The local forces know that we are here and have made numerous aerial sorties during the morning.

We can expect boats to visit us this afternoon for a closer look. That is all.

A bridge TELEPHONE TALKER winds up his cable, which is still plugged.

TALKER

Sir! Combat reports three high-speed aircraft, sixteen miles away, approaching the ship from zero eight two degrees.

The radar operator in the adjacent radar room shouts. Painter responds and goes into the room.

PAINTER (OS)

Captain, you gotta look at this! I never saw anything move so fast!

McGonagle and Ennes rush to the radar room.

INT. RADAR ROOM

The three officers look at the radar scope. Three apparent boats move toward the ship at high speed.

RADAR OPERATOR

Three surface contacts approaching from zero eight two degrees at thirty-five knots. Fifteen miles away.

The officers go back to the bridge. They go outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. SKY – DAY

We fly along next to a US Navy Constellation, an EC-121 spy plane. Its graceful lines are distorted by a huge hump atop the fuselage. Miles below we see the Mediterranean and the Sinai Peninsula.

INT. EC-121

Petty Officer MICHAEL PROSTINAK sits with other LINGUISTS, all wearing headphones and taking notes. Prostinak hits the record button.

VO – EXCITED HEBREW CROSSTALK

Prostinak frowns and hits his intercom switch.

PROSTINAK

Hey, Chief, I've got really odd activity. Israeli fighter pilots mentioning an American flag.

SUPERVISOR (VO)

Are you capturing it?

PROSTINAK

Affirmative. They're questioning their orders to attack. Orders stand.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY BRIDGE – DAY

Ennes, McGonagle and Painter join O'Connor and Armstrong to look for the approaching jets. Ennes points to a single delta-wing Mirage fighter which flies parallel to the ship. The others see it. Ennes and O'Connor go to the ladder and climb to the open bridge above.

EXT. OPEN BRIDGE – DAY

Ennes rushes to the mounted telescope on the port side and swings it toward the approaching jet. O'Connor searches with his binoculars.

SAILOR

Mr. Ennes, he's not there! He's up ahead!

1400 HOURS

Terrible noise comes from everywhere. O'Connor spots orange flashes from under the wing of an approaching fighter. He dives down a ladder but is struck in midair, severely wounded by rocket fragments before he crashes onto the deck below.

A geometric pattern of orange flashes opens eight-inch holes in the heavy deck plating. Below in the forward gun tubs, the gunners are blown high into the air, spinning, broken, like rag dolls. The jet rushes overhead with incredible noise.

Ennes, his uniform red with blood from two dozen rocket fragments in his flesh, is the only man left standing. Around him, men writhe helplessly, wide-eyed, terrified, uncomprehending. Ennes' left leg is broken and hangs from his hip like a great beanbag. He hops to the ladder and hops down to the pilothouse deck and falls heavily just as a second rocket attack hits with the sound of jackhammers. More eight-inch holes are punched through the ship. Ennes pulls himself up and enters the pilothouse.

#### INT. PILOTHOUSE

The pilothouse is littered with helpless and frightened men. Blood is puddled everywhere. Men step in blood, slip and fall in it, tracking it in crimson footprints. The General Quarters alarm sounds.

Captain McGonagle appears at the starboard door.

#### MCGONAGLE

Right full rudder. All engines ahead flank. Send a message to the CNO: Under attack by unidentified jet aircraft, require immediate assistance.

The crew responds with speed and precision. Brave and highly trained, they are also confused and frightened. They are inexperienced in combat. They are visibly reassured by the captain's orders.

Lt. Painter, unhurt, steps out of the pilothouse and sees Lt. O'Connor lying in a heap, half-dead and bleeding heavily.

#### PAINTER

(quietly)

Mr. O'Connor, are you ready to relieve me?

#### O'CONNOR

No, I'm not ready to relieve you.

McGonagle hears this ironic exchange from inside pilothouse.

MCGONAGLE

Mr. Painter, you are relieved of  
bridge duty. Go to your assigned  
damage control station.

Painter salutes and departs.

Ennes lies next to the chart table, unable to control the flow of blood from his wounds. Blood from his chest wound collects in a lump in his side so large that he can't lower his arm. Blood also flows from his broken leg. Next to him lies Seaman GEORGE WILSON, a lookout whose thumb is severed. Wilson uses his good hand and Ennes' web belt to fashion a tourniquet for his leg. Ennes wraps a handkerchief tightly around Wilson's wrist to control the bleeding from his hand.

The terrible jackhammers hit again with another rocket attack.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK - DAY

Men drop with the new assault. Lt. Toth, still carrying the unsent sighting reports, takes a rocket that turns him into smoking rubble. Seaman SALVADOR PAYAN takes two jagged chunks of steel in his head,

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Quartermaster FLOYD POLLARD reaches to swing a heavy steel battle plate over the glass porthole. A rocket, and with it the porthole, explode in front of him. His face and torso are a bloody mess. A SEAMAN leads him to the shelter of the log table.

EXT. BELOW THE BRIDGE – DAY

Two fifty-five gallon drums of gasoline are hit by a rocket. They are held in place by a strap and quick-release handle. Lt. Cdr. Armstrong bounds toward the fire and tries to grab the quick-release handle that would drop the flaming containers into the sea. A lone rocket dissolves the bones of both of his legs.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATER SURFACE – DAY

Close-up of a submarine periscope sticking out of the water.

VIEW THROUGH PERISCOPE

We see the LIBERTY being attacked by several Mirage III fighters, coming from all directions, pouring rocket and cannon fire onto the helpless ship.

SUB COMMANDER (VO)  
Son of a bitch. Activate the camera.

An indicator in the reticule shows that movie film is being shot of the attack.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY WEATHER DECK – DAY

Two wounded SAILORS on the exposed weather deck are too weak to crawl to safety. Cannon and rocket fire explode everywhere. The plating is blasted above them

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Dr. Kiepfer stops to treat a badly bleeding SAILOR in the passageway. Through the open door he sees the two crawling sailors stop crawling.

Three SAILORS take shelter in the passageway.

KIEPFER  
Go get those two men!

The frightened men move away from the open door.

SAILOR 5  
No, sir!

SAILOR 6  
Not me!

SAILOR 7  
I'm not crazy!

Kiepfer works on his patient for a moment and then gets up and goes to the door. He goes out, wraps a long arm around each man's waist and carries both men back inside.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Lt. Golden enters the engine room and starts down the ladder. A rocket penetrates the engine room, blowing him off the ladder just as the lights go out. He crashes down on the deck below. More rockets blast through the bulkheads, letting little sunlight through the eight-inch holes. The rockets go just over the heads of his MEN.

GOLDEN

Get down! Everybody stay low, on your knees! Aishe! Front and center!

Fireman BEN AISHE rushes to Golden, bending low.

AISHE

Yes, sir?

GOLDEN

They're gonna want max speed but I just took boiler 2 off the line to cool for repairs. Let's get it back up and making pressure!

They light boiler 2 and watch the gauges. Pressure builds.

As cannon fire and rockets batter the ship, the main engine room is one big fireworks display. In the relative darkness, men work on hands and knees, operating valves, checking gauges, starting and stopping equipment, bypassing broken pipes. Above them dance multi-colored bright particles, some small, some huge that burst into pieces to shower down on them. All produce tremendous noise as they burst through the ship's outer skin.

AISHE

With both boilers, the governor still limits us to eighteen knots, Mr. Golden!

Golden fishes in his pocket and produces a key. He inserts the key into the governor control and turns it.

GOLDEN

The governor, she is now off! That

should give us twenty-one knots. I've carried this key in my pocket for three years for a time like this!

Aishe is impressed. Golden glanced above them. Through the heavy spark showers from the rockets, he spies the huge hot water storage tank three decks above them.

GOLDEN (cont'g)  
Holy crap! The hot water storage tank up there! If that thing gets hit, we'll be scalded to death by five thousand gallons. We gotta open that valve.

He is overheard by Machinist Mate Chief RICHARD BROOKS, who immediately mounts the ladder leading to the vital drain valve. He climbs past two decks when a huge explosion knocks him off the ladder to crash heavily on the steel deck he just passed. Before anyone can go help him, Brooks is on his feet and back on the ladder. He climbs past the third deck and finds the drain valve and opens it. It begins draining quickly to the sea and Brooks drops down the ladder to the engine room. Golden claps Brooks on the back and they continue to work. All the men work on hands and knees.

BROOKS  
Mr. Golden, we're pretty safe down here, below the waterline. Rockets can't get us if we stay low.

Golden nods as he turns valves. Above them, a rocket hits the hot water tank but enough water has drained and it passes through harmlessly. They both look up fearfully.

GOLDEN  
Good job, Brooks. You saved us there.

Choking black smoke from the main deck is sucked into the engine room by the fresh-air fans. No one can breathe. Golden makes his way to the telephone.

GOLDEN (cont'g)  
Bridge! I have to evacuate the engine room! Too much smoke!



INT. PILOTHOUSE

McGonagle orders a course change that shifts the smoke from the fans.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Fresh air pours into the engine room before Golden orders them out.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

The radio operator appears and goes to McGonagle.

RADIO OPERATOR

Sir, we have no communications!  
Every radio antenna was disabled  
on the second pass!

MCGONAGLE

You mean no one is aware of this  
attack?

RADIO OPERATOR

Yes, sir. We're trying to piece  
something together. I just wanted  
you to know that no one has been  
notified yet.

MCGONAGLE

Do whatever you can.

The radioman departs.

CUT TO:

INT. JET FIGHTER

We look down on the smoking, cannon- and rocket-riddled LIBERTY as we approach for another attack. Shooting out ahead of the fighter go two more air-to-surface rockets that hit the ship hard, below the bridge.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

Through the rocket smoke, we see the fighter, an unmarked Mystere, approach and let go two huge silvery canisters that hit the bridge. They are filled with napalm and burst into violent flame on impact.

EXT. BRIDGE

McGonagle stands alone on the starboard wing of the bridge as the whole world catches fire. The deck below him, stanchions around him, even the overhead above him burn. The entire superstructure of the ship bursts into a wall of flame from the main deck to the open bridge four levels above. McGonagle's right pants leg is soaked with blood from shrapnel. Seemingly impervious to flame, he steps through the fire to the pilothouse door.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)

Fire, fire, starboard side, oh three level. Sound the fire alarm.

FIREFIGHTERS immediately come through the rear pilothouse door with axes, crowbars, CO2 bottles and hundreds of feet of fire hose. Men scream, cry, yell orders and scramble to duty to keep the ship alive.

EXT. DECK

Two men, Gunner's Mate ALEXANDER THOMPSON and Radarman CHARLES COCNAVITCH, make their way to the starboard gun mount. Exploding rockets prevent them from reaching it.

Lt. O'Connor, still lying near the ladder where he fell, is picked up by Signalman Russell David and taken through cannon and rocket fire to safety inside the ship.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

The pilothouse is a hopeless mess of wounded men, fire hoses and equipment. A large glob of napalm burns angrily in front of the helmsman, adding to the smoke and confusion. Ennes is weak from shock and loss of blood. A sailor trips over him, steps on Wilson and falls on another wounded man as he drags a CO2 bottle. Ennes and Wilson still hold each other's tourniquets.

ENNES

Let's do our own.

They let go and grab their own tourniquets. Ennes raises an arm to signal Seaman KENNETH ECKER, who pulls him up on his good leg. Ecker helps Ennes hop out of the pilothouse and down the back passageway.

The helmsman is blown down by another rocket through the pilothouse. QUARTERMASTER FRANCIS BROWN takes the helm as the man falls, grievously wounded in his head.

INT. GYRO ROOM

Three rockets blast through the bulkhead, just miss SAILORS, smash the gyro equipment and leave a three-foot hole in the steel door as they go into the next compartment.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Francis Brown sees that the gyro compass is not working.

BROWN

Check the gyro!

A sailor who was in the gyro room runs up.

SAILOR 8

Gyro's wrecked, Mr. Brown!

The magnetic compass, Brown notices, spins uselessly as well.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Ecker helps Ennes into Kiepfer's cabin. Ennes is in extreme pain.

ENNES

In here... Doc's cabin.

(groans)

Gotta stop this bleeding.

Ecker lays Ennes on Kiepfer's bunk. He lifts the broken leg and lays it next to the other. Ecker takes a sheet and fashions another tourniquet and twists it with a pencil to tighten it.

ECKER

Who's attacking us, Mr. Ennes?

Are those Soviet jets?

Ennes shakes his head in uncertainty.

ENNES

Or Egyptians. Hard to believe  
either of them would do this...

Suddenly, four rockets blast eight-inch holes in the steel bulkhead and out the opposite side. Fire and metal bits fill the room. Ecker's helmet has several new dents in it but he is unharmed. Ennes' bare chest glows with a hundred tiny fires from rocket fragments and napalm-coated fragments burn into him. He and Ecker try to brush them off. The room fills with smoke as the carpet and bedding burn.

LOUDSPEAKER (VO)

Firefighters required on C deck.

ENNES

Go help them. I'll be fine.

ECKER

Mr. Ennes, we're right under a gun  
mount and a radio antenna. This  
isn't a good place for you.

Ecker departs. Through the fresh rocket holes, Ennes sees the tremendous fire raging on the weather deck outside. The motor whaleboat burns furiously from a direct napalm hit while other fires engulf the weather decks and bulkheads nearby.

With great effort, Ennes gets off the bunk and hops painfully to the door.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Ennes enters the passageway and by habit closes the steel door behind him. Just as he attempts to lock it, a rocket explosion in Kiepfer's cabin tears the door off its frame and flattens Ennes on the deck.

EXT. DECK

Gunner Thompson reaches the starboard gun mount to find the Browning blocked by the dismembered body of Fireman DAVID SKOLAK. Very weak now, Thompson makes his way to the rear gun mount, forty feet away.

EXT. TRSSCOMM ANTENNA

The sixteen-foot dish, aimed at the moon, takes another rocket hit.

INT. TRSSCOMM ROOM

A shower of sparks cascades from high-voltage wires overhead, bathing men and equipment below with melted copper. They slap themselves to escape the pain.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHELTENHAM NSA BLDG – DAY

INT. CHELTENHAM NSA OFFICE

An OPERATOR sits at his post with headphones on. Puzzled, he looks at a COLLEAGUE.

OPERATOR

The Liberty had just started to send something but now it's dead.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY CODE ROOM

Lt. Cdr. Dave Lewis hovers over the TELETYPE OPERATOR, who is speechless with terror. He has wet his pants but remains at his post, trying to hammer his message into the keyboard.

LEWIS

Forget the code! Get it out in plain language!

The operator's voice comes in gasps and his body shakes violently.

OPERATOR

Mr. Lewis... it's not getting out! All

the antennas must be gone...

Lewis goes to the door and tries to see outside, through the fires.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Ennes lies on the deck. A SAILOR jumps hysterically down a ladder.

SAILOR 9

Mr. O'Connor is dead! He's dead!

Another sailor, SEAMAN FRANK MCINTURFF, arrives with a stretcher.

ENNES

Might as well leave me here – there's no time to treat the wounded.

MCINTURFF

The wardroom is in operation as an emergency hospital, Mr. Ennes. You should be there.

McInturff and another SAILOR roll Ennes onto the stretcher, twisting his leg grotesquely. Ennes groans. McInturff tries to straighten it and then straps him to the stretcher with web belting. They hoist him and head for a ladder. As they start down, with Ennes holding on, he tries to keep from sliding off the end.

ENNES

Ahhh, the bones are grinding!

MCINTURFF

Sorry, Mr. Ennes! Just hold on!

Another rocket barrage hits the ship and the sailors almost drop the stretcher from the shock and heat. A jet fighter roars overhead. The sailors reach the deck and head for another ladder down.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

The sailors carry Ennes reach the wardroom door and look in just as more rockets blast into it. Fire burns under the dining table. No one is there.

SAILOR 10

There's no battle dressing station here, Mr. Ennes! Where should we go?

ENNES

Just put me down here but move me away from the door.

More rocket fragments hurtle through the open door as the sailors move his stretcher away from it. They leave for more wounded.

The passageway is quickly filled with other wounded, frightened men.

INT. ENLISTED MESS HALL

The mess hall is one deck below. It is filled with grievously wounded SAILORS. Dr. Keipfer attends each one as best he can.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

A SAILOR kneels by Ennes' stretcher.

ENNES (cont'g)

Don't worry. Admiral Martin's jet fighters should be here anytime now.

SAILOR 11

No, Mr. Ennes. They put a rocket at the base of every transmitting antenna on the ship. I don't think anyone knows what's happening to us.

Ennes looks at him, appalled.

SAILOR 11 (cont'g)

But there is one that I think I could repair. Should I go out there and try to fix it so we could get our message off?

ENNES

You'd be doing us all a great service, but you must be careful.

The sailor departs.

EXT. DECK

The sailor appears and goes to a damaged transmitting antenna and begins to repair it. In the sky behind him, a Mystere jet fighter starts another gun run. Orange flashes under the wings, cannon fire soon hits the deck and the sailor is killed.

INT. RADIO ROOM

Radioman TERRY HALBARDIER collects coaxial cable and looks out the door. A jet roars overhead and he runs out on the deck, trailing co-ax behind him. When it is stretched out straight along the deck he attaches it to another transmitting antenna and runs back inside.

Radiomen JAMES HALMAN and JOSEPH WARD work the radios. They try various frequencies. On each one, there is a loud buzz-saw noise. They look at each other in surprise.

HALMAN

We're being jammed! On all five of our frequencies!

WARD

Who the hell knows our frequencies?

They continue to try to send. The buzz-saw noise stops just before another rocket barrage hits the ship. The noise returns.

HALMAN

Hey, the jamming stops while the rockets are coming.

He keeps trying to send. Another rocket barrage is on the way.

HALMAN (cont'g)

Any station, this is Rockstar. We are under attack by unidentified jet aircraft and require immediate assistance!



CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

1409 HOURS

Near Crete, from overhead, we look down on the aircraft carrier USS SARATOGA.

SARATOGA OPERATOR (VO)  
Rockstar, this is Schematic. Say  
again. You are garbled.

HALMAN (VO)  
Schematic –

Halman is jammed with the buzz-saw noise. Abruptly it ends.

SARATOGA OPERATOR (VO)  
Rockstar, authenticate Whiskey Sierra.

HALMAN (VO)  
Authentication is Oscar Quebec.

SARATOGA OPERATOR (VO)  
Roger, Rockstar. Authentication is  
correct. I roger your message. I am  
standing by for—

The buzz-saw jamming kills the transmission. It ends again.

HALMAN (VO)  
Schematic, this Rockstar. We are  
still under attack by unidentified  
jet aircraft and require immediate  
assistance.

The buzz-saw jamming occurs again. When it stops,

SARATOGA OPERATOR (VO)  
Roger, Rockstar, we are forwarding  
your message. Authenticate Oscar  
Delta.

HALMAN (VO)  
Listen to the goddamned rockets,  
you son of a bitch!

Explosions are heard as he speaks.

SARATOGA OPERATOR (VO)  
Roger, Rockstar, we'll accept that.

The buzz-saw jamming resumes.

CUT TO:

INT. USS AMERICA READY ROOM

CAPTAIN DONALD ENGEN addresses four PILOTS and CO-PILOTS.

ENGEN  
Well, this is it, men. Operation  
Cyanide is in effect. Thompson and  
Kowalski have Cairo as a target,  
Crandall and Wilson – Alexandria.

The air crews are pensive as they file out the door.

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

The four pilots and co-pilots climb the ladders of their F-4H Phantoms, which are parked near the catapults. Next in line are four A-4 Skyhawk jets. The Phantoms' canopies are closed. The jets are taxied onto the catapults.

Four Phantom jets take off from carrier two by two.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY RADIO ROOM

Radioman Halman transcribes a Morse code message.

“HELP IS ON THE WAY”

CUT TO:

INT. USS AMERICA BRIDGE

Captain Engen watches as the Skyhawk jets take off and disappear in a slightly different direction.

TELETYPE MESSAGE

FROM: COMSIXTHFLT  
TO: WHITE HOUSE, DEFENSE, STATE

USS LIBERTY REPORTS UNDER ATTACK BY  
UNIDENTIFIED JET AIRCRAFT. HAVE  
LAUNCHED STRIKE AIRCRAFT TO DEFEND  
SHIP.

INT. USS AMERICA PILOTHOUSE

A SAILOR with headphones switches on loudspeaker.

SAILOR  
Captain, message from the Pentagon...

Captain Engen turns to listen.

INTERCOM (VO)  
This is the secretary of defense  
Robert McNamara... Tell Sixth Fleet  
to get those aircraft back immediately!  
And get me a status report!

Captain Engen stares at the loudspeaker for a moment.

INTERCOM (VO)  
This is the chief of naval operations,  
David L. McDonald. You get those  
fucking airplanes back on deck and  
you get them back now!

SAILOR  
Jesus, he talks just like a sailor...

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

One by one, the four Phantom jets land back on deck. The Skyhawks soon arrive and also land.

TELETYPE

HAVE RECOVERED STRIKE AIRCRAFT.  
LIBERTY STATUS UNKNOWN.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY – DAY

PERISCOPE VIEW

The rocket attack continues. Mirage and Mystere jets pound the ship from all directions.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOVIET DESTROYER – DAY

The guided missile destroyer 626/4 moves slowly through the seas.

INT. PESHKOV'S CABIN

Lt. Kovalenko finds Cdr. Peshkov writing in his log.

KOVALENKO  
Captain, Liberty is under attack!

PESHKOV  
(stares)  
By whom?

KOVALENKO  
The attackers have not been identified.  
And, Captain, four Phantom jets from  
the USS America were sent toward Cairo,  
but have been recalled. Four Skyhawks  
started toward Gaza but they have also  
returned.

Peshkov gets up and goes to his porthole. He lights a cigarette.

PESHKOV

This is insanity. If the attackers are not identified, the Americans can say that we did it. Or our clients, the Egyptians. Of course, maybe they did, but I doubt it seriously.

(takes drag)

How far away from her are we now?

KOVALENKO

Two hundred nautical miles, Captain.

PESHKOV

How about other American ships?

KOVALENKO

They are still on maneuvers near Crete. There is nothing closer to her than five hundred nautical miles from Liberty.

PESHKOV

Send a message to our fleet command, asking for authorization to approach and render aid. I believe we must show that we are not involved in this attack.

KOVALENKO

Right away, Captain.

PESHKOV

Kovalenko, we speculated about Liberty's actual mission... This may be it.

CUT TO:

INT. ENLISTED MESS HALL

A sailor makes his way through the dozens of wounded men, attended to by Dr. Kiepfer.

SAILOR 12

Help is on the way! Help is on  
the way! Fleet got our message!

The wounded men look at him dully with flickers of hope.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Another sailor steps quickly around wounded men on stretchers.

SAILOR 13

Help is on the way!

Ennes hears the message and opens his eyes. The sailor keeps going. Ennes closes his eyes, recalling the prediction of Phil Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG (VO)

We probably wouldn't even last  
long enough for our jets to make  
the trip.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Most of the wounded have been removed from the bridge. Quartermaster Brown stands at the helm. Captain McGonagle, weakened from loss of blood, remains in firm control of the ship, directing damage control and firefighting efforts. Ensign Lucas listens to the telephone.

LUCAS

Captain, three torpedo boats are  
approaching from starboard at high  
speed in attack formation!

Seaman DALE LARKINS stands by McGonagle.

MCGONAGLE

Larkins, take the boats under fire  
from the forecastle.

LARKINS

Aye, aye, Captain.

Larkins quickly departs.

Through the smoke of the napalm fire, we can see the three PT boats, the center boat flashing a signal. McGonagle picks up a hand-held Aldis lamp and attempts to communicate with the center boat but the smoke is too heavy.

EXT. BRIDGE – DAY

Signalman David accidentally steps on the torn and bloody US flag and then notices it and picks it up. He runs to the flag locker and brings out the oversized, seven by thirteen foot holiday colors. He runs back to the bridge and hauls it up. It flutters and stands out.

EXT. FORWARD GUN TUB – DAY

Larkins stumbles over the bloody remains of the gunners and phone talkers. One of the bodies is cut in half, the sailor's intestines drape over the forecastle and his blood runs down the bulkhead to the deck below. He pulls the remains out of the way and gets behind the big Browning. He pulls the charging handle, and sees that the ammo belt has been cut by shrapnel. He removes the belt and replaces it with a good belt. He aims at the approaching boats and fires one tracer round. The top cover flies open and the damaged gun jams.

EXT. REAR GUN TUB – DAY

Gunner's mate Thompson can't enter the gun tub for the napalm flames, which engulf the loaded Browning. The gun fires a whole belt of tracer rounds as the first one cooks off from the heat.

EXT. TORPEDO BOAT TAHMASS – DAY

We are speeding toward the LIBERTY on the center boat. A water spout erupts in front of us from Larkins' one tracer round. The cooked-off tracer rounds are visible, going in all directions, including ours.

COMMANDER ERELL (VO)  
Fire torpedoes! Look out!

We swerve violently toward the boat on our left, just as the order in Hebrew is given to launch torpedoes.

The center boat veers toward the left-side boat, which also flinches slightly. Their four torpedoes launch but speed away on the wrong course. The third boat's two torpedoes head for the LIBERTY.

All three PT boats open fire with their cannon and machine guns as they attack the LIBERTY.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

Heavy machine gun fire saturates the bridge and pilothouse. Quartermaster Brown, standing at the helm, is hit. His head swells like a balloon and bursts. Ensign Lucas steps over Brown's body and takes the helm.

SAILOR 14  
Torpedo just missed astern!

McGonagle picks up the telephone.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

The ship's general announcing systems comes alive.

MCGONAGLE (VO)  
Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Lt. Golden checks gauges on the boilers.

MCGONAGLE (VO)  
Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side.

GOLDEN  
Evacuate the engine room!

Greasy, sweat-soaked ENGINEMEN race up the steep ladders. Golden does not move. Chief Brooks stays also, along with Fireman Aishe.

AISHE  
You'll need help, sir. If you stay here, I'll stay.

The three men run the engineering plant while they wait for the torpedo to arrive.

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT



The men in these offices, just below the waterline, are calm. The sounds of the war are muffled and unreal. They sit, as they have been drilled to do, on the deck, along the edges of the rooms. They wear battle helmets. Their sleeves are rolled down, trousers tucked into socks to protect against flash burn. Buddy Rodgers is among them.

Petty Officer RONNIE CAMPBELL stretches, gets up and places fresh paper in a typewriter.

CAMPBELL

You guys can stay there if you want.  
I'm going to write a letter home.

Dear Elizabeth, you won't guess where  
we are –

Petty Officer JOE LENTINI looks down and sees that his shoe has filled with blood. Lt. Cdr. Dave Lewis immediately produces a bandage from a first aid kit and as Lentini steps toward him, Lewis sees behind him the exterior (seaward) bulkhead bulge inward. The light green standard navy paint crackles into bright flame, becomes black ash along with hundreds of Playboy pin-ups. The now bare steel turns red with heat and then white. Blackened paint particles fly across the room as the bulkhead dissolves to admit the sea.

With a great crunch, flesh and steel are compressed into a distant corner as the blast hurls men and equipment the width of the ship. Steel bulkheads vanish. Muted sunlight from a forty foot wide, underwater hole in the seaward bulkhead illuminates the room as it fills with seawater.

Twenty-five men in the Research Operations Department are killed by the blast of a thousand pounds of high-energy explosives packed into the torpedo. Dave Lewis is blinded by paint chips and deafened by the noise but holds onto the circular manhole handle at the top of the ladder in the swirling water. ROBERT SCHNELL and JOHN HORNE pry his fingers away so the manhole can be opened. Schnell goes out and then helps Lewis and Horne through.

JEFF CARPENTER is trapped underwater by a heavy desk. He gives up struggling but then the desk shifts in the churning water and he is released. Lentini is trapped underwater with a broken leg. He strains to hold his head above the oily and rising water to cry for help. DOUG RITTENBURG and Jeff Carpenter come upon Lentini and free him from the twisted steel and drag him toward the still-shining battle lantern that marks the manhole. They get him to

the manhole where shipmates above pull him out. The battle lantern dies while a few men crowd toward the manhole.

Marine sergeant BRYCE LOCKWOOD ducks under water to find Buddy Rodgers pinned under steel plating. Lockwood frees him and pushes him toward the manhole. He looks for anyone else as water reaches the manhole, covering his only exit.

#### ABOVE THE MANHOLE

Sailors shut the hatch to keep the flooding water out. They spin the circular handle.

#### BELOW THE MANHOLE

Lockwood is trapped. He grabs the handle but it won't turn. Furious, he pounds on the hatch. Finally, white light shows around the gasket as the manhole opens. They pull him through.

#### ABOVE THE MANHOLE

Lockwood sputters and chokes.

#### LOCKWOOD

Who's the stupid son of a bitch who  
closed the hatch? Couldn't you hear  
me yelling? Didn't you see me coming?  
Stupid squid!

Then Lockwood goes down through the hatch and re-enters the room.

#### BELOW THE MANHOLE

Men shine battle lanterns as he swims around, looking for survivors. All he sees are dead men and body parts. He returns to the manhole.

#### ABOVE THE MANHOLE

He crawls and is pulled back through the opening.

#### LOCKWOOD (cont'g)

No one is alive down there.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

McGonagle has only David Lucas and telephone talker JOHN LAMAR with him. All the dead and wounded have been taken away. Impenetrable black smoke from the torpedo explosion hides the ship, spreads over her length as high as the mast. The men cling to the starboard rail as the ship rolls sickeningly.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

A SAILOR loses his footing and tumbles headlong down a wildly slanted athwart ships passageway.

INT. DAMAGE CONTROL CENTRAL

Ensign Scott, STEPHEN GURCHIK and THOMAS MOULIN struggle to stand as they watch the inclinometer.

SCOTT

We're rolling back to starboard.

GURCHIK

Our father, who art in heaven...

MOULIN

Are we going over?

They hold on to anything available as the inclinometer needle swings to twelve degrees starboard and then settles back to nine degrees starboard list. Scott picks up his telephone.

SCOTT

Bridge, Damage Control Central is still in operation. Will keep you advised as we conduct our repairs.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – DAY

Petty Officer JOHN RANDALL bursts out of his electrical shop door onto the main deck just in time to see the torpedo boat TAHMASS slowly drift down the ship's starboard side. The Star of David flag flutters at its stern, its machine guns trained on LIBERTY'S bridge. In his rage, he extends his middle finger at the gunners. The 40mm cannon slowly swings and comes to bear on his chest.

Randall is too angry to be frightened and too proud to move. He stares defiantly at the gunner as the boat drifts by.

The boats, on a signal, accelerate in a circle around the ship as they open up with their cannon and machine guns, firing at the waterline and at any men they see moving. Randall stands and watches them.

CUT TO:

EXT. USS LITTLE ROCK – DAY

The big cruiser is the flagship of the US Sixth Fleet. In the distance can be seen two aircraft carriers, the USS SARATOGA and USS AMERICA, all accompanied by destroyer escorts.

INT. USS LITTLE ROCK RADIO SHACK

Vice Admiral WILLIAM MARTIN, the Sixth Fleet commander, listens to the radio.

HALMAN (VO)  
Hit by torpedo starboard side.  
Listing badly. Need assistance  
immediately.

INT. USS LITTLE ROCK PILOTHOUSE

1450 HOURS

Admiral Martin enters, puts on headphones. PERSONNEL straighten up.

MARTIN  
Order the carriers to turn into  
the wind.

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

The AMERICA starts to turn into the wind.

MARTIN (VO) (cont'g)  
America, launch four armed A-4s to  
proceed to 31-23N, 33-25E to defend  
USS Liberty who is now under attack  
by gunboats. Provide fighter cover

and tankers. Relieve on station.

EXT. USS SARATOGA – DAY

The SARATOGA starts to turn into the wind.

MARTIN (VO) (cont'g)  
Saratoga, launch four armed A-1s  
ASAP same mission.

EXT. AMERICA - DAY

Rockets and missiles are brought up on the big elevator. ORDNANCE CREWS attach them under the wings of the Skyhawk jets.

EXT. USS SARATOGA – DAY

Rockets are attached under the wings of the A-1 Skyraiders.

CUT TO:

INT. DAMAGE CONTROL CENTRAL

The firing of machine guns is very loud. Scott holds the telephone.

SCOTT  
Bridge, this is Damage Control Central.  
Flooding is confined to the third deck  
and below, frames fifty-two through  
seventy-eight. The Research spaces  
are totally flooded below the second  
deck. No other serious flooding is  
reported. The ship appears to be in  
no present danger of sinking but we  
cannot take another torpedo and stay  
afloat.

BRIDGE  
Roger, DCC. All stations, bridge.  
Prepare to abandon ship.

The general announcing system responds.

LOUDSPEAKER (VO)  
Prepare to abandon ship! Prepare to  
abandon ship!

Scott frowns and speaks into his telephone.

SCOTT  
No, bridge! I said we're not in  
danger of sinking!

LOUDSPEAKER (VO)  
Prepare to abandon ship!

An ENGINEMAN appears next to Scott.

ENGINEMAN  
The boats are firing at the waterline!  
They're trying to explode the boilers!

SAILOR 16  
Oh, god damn! We can't go out there.  
They'll kill us out there!

SAILOR 17  
Where are our jets?

SAILOR 18  
Come on, jets. Come in, Phantoms!  
Get in here and get these bastards  
before they sink us!

CUT TO:

EXT. USS SARATOGA – DAY

The propeller-driven Skyraiders are still being prepared.

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

The Skyhawk jets are still being prepared.

CUT TO:

INT. PASSAGEWAY

The ever-present sound of the feedwater pump slowly dies. Lights dim and go out. Emergency lights come on. Men lying in the passageway are startled. Air conditioners and blowers stop. The passageway fills with choking black smoke.

Petty Officer Jeff Carpenter, face black with soot, gropes through the dark and finds the door to the main deck.

EXT. MAIN DECK – DAY

Carpenter emerges to hear McGonagle above him.

MCGONAGLE

Hey, we need firefighters up here!

The port side fire rages out of control. Napalm burns in the gun mounts. Carpenter picks up a CO2 container and heads for the inferno but has to retreat from the machine gun fire of the circling torpedo boats. The bullets puncture the fire hose in several places, reducing flow.

A FIREFIGHTER sprays water on a river of flaming napalm. His hose goes empty and limp. He is forced to retreat from the advancing fire.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

The feed pump is barely working. Lt. Golden holds the telephone to his ear. A SAILOR yells down.

SAILOR 19

Mr. Golden! We have no water for fighting fires!

Golden nods and waves. Chief Brooks works on the feed pump.

GOLDEN

There's either water for the boilers or for fighting fires, but not both. I say we try to get the boilers going 'cause we're dead in the water now.

He listens to telephone and frowns. He repeats to Brooks.

GOLDEN (cont'g)  
"Disable the main engines and scuttle  
the ship?"

BROOKS  
Was that the captain?

Golden shrugs.

GOLDEN  
Engine room to bridge... Engine room to  
bridge. Come in, bridge.  
(hangs up)  
Listen, Chief – we can't scuttle the  
ship until everyone is off. There's  
been no order to abandon ship, just  
to prepare to abandon... Let's keep  
the engines going.

INT. DAMAGE CONTROL CENTRAL

Ensign Scott holds his telephone. Three SAILORS await his orders. Lt. Painter enters. Scott turns to the sailors.

SCOTT  
We are to prepare to abandon ship.

The sailors depart.

PAINTER  
Repair Three is in the crew's mess  
hall, but that's now the main battle  
dressing station and it's full of  
wounded and dying men...

SCOTT  
Mr. Painter, perhaps the wounded  
should be moved up to the next deck,  
to be closer to the life rafts.

PAINTER  
Right. Good plan.



Painter departs.

INT. ENLISTED MESS HALL

The mess hall is littered with bloody wounded and dead men. Painter approaches Lt. Kiepfer, who himself is seriously wounded in the abdomen, has cinched a life vest tightly around his stomach to stem the bleeding. Despite his wounds, he tends to the others.

PAINTER  
Doc, you heard the order?

KIEPFER  
Yeah.

PAINTER  
Whaddya say we move the wounded closer  
to the life rafts?

KIEPFER  
Okay.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Painter begins the difficult task of moving the seriously wounded up the steep ladder, a backbreaking effort as two, three or four men haul the awkward stretchers up the nearly vertical ladder to the main deck.

INT. AFTER DECK HOUSE

Painter assembles most of the wounded in the abandon ship station. They hear the boats firing at the ship.

WOUNDED SAILOR  
Jesus, Mr. Painter – we can't go out  
there. They'll kill us.

Painter opens the door and looks out.

EXT. MAIN DECK – DAY

The three torpedo boats continue circling and firing at the ship.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Painter shuts the door, shaking his head.

PAINTER

(sighs)

We might as well go back to the mess.

EXT. STERN LIFE RAFT AREA – DAY

1515 HOURS

Petty Officer THOMAS SMITH and a group of SAILORS, wearing life vests, examine the life rafts. All rafts in this area are charred or shot up. Smith and the seamen run to the port side and examine those rafts. They find three that are sound. They secure them with heavy lines and drop them over the side, ready for the abandon ship order.

A few hundred yards away, lurking patiently, the men on the torpedo boats watch the orange rafts go in the water. Smith hears the engines growl and the three boats move closer. The center boat's machine guns open up and destroy two rafts and cut the line of the third, setting it adrift. It floats away rapidly. One of the boats intercepts the raft and crewmen seize its mooring line, taking it with them as all three boats depart, heading for Ashdod.

ANNOUNCING SYSTEM (VO)

Stand by to repel boarders!

In the distance, as the torpedo boats disappear, we see two large Israeli Hornet assault helicopters speeding toward us.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

A MESSENGER runs through the ship.

MESSENGER

Helicopters are coming! Helicopters  
are coming! Stand by to repel boarders!

EXT. MAIN DECK – DAY

As the two helicopters near the ship, crewmen armed with sidearms take their positions along the rail. The helicopters with Star of David insignia are each

carrying thirty armed MEN in battle dress. One SAILOR panics and runs from his station, yelling.

PANICKED SAILOR

They've come to finish us off!

The rest of the men stand and glare at the soldiers, who look at them balefully, holding Uzi submachine guns with their legs dangling out the doors. The crewmen raise their rifles and pistols. The helicopters slowly circle the ship twice but do not attempt to land. The helicopters fly away without attempting to communicate.

A sailor squints at the receding helicopters. Next to him stands a chief petty officer.

SAILOR 19

Who were those guys, Chief?

CPO

Israelis, looked like.

SAILOR 19

(thinks)

Israelis? Well, hell – they were out here to protect us! And we nearly... I mean, we're on the same side, aren't we?

CPO

Yeah. I guess.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Golden and Brooks fight to keep the engines on the line. They examine the gauges. The engines start, run briefly, then die. Brooks starts them again while Golden watches the gauges. They stay running.

GOLDEN

Good, yeah. Wait – these gauges are giving false readings... Man, we have a lot of damage.

INT. PILOTHOUSE

McGonagle and Lucas scan the sky and sea. The engines are running but the HELMSMAN gets no steering response.

HELMSMAN

Captain, the rudder does not respond.

MCGONAGLE

Mr. Lucas, send a party to the aft steering station to manipulate the rudder by hand. We have no communication so run emergency telephone wire.

CUT TO:

EXT. USS SARATOGA – DAY

1600 HOURS

Four A-1 Skyraiders are launched from the SARATOGA.

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

Four F-4B Phantom jets and four A-4 Skyhawk jets are launched from the AMERICA.

INT. PHANTOM JET

FLIGHT LEADER (VO)

We are on the way. Who is the enemy?

INT. USS AMERICA COMBAT CONTROL

Rear Admiral LARRY GEIS holds the microphone.

GEIS

That is to be determined by you. It is probably Egypt, possibly the Soviet Union. Your mission is to protect the Liberty without provoking a larger confrontation. Acknowledge.

FLIGHT LEADER (VO)  
Yeah, roger. Protect, don't provoke.

GEIS  
Defense of USS Liberty means exactly that. Destroy or drive off any attackers who are clearly making attacks on Liberty. Remain over international waters. Defend yourself if attacked.

CUT TO:

INT. AFT STEERING STATION

With huge pipe wrenches and cheater pipes, ten SAILORS are able to force the rudder to turn slightly. Ensign Lucas listens to his phone.

LUCAS  
Right five degrees rudder.

The men put their combined weight against the wrenches.

ANNOUNCING SYSTEM (VO)  
The attack appears to be over.           The  
attack appears to be over.

LUCAS  
Rudder amidships.

The men struggle to bring the rudder back to neutral.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

From behind the Liberty, we watch her zigzag wake as she heads north.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE – DAY

INT. UPSTAIRS WHITE HOUSE

Lyndon Johnson comes out of Room 303 and heads down the hall.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

WALT ROSTOW, ROBERT MCNAMARA, DEAN RUSK, CLARK CLIFFORD, NICHOLAS KATZENBACH and MCGEORGE BUNDY file into the small room. LLEWELLYN THOMPSON, the ambassador to the USSR, joins them.

They stand around and wait.

Lyndon Johnson enters and picks up his phone at the head of the table. A younger Grace Helstrom takes a chair at the edge of the room.

LBJ

(into phone)

Mary, get me in twenty minutes how many states I have been in since I became president...

He looks at his advisors as they take their seats. He is angry.

LBJ (cont'g)

Bob, what's happening?

MCNAMARA

Mr. President, one of our navy ships, the Liberty, was attacked and is in serious trouble. The carriers America and Saratoga have sent fighters to defend her...

LBJ

The ship's still afloat?

MCNAMARA

Yes, but it was torpedoed and is in danger of sinking.

LBJ

Get those planes recalled!

MCNAMARA

Right away.

LBJ  
Connect me with the commander out there.

McNamara goes to a telephone near Grace Helstrom.

MCNAMARA  
Patch me through to Admiral Geis on  
the USS America...

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Admiral Geis takes a red telephone from an AIDE.

GEIS  
Geis speaking.

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

McNamara signals to LBJ, who picks up his white telephone.

LBJ  
Geis? This is the president. You  
get those god-damn airplanes back to  
your ship!

INT. USS AMERICA CONTROL ROOM

GEIS  
Mr. President, I have given strict  
orders to act only in defense of the  
Liberty. We don't even know who the  
attackers are yet...

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

LBJ  
Listen to me, Geis, and hear me well.  
I don't care if they sink the god-damn  
ship, I'm not going to embarrass my  
allies! Is that clear?

GEIS (VO)

Yes, sir.

LBJ

Recall those planes this minute!

GEIS (VO)

Yes, sir.

Johnson slams down the phone. His advisors squirm uneasily, except for Walt Rostow, who stares angrily at his papers.

LBJ

What the hell happened out there,  
Bob?

MCNAMARA

The ship came under attack by unmarked jets about two hours ago, according to messages received on the Saratoga and America, which are about five hundred miles to the west, near Crete. These attacks were followed by torpedoes, one of which struck the Liberty. There is tremendous damage...

LBJ

The ship may still sink?

MCNAMARA

Well, yes. She is five or six days away from the nearest port where she could be repaired, on Malta. She might not even make it.

Johnson considers this and nods. His white phone's light blinks.

LBJ

(picks up)

Yes? Say that again?

(to advisors)

From our naval attaché in Tel Aviv:  
Israeli aircraft and MTBs... erroneously



attacked US ship... IDF helicopters in rescue operations... No other info... Israelis send abject apologies... and request info of other US ships... near war zone coasts.

Johnson sighs and hangs up. His advisors look at him expectantly.

LBJ (cont'g)

Listen to me. This does not leave this room. If this leaks, and I don't care who from, I'll have all of your balls for breakfast. Every one of you. We are not going to embarrass our allies.

(pauses)

Let's draft a note to Soviet Premier Kosygin to reassure him that we know this was a tragic error on Israel's part and that we're not going to war over this thing. Word it the right way.

The white telephone blinks. Johnson picks it up.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE ROOM 303

Mathilde Krim sits on her bed holding the phone.

MATHILDE

Lyndon Dear...

LBJ (VO)

Hello, Darlin'. I'm a little busy right now...

MATHILDE

Of course, Dear, I know you are. But the operation can still succeed. It's a very long way to Malta...

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

LBJ

Uh, huh.

MATHILDE (VO)

And Dear? I've written a message that you can read to the American people. It's very important. It will be on your desk by the time you get back to the office.

LBJ

Thank you for that, Darlin'. I'll have a look at it.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE ROOM 303

MATHILDE

Dear, I told Walt Rostow yesterday that I'm getting reports of very strong anti-American feelings in Israel – that the Israelis feel that they have won the war not with the US, but despite the US...

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

Johnson glances at Rostow as he speaks into the phone.

LBJ

That's a god-damn ignorant and ungrateful thing for them to say. If they only knew the truth of what we're doing for them – this minute.

He listens briefly and unhappily hangs up. His advisors look down at their papers.

LBJ (cont'g)

Bob, did you say the ship would have to sail to Malta for repairs?

MCNAMARA

That's right, Mr. President.

Rostow, the national security advisor, cannot contain himself.

ROSTOW

Mr. President, if the press is allowed to photograph the ship, assuming it even lasts long enough to get to Malta, it will inflame public opinion against Israel.

LBJ

Uh, huh.

ROSTOW

The attack was obviously a dreadful mistake, as our naval attaché in Tel Aviv has told you. Our credibility depends on the perception that we are strictly neutral in thought, word and deed. This tragic mistake could be mischaracterized and exploited by both the Arabs and by the Soviets, and by our own anti-Semitic elements to drive a wedge between us and our Israeli allies.

LBJ

What's your recommendation, Walt?

ROSTOW

The ship should be sunk, Mr. President.

LBJ

Uh, huh. What about the crew?

ROSTOW

The crew... the crew should be reassigned, and sworn to secrecy and threatened with the harshest punishment for unauthorized disclosures.

LBJ

What sort of punishment?

ROSTOW

Prison, or worse...

LBJ

Uh, huh. Bob, we've got a submarine close by the ship, don't we? Part of the operation?

MCNAMARA

(startled)

We have, Mr. President.

LBJ

(sighs)

Let's see how it plays out. It's a long way to Malta. But I want a total blackout on this. The highest classification. Bob, you put the fear of God into those sailors so they stay shut up. You hear me?

MCNAMARA

Of course, Mr. President.

Johnson stares at a wall map of the eastern Mediterranean.

LBJ

What the hell went wrong out there, Bob?

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

The Soviet destroyer 626/4 cuts through the seas.

INT. DESTROYER WARDROOM

Peshkov and Kovalenko drink tea and wait. A SAILOR enters.

SOVIET SAILOR  
(Russian)  
Captain! A signal from fleet command!

Peshkov takes the paper. The sailor departs.

PESHKOV  
“Destroyer 626/4 shall approach  
stricken US vessel and offer aid.  
Prepare to defend ship from hostile  
forces, including US submarine.”  
(looks at Kovalenko)  
Defend which ship? This one, or  
the Liberty?  
(smokes and thinks)  
This should be interesting.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

From overhead, the LIBERTY leaves a crooked wake as she slowly departs the kill zone. We look to the south and see three torpedo boats approaching at high speed several miles away.

INT. LIBERTY BATTLE DRESSING STATION

Corpsman TOM VANCLEAVE administers first aid to the many wounded. Dr. Kiepfer finishes checking the men, pinning a paper to one. His life vest/bandage is bloody. He is not in good shape.

KIEPFER  
Corpsman VanCleave, the men with notes  
on them will need morphine or intravenous  
solutions started. Keep a close watch  
for changes in pulse or respiration. I’m

going to the bridge to check on the captain.

VANCLEAVE

Aye, sir.

Kiepfer makes his unsteady way out of the mess area. Lt. Painter helps VanCleave hang an IV bottle from a light fixture.

ANNOUNCING SYSTEM

Aircraft and torpedo boats approaching, starboard side. Stand by for torpedo attack, starboard side.

Pandemonium. Every wounded man with any strength gets up and heads for the ladder, lurching, stumbling, falling. Men tear IV tubes from their arms to keep from drowning the way the men drowned in the Research Ops rooms. Men too sick to move, too weak to be driven to their feet even by the fear of instant death, cry out.

WOUNDED SAILORS

Help me!

Please, oh, please help me!

Mama! Mama!

Painter reaches the ladder ahead of most of the men and leaps to the third rung and faces the fear-crazed mob behind him.

PAINTER

Stop it, god dammit, knock it off!

He screams at the wall of frightened sailors piled up against him. One grabs his foot and tries to pull him off the ladder. Painter sends the man flying with a kick to the neck.

PAINTER (cont'g)

Move away! No one leaves here until every wounded man is safe! No one leaves!

The men move back. Hastily but not panicked, they help the men who can't move by themselves.

OS – a flight of jets passes overhead with a tremendous roar. The men brace themselves for another rocket barrage but nothing happens. They look around at each other.

EXT. LIBERTY BRIDGE – DAY

1632 HOURS

McGonagle and Lucas flinch as four Israeli-marked jets pass overhead without attacking. They shift their eyes to the three torpedo boats approaching at high speed.

The boats come closer with their signal lights flashing. McGonagle and Lucas strain to read the lights.

MCGONAGLE

Mr. Lucas, can you make anything of their signals?

LUCAS

Negative, Captain.

MCGONAGLE

Signalman?

CHIEF THOMPSON squints at the flashing lights.

CHIEF THOMPSON

Can't make it out, Captain. Shall I try semaphore?

MCGONAGLE

Go ahead.

Thompson steps to the bridge rail and uses his two flags. The boats keep flashing. McGonagle looks through his binoculars and sees the Star of David flag on the stern.

MCGONAGLE (cont'g)

They seem to be Israeli.

Thompson shakes his head, unable to communicate. Finally, the TAHMASS comes closer. Its captain, UDI ERREL, the same one who attacked them earlier, picks up a bullhorn and turns it on.

ERREL  
DO YOU NEED ANY HELP?

MCGONAGLE  
Do we – why you son of a bitch!

EXT. TAHMASS – DAY

Errel puts down the bullhorn as he sees McGonagle shaking his fist in fury. A CREWMAN listens to McGonagle's rage.

CREWMAN  
(Hebrew)  
He says, "Fuck you."

ERREL  
I heard him. Let's go.

The torpedo boats turn away and head for Ashdod.

The LIBERTY continues to leave an oily path on the water.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Lloyd Painter finds Phil Armstrong, the executive officer, lying on his stretcher. He kneels down and lights a cigarette for him.

PAINTER  
There you are. Been looking for you.

ARMSTRONG  
Well, you found me, you lucky bastard.  
What's in the bag, Goose?

Painter removes a bottle of Johnny Walker Red from a paper bag and breaks the seal as Armstrong sucks the cigarette in one deep drag.

PAINTER



I know how you frown on drinking, but –

Armstrong takes the bottle and swallows quite a bit.

ARMSTRONG

You'll make admiral yet, Lloyd. Just what the doctor ordered.

He tucks the bottle under his arm as four SAILORS pick up his stretcher and start a hard journey to the main battle dressing station. The pipe and wire stretcher goes almost vertical on the steep stairway. Armstrong yells bitterly but holds on to the bottle.

INT. MAIN BATTLE DRESSING STATION

The four sailors place Armstrong's stretcher on a table. Ennes sees him from across the room. O'Connor, not dead, waves at both of them weakly, very sick. Armstrong raises himself on one elbow and looks around at the wounded. He waves back. Dr. Kiepfer makes his rounds. He checks Armstrong's bloody groin and leg wounds. Blood seeps out from Kiepfer's tightly cinched life vest.

KIEPFER

How do you feel, XO?

ARMSTRONG

I'm okay, Doc. Some of the guys are a lot worse off than I am. Cup of coffee and I'll be fine. Hell, you're hurt worse'n me.

KIEPFER

Okay, XO. I'll be back to see how you're doing.

Kiepfer and a CORPSMAN move along to Seaman Salvador Payan, who is unresponsive and dying. Gray matter dribbles from his ear. He stares at the ceiling, seeing nothing, but in distress. Kiepfer pulls down his sheet and inserts a catheter. Payan's distress dissolves.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

He had to pee. Morphine is all we can do for him now.

LATER

Armstrong and his room steward, TROY GREEN, drink coffee. McGonagle's voice comes over the announcing system.

MCGONAGLE (VO)  
Will the executive officer please  
come to the bridge?

Armstrong and Green laugh. McGonagle doesn't know how badly injured he is. He swallows more coffee.

ARMSTRONG  
Tell the captain I can't come to the  
bridge right now!

He and Green and others laugh at this unthinkable statement. Then Armstrong starts vomiting deep red blood. Green is horrified. Armstrong remains calm. His khaki uniform is blood-soaked.

GREEN  
Doctor! Corpsman!

ARMSTRONG  
No, no, no. I'm okay. Just a little  
blood. No big deal. Now, look –  
(removes watch)  
look, I want you to have this, Troy.  
No, please. Keep it. And this,  
(removes wedding band)  
see that Weetie gets this.

GREEN  
C'mon, XO!

Armstrong drops dead in his stretcher. Several of the men weep openly when they realize what has happened.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. LIBERTY BRIDGE – NIGHT

McGonagle remains on the bridge with Lucas. He scans the sky. His bloody right pants leg has been cut away so the tourniquet can be tightened and released more easily. Both compasses are destroyed.

MCGONAGLE

All right, I can make out the North Star, Mr. Lucas. Do you see it?

LUCAS

Yes, sir.

MCGONAGLE

Just like the old days.

LUCAS

Yes, sir.

Lt. MAURY BENNETT reports to the bridge.

MCGONAGLE

Mr. Bennett, take down this after-action report and send it to London, Washington and the Sixth Fleet.

BENNETT

Yes, sir.

LATER

Bennett shakes his head when McGonagle's back is to him and leaves. Dr. Kiepfer enters and looks at McGonagle. He examines his wounds.

KIEPFER

Captain, you've lost a lot of blood. You need to rest.

McGonagle stares at Kiepfer blankly and doesn't respond.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

What is your name?

McGonagle doesn't answer and slowly loses consciousness. He is grabbed as he falls to the deck. Kiepfer straightens him out and leaves him there.

INT. MAIN BATTLE DRESSING STATION

Lt. Bennett finds Ennes and pats him on the back, surprising Ennes.

ENNES

My God, Maury! I thought you were dead! You were in the flooded space.

BENNETT

Listen, Jim – I just sent the battle report on this thing to the Chief of Naval Operations. You won't believe what the old man said.

ENNES

What did he say?

BENNETT

You'd think almost nothing happened at all. It said there were a couple of planes that made five or six passes over a period of five or six minutes. Then, bam, the torpedo, and it was all over. Clean, simple. Just like that.

ENNES

For Chrisake! Who wrote the goddamned report?

BENNETT

Well, I did. He dictated it to me.

ENNES

Jesus Christ, Maury! What did you let him send a crazy report like that for? He's pretty sick. Doesn't he know what really happened?

BENNETT

What do you mean, "let him?" He's the captain. I couldn't sit up there and argue with him about his battle report.

He told me what to say and I said it.

INT. DAMAGE CONTROL CENTRAL

Ensign Scott receives a MESSENGER.

SAILOR 20

Mr. Scott, we have a weakened and leaking bulkhead in number four storeroom. That's forward of the flooded research department.

Scott grabs a flashlight and follows the sailor.

INT. NUMBER FOUR STOREROOM

Scott inspects the leaking wall, feeling the massive quantity of seawater crashing into it from the other side.

SAILOR 20

There's heavy desks and all kinds of things in there, hitting this bulkhead. If this gives way, we're done for.

Scott nods worriedly.

SCOTT

Right. Get our most experienced men to shore this bulkhead with heavy plywood and timbers.

LATER

The damage control team MEMBERS place the supports against the bulkhead and sledgehammer the timbers in to give them strength.

SCOTT

Well done. Now, I want a man here all the time to watch for problems. The watch will be for ten minutes at a time. Volunteers only.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE – EVENING

INT. WHITE HOUSE ROOM 303

A bitter Lyndon Johnson sips his Bourbon, not looking at Mathilde.

LBJ

Mathilde, I can't believe the Israeli navy and air force couldn't sink that old tub.

MATHILDE

But Walt Rostow is correct, Dear. She must be sunk in any event. You should order her scuttled, for the safety of the crew. It is extremely unlikely that she could stay afloat for five more days. Or the submarine could sink her tonight, before she makes contact with the fleet tomorrow.

LBJ rubs his face.

LBJ

Lord, Mathilde... if this ever gets out... they'll hang me.

MATHILDE

Lyndon, no Americans have actually seen her yet. If she sinks tonight, the Egyptians can still be blamed. Don't you see? The operation can still work!

LBJ

Seems to me the operation has turned to shit, Darlin'. It was a hell of a plan, though.

(gets up)

I'll talk to Bob and see what we can do.

(stares at her)

Your mighty Zionists ain't all they're cracked up to be.

Mathilde's composure almost remains intact.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

The LIBERTY slowly struggles erratically through the seas, leaving a crooked and oily wake in the moonlight.

INT. MAIN BATTLE DRESSING STATION

Dr. Kiepfer examines Seaman GARY BLANCHARD's destroyed midsection. Blanchard is in shock but he groans. Lloyd Painter stands by.

BLANCHARD

I'm on my way out, aren't I, Doc?

KIEPFER

I need to open you up to stop the bleeding, Gary. If I don't do the surgery, you will die. If I do, you may die anyway...

BLANCHARD

(whispers)

Take your best shot.

Kiepfer pats his arm gently. Painter turns away to hide his emotion but Kiepfer puts a hand on his shoulder.

KIEPFER

Lloyd, we have no anesthetic on board. I can give him a spinal to numb his pain, but he will be awake for the surgery. I'll need your help.

Painter stares at Kiepfer.

PAINTER

Okay, Doc. Where are we going to do it, on the wardroom mess table?

KIEPFER

I'm afraid so. Make it as clean as you can. I'll need several pints of blood from volunteers.

LATER

Kiepfer and his assistants roll Blanchard on his side. Kiepfer inserts a needle between his vertebrae and slowly injects the anesthetic. Blanchard is rolled on his back. Painter and Ensign Scott hold Blanchard down as Kiepfer makes his incision.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

Much blood in the abdominal cavity...  
we haven't any suction to take it out.  
Just keep soaking it up with sponges...

The assistants keep soaking their sponges with blood and wringing them out. Blanchard is awake and stares at the ceiling, then rolls his head to the side. Painter holds replacement blood overhead.

LATER

Kiepfer is able to see the injuries, but fresh blood keeps flowing.

KIEPFER (cont'g)

Shrapnel in the liver and right kidney...  
And – both the aorta and vena cava are  
torn. I can't stop the bleeding. His  
blood pressure is dropping.

He looks at Painter and Scott and shakes his head. The three officers squeeze Blanchard's hands and arm, looking down at him as he dies.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

The Soviet destroyer 626/4 slows.

INT. SOVIET DESTROYER BRIDGE



Peshkov and Kovalenko watch the radar screen which indicates an approaching ship. The executive officer wears headphones.

KOVALENKO

(Russian)

Captain, sonar reports a submarine, diesel-electric, two kilometers behind Liberty, very shallow depth. Liberty's bearing three one zero, speed, ten knots.

The LIBERTY's running lights come into view.

PESHKOV

The danger here, Kovalenko, is that we can now be blamed if Liberty sinks. Engines stop. Let's make contact.

HELMSMAN

All stop, aye, sir.

Peshkov and Kovalenko step outside.

EXT. SOVIET DESTROYER BRIDGE – NIGHT

A SIGNALMAN works the flashing lights, aimed at the LIBERTY.

PESHKOV

Identify us.

The signalman obeys. They wait. The LIBERTY's light flashes back.

SIGNALMAN

"US Navy ship"

PESHKOV

Do you need help?

They wait. The LIBERTY's light flashes back.

SIGNALMAN

"No thank you"

PESHKOV

I will stand by in case you need me.

They wait. The LIBERTY's light flashes back.

SIGNALMAN

They acknowledge.

They watch as the LIBERTY slowly passes two hundred yards away.

PESHKOV

Let's follow them. One kilometer  
abaft. Don't hit the submarine.

Peshkov leans against the rail and stares at the departing ship.

PESHKOV (cont'g)

You just may need me more than you  
realize.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

From overhead, the moonlight shows the destroyer starting up and turning to follow the LIBERTY.

We fly southeast, watching the sea, and soon we can make out the wake of a periscope as it cuts through the water.

INT. USS AMBERJACK

Captain JOE FRANKLIN steps away from the periscope and is relieved by his executive officer, PAUL MURRAY. The captain rubs his eyes.

FRANKLIN

What do you make it out to be, Mr.  
Murray?

MURRAY

Kirov class guided missile destroyer,  
Captain. The one that pinged us.

Franklin sighs.

FRANKLIN

Well, they asked for a destroyer escort  
and now they have one. Let's not be so  
close. Drop back two thousand yards.  
I suspect our work here is done.

MURRAY

Rather ironic, when you think about it.

FRANKLIN

Attacked by friends, saved by the enemy.

MURRAY

I'm glad it turned out this way.

FRANKLIN

Yeah.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

9 JUNE

0600 HOURS

INT. SOVIET DESTROYER PASSAGEWAY

Kovalenko knocks at Peshkov's door, enters.

INT. PESHKOV'S CABIN

Peshkov lies on his bunk, waking up. He looks at Kovalenko.

KOVALENKO

(Russian)

Captain, radar indicates two fast ships  
closing at forty knots. American  
destroyers. Thirty minutes from contact.

Peshkov sits up and looks at his watch and yawns.

PESHKOV

Sixteen hours since the attack... No

air umbrella in all this time? This is one for the books, Kovalenko. Someone still expects her to sink.

KOVALENKO

She may yet, Captain. She is listing badly to starboard.

PESHKOV

Let's have a look.

EXT. SOVIET DESTROYER BRIDGE – DAY

We come alongside the LIBERTY's starboard side. A dozen US sailors watch us sullenly. The top of the torpedo hole is visible and the bridge is charred black. Dried bloodstains run to the waterline.

KOVALENKO

(Russian)

Look at all the rocket holes! There are hundreds! There's where the torpedo hit her. She had a fire, Captain.

PESHKOV

Fire from the sky. Napalm. They hit her with everything except a suicide plane. What the hell is keeping her afloat? Obviously heavy casualties, but how did anyone survive?

KOVALENKO

Captain, who would do this to an American ship? I really can't understand this.

PESHKOV

We can see with our own eyes what her mission was, Kovalenko.

EXT. LIBERTY BRIDGE – DAY

To our right, Destroyer 626/4 pulls away. Its signal light flashes.

SIGNALMAN

“Good luck”

BRIDGE LOOKOUT (OS)

Surface contact dead ahead! Two contacts, sir, hull down on the horizon!

LATER

US destroyers DAVIS and MASSEY flank the LIBERTY, dead in the water. A large helicopter hovers over the LIBERTY, removing the dead and wounded to the nearby carrier, USS AMERICA.

EXT. USS AMERICA – DAY

On his stretcher, Lt. Ennes is carried from the helicopter toward the sickbay. Walking alongside is a civilian, HAROLD ROBINSON, who bends over as he walks between Ennes and a group of REPORTERS and CAMERAMEN.

ROBINSON

Robinson, ONI.

(shows ID)

Don't answer any questions. Don't talk to the press or anyone until you're told it's all right.

ENNES

When's that going to be?

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

The LIBERTY is still flanked by the destroyers, not moving. Four SCUBA DIVERS are in the water, measuring with a rope the size of the torpedo hole. They make a knot and the rope is hoisted and measured by Golden and Scott, standing by the rail above the hole. The divers swim over to their ocean tugboat, the PAPAGO.

SCOTT

Okay, that was twenty-eight feet in

height and forty feet wide. Jesus.  
We'll never make it to Malta.

GOLDEN

We have a major leak up forward  
somewhere. The bow is getting lower.  
I'm going to have to jettison the  
anchor chain to lighten the bow...

Above them, on the bridge, McGonagle is impatient.

MCGONAGLE

Are we ready to proceed, Mr. Golden?

GOLDEN

(waves)

Aye, aye, Captain!

INT. PILOTHOUSE

McGonagle steps inside.

MCGONAGLE

Helmsman, you have your course.

HELMSMAN

Aye, Captain, two eight zero.

MCGONAGLE

All engines ahead half. Ten knots.

HELMSMAN

All engines ahead half. Ten knots.  
Aye, sir.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – NIGHT

The LIBERTY makes its way toward Malta, followed closely by PAPAGO.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

10 JUNE

The LIBERTY plods along. Alongside her starboard side we watch the torpedo hole as seawater storms in and out. Suddenly, a body floats out and is left behind.

EXT. PAPAGO – DAY

A LOOKOUT on PAPAGO's bridge looks through binoculars.

LOOKOUT  
Bridge! Dead body ahead!

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAY

The tugboat slows and MEN reach for the body with hooks. It is snagged and pulled on deck. The tugboat resumes its matching speed.

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN – DAWN

11 JUNE

The LIBERTY is joined at sea by the destroyer USS BARRY, connected by a high-line transfer cable. An officer, REAR ADMIRAL ISAAC KIDD, is pulled across and helped down by crewmen, who then salute. Other STAFF OFFICERS make the trip.

McGonagle salutes and greets Kidd. They go below.

INT. WARDROOM

Kidd and his officers are shocked by all the holes, blood and debris.

KIDD  
Are we seaworthy, Commander?

MCGONAGLE  
So far, Admiral.

KIDD  
Commander, as you know, Admiral McCain has appointed me to head the Court of Inquiry on this incident.

MCGONAGLE

Yes, sir.

KIDD

I am required to collect evidence, screen witnesses and complete a report for the record. I want to talk privately with the witnesses to learn what they might be expected to say and to decide who should be called to testify and what questions they should be asked in court.

MCGONAGLE

You'll have our full cooperation, Admiral.

LATER

Six sailors file into the wardroom and come to attention. Kidd removes the admiral's stars from his shirt collar. The men stare.

KIDD

At ease, men, I'm taking off the stars. I want you to think of me as one of you, as someone you can level with. I want you to tell me in your own words what you saw and what you experienced... What's your name, sailor?

PHIL TOURNEY blinks and straightens up.

TOURNEY

Shipfitter Tourney, sir.

KIDD

Tourney? Okay, what happened?

TOURNEY

Well, sir, we've been hearing rumors that the report said the attack was about five minutes long, but it went on for over an hour.



KIDD

What did you actually see, Tourney?

TOURNEY

Well, about ten minutes into the attack, I and others started evacuating wounded from the weather decks. The jets kept coming with rockets and cannon and then they dropped napalm on us, so we had to fight those fires as best we could... And they just kept hitting us over and over, even though they could see us out there fighting the fire. When they finally ran out of ordnance, then the PT boats hit us. And after that, they machine gunned us and they sank our life rafts –

KIDD

You sure about that, Tourney?

TOURNEY

Sir?

KIDD

Did you actually see them do that?

SMITH

I did, admiral.

KIDD

What's your name, sailor?

SMITH

Seaman Smith, sir.

KIDD

All right, Smith.

SMITH

Well, sir, we had the order to prepare to abandon ship, after the torpedo got

us. So I went to check on the life rafts. Most of 'em were burned up or shot up, but we found three good ones. We secured them and put them overboard. The torpedo boats came close and shot 'em up. They sank two and cut the third one loose with gunfire but they grabbed it and took it away with 'em.

LATER

Kidd listens to the sailors. He nods and picks up his stars, fixing them to his collar again. He looks at them sternly.

KIDD

Okay, men. I'm the admiral again. I know you've been through a rough time. You've lost shipmates and you might lose some more, from what I hear. So this is going to be a tough assignment, a tough order to follow. You are not going to mention any of this again, whatever you've told me. You're not going to tell the reporters when you get to Malta, or any reporters anywhere ever! You're not going to tell your families. Do you hear me? You're not even going to discuss it among yourselves. This never happened, men. It never happened. Now, if you do speak of this to ANYONE, I will have you court-martialed and sent not just to the brig but to federal prison. The consequences could even be worse than that, and I'll leave that to your imagination.

The sailors look at him in utter shock and amazement.

KIDD (cont'g)

That is all.

One of Kidd's staff stands up.

OFFICER

Attention!

The sailors snap to attention.

OFFICER

Dismissed!

They file out of the wardroom, stunned, bewildered and frightened.

LATER

Another six sailors enter the wardroom uncertainly. Kidd smiles and removes his stars, putting them on the table.

KIDD

At ease, men. I'm taking off my stars. I want you to think of me as one of you, as someone you can level with. I want you to tell me what you saw and what happened to you...

DISSOLVE:

EXT. MALTA HARBOR – DAY

14 JUNE

The LIBERTY, listing heavily and down in the bow, is pushed toward the Valletta dry-dock by two tugboats. The big doors are open wide and she is maneuvered between them. Maltese BYSTANDERS gawk at the damage.

LATER

The LIBERTY is in the dry-dock. The doors are closed behind her. Pumps are started. The water level inside slowly begins to drop.

LATER

It is getting dark. The water level is below the enormous hole in the ship. We slowly zoom in on the hole until it fills the screen. Oily, waterlogged office equipment and papers, twisted pipes and conduit.

We do not want to look in the cavernous hole.

EXT. DRYDOCK – DAY

DOCK WORKERS drape the hole with tarpaulins, cloths over their noses.

Lloyd Painter and ten LIBERTY sailors stand before a LT. COMMANDER with right hands raised. They mumble something, drop their hands.

LT. COMMANDER

Right, men – you're sworn to secrecy regarding anything you find in there. I'm sorry that you all pulled this duty, but we can't have anyone else in that classified area. Lieutenant?

Painter nods briefly and turns to the gangway to board the LIBERTY. The sailors follow. The officer makes notes on his clipboard.

INT. LIBERTY PASSAGEWAY

The sailors crouch in awe around the single access to the space through which some of them had narrowly escaped days before. Painter undogs the hatch and swings it open and the odor overwhelms them all.

SEAMAN 1

Oh, bloody shit.

SEAMAN 2

Oh, wow.

A sailor throws up. Another starts crying. Painter blows air out of his mouth. Another sailor starts down the oily ladder.

SEAMAN 3

The longer we wait, the harder it will be.

PAINTER

Careful! Slippery!

SEAMAN 3

No sweat.

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT

The sailor descends the ladder with his flashlight clipped to his belt. He finds firm footing near the bottom and shines his light around. The former compartmentalized offices are just one big space.

SEAMAN 3 (cont'g)

This is gonna be hell! Oil is everywhere. Bulkheads are all gone. Looks like half the stuff here is pushed into one corner. Here's a desk, on its side. Oh! OW! OH!

He drops the flashlight. We can't see what frightens him. He steps back, slips on the oily metal, scrambles to get his footing, slips again and reaches the ladder. His hands and feet slip on oil in wild panic as he scrambles up. Men reach from the hatch to help him.

INT. PASSAGEWAY

Hoisted through the hatch, the sailor stammers helplessly.

SEAMAN 4

What the hell is down there?

The sailor can't speak. He can only sob.

LATER

Painter and the men look at the hatch warily. Finally, Painter rubs his face and goes to the ladder and starts down.

INT. RESEARCH OPS DEPT

Painter descends the ladder, flashlight clipped to his belt. He reaches the bottom and searches around, heading for the same area. Now we can see what scared the sailor. Painter's light shines on the bloated, slimy corpse of an officer, impaled on a pipe that suspends him with his toes just touching the deck, eyes and mouth open. Painter grunts in surprise, his flashlight jerking upwards and we see the head and torso of another body tangled in cables, hanging from the

overhead. The legs are gone. Painter sighs. He shines his light on the deck around him. Several arms and a head are among the debris.

PAINTER

Okay, men. It's bad. Let's get the body bags down here. I'll need some help now.

Folded body bags are dropped through the hatch. Men start down.

EXT. LIBERTY DECK – EVENING

The exhausted and filthy men of the recovery party take a smoke break. Loaded body bags are neatly lined up on deck. Painter speaks to the Lt. commander, who writes on his clipboard.

PAINTER

I think that's all we could find. Twenty bodies or major parts. So probably five guys went out the hole.

LT. COMMANDER

Twenty dead, five missing?

PAINTER

Yeah. Twenty-five guys killed by the torpedo, nine killed by the planes.

The officer shakes his head as he writes.

LT. COMMANDER

And what, a hundred and seventy wounded?

PAINTER

Yeah. One seventy one, I think.

LT. COMMANDER

Two hundred and five casualties out of two hundred ninety four? Hell of a mistake, huh?

PAINTER

Is that what you think?

The officer glances at the body bags, the napalm blackened bridge and the hundreds of rocket and cannon holes everywhere.

LT. COMMANDER  
I'm not allowed to say what I think,  
Lieutenant.

PAINTER  
Right.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

BUDDY  
There was the fake Court of Inquiry.  
Admiral McCain was running it for  
his buddy, Arthur Goldberg. He gave  
Admiral Kidd one week to investigate  
and make a report. One week!

GRACE  
McCain... Wasn't his son a POW in Vietnam?

BUDDY  
Same guy. He had most of the sailors  
transferred to other ships so they  
couldn't compare notes or be found  
easily by reporters, who weren't very  
curious anyway. American people were  
pretty much unaware of what happened.

GRACE  
Arthur Krim called Lyndon the day the  
Israelis invaded Syria and complained  
that there was a big arms shipment on  
the New York docks that had to go to  
Israel, and for Lyndon to release it  
immediately, which he did.

(pauses)  
I did hear Lyndon mention "the operation,"  
but I didn't know what that referred to.

BUDDY

Yeah, that was Operation Cyanide. The biggest secret in Washington. The plan was to blame Egypt for the Liberty and then nuke Cairo and Alexandria, just for openers. Then the US would have come in to the war on Israel's side and bluffed the Soviets out of the Mid-East. Israel and the US would have occupied all the Arab countries. All the oil would have been under US and Israeli control. It was actually a pretty slick plan, like you said, years in the making. It just didn't work out.

GRACE

Hah! To put it mildly. But, what happened to you?

BUDDY

You mean...

GRACE

Well, I mean, during the attack. Were you hurt?

BUDDY

Like I said, I should have drowned when I got pinned under water but Bryce Lockwood, another Russian linguist, pulled me out. I had some broken ribs and some gut problems and was sent with some other kids to the naval hospital in Puerto Rico.

GRACE

Puerto Rico!

BUDDY

Yeah! They really scattered us around. But San Juan's where it got pretty scary, and I should have learned something there, but I didn't.



CUT TO:

EXT. US NAVAL HOSPITAL SAN JUAN – DAY

US Navy vehicles come and go by the main entrance.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Buddy shares a room with two wounded LIBERTY sailors, MICKEY THOMPSON and TYRONE MITCHELL. Buddy has been dozing in the sunlit room.

TYRONE

Hey, Buddy! You awake?

BUDDY

(eyes closed)

No.

TYRONE

Hey, man – it's like no one at home knows what happened! I called home and told 'em I'm here and they said, What for? What for? 'Cause we got attacked an' almost sunk! They said, You wasn't attacked – that was an accident! I said, Accident my ass! Accidents don't go on for over an hour! They said, No, man, it was an accident and we heard it on the news.

BUDDY

Take it easy, Tyrone. We're not supposed to be talking about it. I don't want you getting in a jam.

MICKEY

C'mon, Buddy – you heard about the report that son of a bitch admiral put out? And the captain said the attack only lasted a few minutes! What's with him?

BUDDY

I remember that son of a bitch admiral threatened to put us in federal prison or worse if we talked.

TYRONE

Takes off his stars an' says, I'm one o' y'all. Tell me what happened...

BUDDY

You guys pipe down. I'm serious.

INT. HOSPITAL OFFICE

Two ONI COPS with headphones listen to the talk and record it.

TYRONE (VO)

Got rocket fragments in my balls, Buddy. I'm damn serious, too. Mickey lost some fingers an' his eye. How serious is that?

BUDDY (VO)

I know. But you gotta be quiet.

TYRONE (VO)

Buddy! Have you thought about what happened to us? Those Jews hit us with rockets, cannon, machine guns, NAPALM! They fired six torpedoes at us! They jammed our radios and they sunk our life rafts! They sent combat troops out in choppers to finish us off, an' we're not allowed to talk about it? What the hell's goin' on, man? You're NSA, I know, big secret, but you can find out.

Exasperated and worried, Buddy puts a finger to his lips and shakes his head.

LATER

The men are served their dinner by a MALE NURSE. They eat silently.

LATER

Lights out in the darkened hospital room. Buddy sleeps soundly.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

In the daylight, Buddy slowly wakes up. He looks around and finds both beds are made up but empty. Tyrone and Mickey are gone. A MALE NURSE enters with breakfast.

BUDDY

Hey, where are my roommates?

NURSE

Transferred to a different department.  
They're fine, don't worry.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC WARD FOYER

Two armed MARINES guard the entrance to the psych ward.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC WARD

A CIVILIAN INTERROGATOR leans over a delirious Tyrone.

INTERROGATOR

Okay, Tyrone, one more time. What happened to you on your ship last month?

TYRONE

Las' month?  
(frowns)  
Don' remember...

INTERROGATOR

You don't remember? Sure you do.  
It made you real mad! Remember how mad you were, Tyrone?

TYRONE

Yeah... Somethin' – hmmm.

LATER

The same interrogator works on Mickey, with bandaged hand and head.

INTERROGATOR

Mickey, what happened last month?

MICKEY

Last month? Last month we missed chow.  
Or was it last week. Can't remember.

INTERROGATOR

You missed chow last week, Mickey.  
What about last month, what do you  
recall about last month?

MICKEY

Mmm, no more guitar playin'. Hand's  
messed up...

INTERROGATOR

How did it get messed up, Mickey?  
Do you remember?

MICKEY

Alligator bit it. Down on the bayou.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

BUDDY

They messed 'em up pretty good. LSD,  
hypnosis. The next step was electro-  
shock treatment, but...

INT. PSYCH WARD

Tyrone and Mickey sit in wheelchairs.

They stare at the interrogator, who stands next to a big machine.

INTERROGATOR

Tyrone, you're doing quite well, but there seems to be some residual hostility. We're going to get rid of that with this equipment here. A few treatments and you won't be bothered with these false memories. Mickey, the same treatments will make you feel better, too.

Tyrone slowly gets up from his wheelchair.

INTERROGATOR (cont'g)

Whoa, hold it, Tyrone. Stay in your wheelchair.

Tyrone takes Mickey by the arm and pulls him up. The interrogator goes for the door but Tyrone shoves his wheelchair and trips him. He swings the door open and it hits the interrogator's head, knocking him out. Tyrone and Mickey make their way out of the room.

INT. PSYCH WARD

They walk quickly down the hallway and out of the psych ward, taking the marines by surprise. They start running into the main hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL

Tyrone and Mickey run into their old room, yelling at Buddy.

TYRONE

Buddy! Call the CO! Help us!

Taken aback, Buddy hits his call buzzer and stares at the sailors.

NURSE (VO)

Yes, Buddy?

BUDDY

Please send for Captain Anderson!  
(to Tyrone)  
Where the hell have you been?

TYRONE

Section eight! They been druggin'  
us and messin' with our minds, Buddy!  
Just now, that quack was fixin' to  
fry our brains, an' we split!

MICKEY

Man, you wouldn't believe the weird  
visions we've been having!

Buddy tries to absorb their words but is aghast.

LATER

CAPTAIN ANDERSON, the hospital's commanding officer, enters the room.

ANDERSON

What's going on here? Why did you  
call me, Mr. Rodgers? Why are these  
men in your room?

BUDDY

They're trying to avoid electro-  
shock therapy, Captain. Who is the  
psychiatrist who's been working on  
them? What's his name?

ANDERSON

He's not a physician... He's more of  
a technician...

BUDDY

Oh, really? A technician, adminis-  
tering drugs and electric shock? Are  
you all out of your minds?

ANDERSON

He's one of your people.

BUDDY

One of - But these guys are navy! Why  
aren't you in charge of their treatment?

Anderson doesn't answer.

LATER

A MALE NURSE enters and hands forms to Captain Anderson.

ANDERSON

You men will sign these forms, in which you promise never to discuss the attack on your ship or what you experienced in this hospital. Mr. Rodgers, you will also sign your form.

Buddy, stone-faced, signs the forms, as do the sailors.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE

BUDDY

And I kept my mouth shut for years, Grace. Everyone on that ship did. They sent me to the Defense Language School in Monterey. One night, I went to a lecture at the World Affairs Council to hear this Israeli diplomat speak.

CUT TO:

INT. WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL

MERON GORDON stands at the podium, addressing a large crowd.

BUDDY (cont'g – VO)

Consul's name was Meron Gordon. He was criticizing some peace plan. After his talk, we could ask questions. I don't know what got into me, but I was the first one and

Buddy stands up and is handed a microphone.

BUDDY (cont'g)  
Mr. Gordon, is Israel an ally of the  
United States?

GORDON  
We are friends.

BUDDY  
Yes, Mr. Gordon, but officially is  
Israel an ally of the United States?

GORDON  
(uneasy)  
We would like to be.

BUDDY  
If an American ship were attacked in  
the Mediterranean, would you all come  
to our rescue?

Gordon, angry, throws his hand up.

GORDON  
That depends... Next question, please?

He looks around the room. A WAC STAFFER tries to retrieve the mike.

BUDDY  
The next question, Mr. Gordon, is:  
What was Operation Cyanide? How close  
did we come to nuclear war in 1967  
because of you people?

INT. GRACE'S LIVING ROOM

GRACE  
Oh, dear!

BUDDY  
Yeah. That tore the ass out of it,  
if you'll pardon the expression. The  
FBI arrested me in class the next  
morning.



INT. DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

Two FBI AGENTS enter the Arabic classroom and go to the INSTRUCTOR.

INSTRUCTOR

Mr. Rodgers, could you come up here,  
please?

Buddy gets up and goes out of the classroom with the agents.

INT. DLI HALLWAY

The agents push Buddy against the wall and handcuff him.

EXT. MONTEREY AIRPORT – DAY

The agents march Buddy in handcuffs onto a small business jet.

EXT. RUNWAY – DAY

The small jet takes off and heads east.

INT. JET

Buddy sits uncomfortably with his hands cuffed behind him. The agents ignore him.

BUDDY

Where we going?

AGENT

Springfield, Missouri.

BUDDY

Federal prison? With no trial?

AGENT

Nah, we wouldn't do that! You're  
going to visit Uncle Sam's nuthouse.

(grins)

They want to see what makes you talk  
so much.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – NIGHT

A government car enters the huge federal correctional institution.

SIGN

SPRINGFIELD FCI  
<<< PRISON HOSPITAL >>>

The car goes to the right, toward the hospital.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE – NIGHT

The car stops at the entrance. The two FBI agents pull Buddy out.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL RECEPTION

Buddy, hands still cuffed behind him, is pushed against the counter by the agents. The uniformed CLERK sits in front of his typewriter. The agents flash their ID.

CLERK

Who's this lunatic?

AGENT

Bernard David Rodgers.

The clerk consults his clipboard.

CLERK

Oh, yeah.

(starts typing form)

Been expecting you, Bernard.

(to agents)

Okay, gentlemen, we'll take it from here.

AGENT

I need my handcuffs.

CLERK

Right...

He pushes a buzzer. Two MALE NURSES appear with a padded garment adorned with straps and buckles. The agent removes the handcuffs. Immediately, the nurses force Buddy's arms in and pull on the straightjacket, cinching up the back and fastening his arms tightly around his body, quickly buckling the straps behind him.

AGENT

Who's your tailor, Bernard?

The agents smirk and depart. Buddy is in obvious distress.

BUDDY

I haven't peed since California.

CLERK

Yeah, go ahead, Bernard. We'll clean you up in the morning. We do that for you every morning, just about.

BUDDY

Why am I in a straightjacket?

CLERK

(keeps typing form)

Because you're a lunatic, Bernard. A dangerous lunatic. If that weren't the case, you wouldn't be here, would ya? Okay, staff – escort our new guest to his new home.

One of the nurses bends down suddenly and hoists Buddy over his shoulder. Buddy grunts in surprise. The nurse takes two steps.

NURSE

He's pissin' on me!

He drops Buddy on the floor, which he hits hard. He is unable to right himself.

INT. BUDDY'S CELL

In the bright light, Buddy is sleeping on the floor, curled up, in the straightjacket.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – DAY

Government vehicles go in and out of the prison complex.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE

Buddy, still in the straightjacket, sits in front of DR. JOLYON WEST'S desk. West makes some notes in Buddy's file. He looks at Buddy.

DR. WEST

Hello, Bernard. I'm Doctor West.

BUDDY

What kind of doctor are you –

DR. WEST

I'm a psychiatrist, Bernard.

BUDDY

What kind of psychiatrist are you to keep me in a straightjacket, make me wet my pants? What are you afraid of?

INT. BUDDY'S CELL

In the bright light, Buddy sleeps in the straightjacket. Next to him are a plastic cup with a straw sticking out and a dish of Jell-O cubes.

CUT TO:

EXT. NSA HQ – DAY

INT. STEM BRO'S OFFICE

JOHN STEM BRO is at his desk, phone to his ear.

STEM BRO

Yes, is this the Arabic Department?  
This is John Stembro in Maryland. One of our guys is taking a course with you...  
Rodgers. B.D. Rodgers? Uh, huh. He

what? When was that? Three days ago?  
Well, why wasn't I notified? Where  
did they take him?

He hangs up and re-dials.

STEMBRO (cont'g)  
George, John. Buddy's been arrested  
by the FBI in Monterey... No idea...  
Three days ago. Can you call your  
guy in the Bureau and try to find out  
what's going on? I can't believe this!

CUT TO:

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE

Dr. West's office has no windows. Buddy, still in the straight-jacket, sits before  
him. He needs a shave.

BUDDY  
How long have I been here? How many  
days? When are you going to take  
this stinking thing off me? When do  
I get a shower? Why are you so afraid  
of me?

West makes notes as Buddy speaks. He smiles.

DR. WEST  
Very good, Bernard. Best defense, etc.

BUDDY  
What am I defending against? Why  
have you kidnapped me?

DR. WEST  
Bernard, you violated the terms of  
a contract. You broke your promise.

BUDDY  
So sue me! Prosecute me! But put  
me in the most notorious insane asylum

in America? Torture me? What the hell is wrong with you? I'm going to keep asking you: Why are you so afraid of me?

DR. WEST

When are you going to start eating?

BUDDY

I need to lose a few more pounds. Why are you so afraid of me?

DR. WEST

Hunger strikes are not tolerated here. I suggest you start eating.

INT. BUDDY'S CELL

Buddy is pushed into his cell. Another dish of Jell-O cubes awaits him. He ignores it.

INT. FEEDING ROOM

Buddy is pushed and pulled into the feeding room by MALE NURSES. A uniformed GUARD awaits him. The nurses force him to lie on a table. The guard takes a rubber tube and inserts it in Buddy's nostril. Buddy yells and gags and jerks around but his head is held steady by a nurse. The straightjacket makes struggle futile.

GUARD

Better not jump around, Bernard! If I shove this into your lung instead of your stomach, you'll drown. Your choice.

Buddy's resistance fades and the tube is all the way in. The guard hooks it to a bag of dark fluid and squeezes it until it is empty.

GUARD (cont'g)

One down, three to go. I can do this every day, if you want to keep screwing around.

The guard attaches another bag to the hose.

DISSOLVE:

INT. STEMBRO'S OFFICE

The telephone rings. Stembro picks it up.

STEMBRO

John speaking. George – what did you find out?

GEORGE (VO)

Buddy is considered a threat to the national security. He gave some Israeli diplomat a hard time in a public meeting. He mentioned Cyanide.

STEMBRO

Oh, Christ. Where do they have him?

GEORGE (VO)

Undisclosed location. He's hot, John. Just asking about him can kill your career, I'm told.

STEMBRO

What are the charges? When's the arraignment?

GEORGE (VO)

John, there are no charges. He wasn't arrested, he was disappeared. I get the feeling that we may never see him again. Or if we do, it won't be the same happy guy we knew and loved.

STEMBRO

George... I can't believe this is happening. What the hell are they doing to him? Please keep trying to find where he is, George?

GEORGE (VO)

John – didn't you hear me? Buddy is

a non-person. We can't help him now.  
I'm sorry, John. He went too far.

Stembro hangs up his phone, devastated.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – DAY

Deep snow covers the prison grounds.

INT. DR. WEST'S OFFICE

Buddy, now with longer hair and a full beard, is no longer in the straightjacket. He massages his temples with one hand. Dr. West watches him and writes on his clipboard.

DR. WEST

Headache, Bernard?

BUDDY

Some weird visions, Doc. Hard to describe. Really wild.

DR. WEST

Bernard, how did you learn of Operation Cyanide? Who told you?

BUDDY

Operation Cyanide? World War III? Thermonuclear war? Occupying the Middle East and seizing all the oil?

DR. WEST

Yes, Bernard.

BUDDY

After the part where everybody on the ship drowns and Egypt is blamed? Cairo gets nuked? Israel reigns supreme?

DR. WEST



Yes, Bernard.

BUDDY

I'm not familiar with that plan.

INT. FEEDING ROOM

Buddy's hands are cuffed behind him. Two MALE NURSES force him onto the table on his back. They hold him down as the guard covers his face with a cloth and pours water on it. Eventually, Buddy breathes in water and gags violently. He jerks and jumps on the table but is held in place by the nurses. The water keeps going up his nose and he finally goes limp.

LATER

Buddy regains consciousness and starts coughing up water.

GUARD

See how easy it is for me to keep doing this, Bernard? I went a little long on the first one. Sorry about that. You're not supposed to pass out. Let me try it again and I'll be more careful.

The guard holds the cloth in place as he pours another glass of water into Buddy's mouth and nose. Buddy holds his breath as long as he can but must start breathing. He sucks in more water and gags. The guard keeps pouring from the big glass. Buddy goes limp again.

The torturers wait for Buddy to regain consciousness. He doesn't. One of the nurses pushes down hard on his chest several times. Water spurts out of his mouth under the wet cloth. Buddy starts gagging and coughing violently. His body jerks with spasms but he's breathing again.

GUARD (cont'g)

Geez, Bernard. Thought we lost you that time. Guess I better practice some more until I get this right.

He holds the cloth in place and pours another glass of water into Buddy's airway. Buddy's back arches and he strains to escape the flood but as soon as he

breathes in, he's drowning again. He lasts a little longer but eventually passes out.

LATER

As Buddy regains consciousness again, the guard removes the cloth.

GUARD (cont'g)

Hey, Bernard? I need to take a break. You're wearin' me out. I know I'm doin' it wrong and believe me, I'll keep practicing till I get it right. You lie there for a while and think about how I can do it better. I need your advice.

The guard leaves the feeding room. Buddy coughs and gags. The nurses watch him.

INT. OBSERVATION ROOM

The guard enters the room and joins Dr. West, who has been watching.

DR. WEST

I don't want brain damage at this stage.

GUARD

A little brain damage might be the answer, Doc. Just the ticket.

DR. WEST

No. I want information. That's enough for today.

GUARD

You're lettin' him win, Doc.

DR. WEST

Where did you go to medical school?

CUT TO:

EXT. NSA HQ – DAY

Cherry blossoms are on the trees in front of the listening agency.

INT. STEMBRO'S OFFICE

STEMBRO

Hi, John Stembro here, Soviet desk. I've got an odd request to make and a mutual friend thought you just might be able to help... Okay, swell. Well, one of our top Russian linguists has been... detained... by the government, somewhere. I'm afraid it's a very sensitive matter, but I really want to help him in any way I can. His name is Bernard David Rodgers. Date of birth, three seven forty one. Social Security number, six seven seven, five one, nine two eight four. Yes. When? About a year ago. Yes, I know, but anything you can do... Thank you so much. Good bye.

He covers his face with one hand and shakes his head. Hopeless.

DISSOLVE:

INT. DR. WEST'S OFFICE

Dr. West puts his clipboard down and looks at Buddy, who now has very long hair and a shaggy beard.

DR. WEST

Shall we discuss Operation Cyanide today?

BUDDY

Sure. Tell me what you know.

DR. WEST

What, may I ask, keeps you from telling me what I want to know?

BUDDY

What's left to know, Doc? Zionists in the US government sent us to be sunk by the Israelis, who would swear the Egyptians did it, which would enrage the American people so they'd support a genocidal war against Arabs. Three hundred dead Americans is a small price to pay for such a plan. But you want to know who told me and who I told. If I did that, and you believed me, you'd kill me. Whether I tell you or don't tell you, you're going to kill me. But it's been ten years now, Johnson's long dead and no one's going to be punished, so what's the big deal? Why are you so afraid of me, Doc? Does just the mention of the word Cyanide scare the crap out of you people?

Dr. West's eyes narrow.

DR. WEST

What people do you mean?

BUDDY

You have a special interest in Cyanide. This is personal. It's why you haven't killed me yet. You're pretty sure it was one of your own people that told me about the operation. Well, it had to be. I mean, who the hell else would know?

Dr. West stares at this scarecrow who should be dead.

BUDDY (cont'g)

Why don't you go ahead and kill me? I've enjoyed about all of this I can stand. Everyone thinks I'm dead anyway. You can't let me go after all

this time, right? Let that thug do what he's been craving to do for a year. Let's get it over with.

DR. WEST  
Don't you want to live, Bernard?

BUDDY  
You call this living? I'm dead and don't know it.

Dr. West thinks it over.

DR. WEST  
Not yet, Bernard.

LATER

Buddy is gone from Dr. West's office. The guard enters.

GUARD  
You wanna see me, Doc?

DR. WEST  
I am suspending the water procedure on Rodgers. Instead, we'll use sensory deprivation and supplement the hallucinogens with ketamine.

GUARD  
(sullen)  
You're the doctor, but he's about to crack wide open.

INT. BUDDY'S CELL

Buddy sits on the floor, sipping his water, squinting in the harsh and constant light.

Suddenly, the lights go out and it is black.

BUDDY (VO)  
That's better.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – DAY

It is Fall and the trees are vibrant in their dying colors.

INT. DR. WEST'S OFFICE

Buddy, wearing a black hood, is lead into the office and made to sit down by the guard. His hair and beard stick out under the hood, and are turning gray. His skin is very pale. His hands are cuffed behind him.

DR. WEST

Hello, Bernard.

BUDDY

Hi, Doc.

DR. WEST

Well, Bernard –

BUDDY

Hey, Doc – I've had time to do a little thinking, and I finally remembered who you are.

DR. WEST

Really.

BUDDY

You're that agency shrink. Brainwash specialist, right? Mind control? What was the name of that program? Somethin' about mind control. You an' that other one, Gottlieb. Gottlieb an' West. What's your real name, Doc? You're the one who interviewed Jack Ruby and said there was no conspiracy.

Buddy chuckles at the thought. He struggles not to laugh.

Dr. West signals to the guard to take him back. The guard taps Buddy on the shoulder.

BUDDY (cont'g)  
Oop, gotta go, Doc. Sorry.

Buddy gets up and is pulled out the door by the guard.

CUT TO:

EXT. BETHESDA SALOON – NIGHT

Wintertime in Maryland. Snow is on the street. PEOPLE enter this Irish-looking pub.

INT. BETHESDA SALOON

Sitting at a table, having a cocktail, is John Stembro. The WAITRESS puts a fresh drink on the table with a napkin under it. He nods as she takes away his empty glass. He looks at an attractive WOMAN at the bar as he picks up the glass and sips. The napkin has stuck to the glass and as he realizes it, he notices something written on the napkin. He removes it and reads

BDR - Springfield

Stembro stands up, puts on his overcoat and hat, puts cash on the table and downs the rest of his drink. He departs.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPRINGFIELD RURAL ROAD – DAY

A dark Cadillac limo comes to a stop at a stop sign. It resumes speed and passes a sign, partially covered by snow:

SPRINGFIELD FCI  
ONE MILE

We follow from the intersection. We get a little closer. Up ahead is a slower car. The limo slows for the car ahead of it, which slows even more. The limo starts around to pass but the lead car cuts it off and stops sideways, blocking the road. The limo stops and we come in right behind.

John Stembro gets out of the rear car and goes to the limo, taps on the rear window with a handgun. The window rolls down. We see Dr. West inside. Stembro leans down.

STEMBRO

Louis Jolyon West? You have one of my men. He's leaving today.

He reaches through the window and opens the door. He gets in and rolls the window up. The three cars continue toward the prison.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – DAY

The three cars enter the prison and go to the right, toward the mental hospital. They all park in the staff area. Eight MEN get out of the sedans and Stembro and Dr. West get out of the limo. They go to the entrance and inside.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION

A GUARD is surprised by the visitors, who are not happy. Dr. West approaches the guard.

DR. WEST

Bring Bernard Rodgers immediately.

GUARD 2

Yes, sir.

He leaves.

LATER

The men wait impatiently by reception. The guard leads Buddy, sick and dirty and unrecognizable with shaggy gray hair and beard. He cannot see in the blinding daylight and he holds his hands out to keep from hitting something. He squints tightly to keep the light out.

STEMBRO

Buddy? Is that you? Jesus.

BUDDY

Who's that – John?

Stembro takes Buddy's arm and holds on to him.

BUDDY (cont'g)

Is Dr. West here?



DR. WEST

I'm here, Bernard.

BUDDY

Hit him.

Stembro punches Dr. West and knocks him down.

BUDDY (cont'g)

Okay, now burn this place down.

STEMBRO

Not today, Buddy. We gotta go now.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD FCI – DAY

The nine NSA men leave the building, two holding onto Buddy. They put him in one of the cars and they all depart quickly.

INT. NSA CAR

Stembro wraps Buddy in a blanket. Buddy keeps his eyes closed.

BUDDY

Well! That didn't take long.

STEMBRO

Don't mention it. You were thanking us, right?

BUDDY

Is this an official rescue? Or are you guys on days off?

STEMBRO

This never happened, Buddy. Sorry.

Buddy nods, his eyes still closed from the glare off the snow.

BUDDY

Anybody got some sunglasses?

One of the agents takes off his sunglasses and gives them to Buddy. He puts them on.

EXT. SPRINGFIELD AIRPORT – DAY

The two cars drive up to a large business jet. They get out of the cars and lead Buddy, wrapped in a blanket, up the jet's stairs. Its engines are going and it immediately taxis away from the apron, out to the runway and quickly accelerates and takes off.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. DC DINER – NIGHT

This is the diner depicted in Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks." There are three people at the counter, two MEN and a WOMAN, just as in the painting. We close on the nearest man, who has his back to us. It is Buddy, now clean-shaven and well-groomed. He is still very pale in the diner's light. Snow falls gently.

INT. DC DINER

Buddy drinks coffee at the counter, deep in thought. John Stembro enters the diner and sits next to Buddy at the counter. The cook gives him coffee. Buddy nods at Stembro.

STEMBRO

Lookin' good, man.

BUDDY

Yeah. Life is good.

STEMBRO

Whaddya gonna do with all that back pay? Two years! And three months R&R.

BUDDY

I'm going out to the Coast. Get some sun.

STEMBRO

That'll be good. You got a serious Vitamin D deficiency, for sure.

BUDDY

There's a guy out there, a producer.  
He wants to make a movie about what  
happened to us. Wants me to be the  
technical advisor on it.

STEMBRO

You're not serious.

Buddy glances at Stembro.

BUDDY

I'm serious.

STEMBRO

You tell him you want your money up  
front, because that movie will not  
happen. In Hollywood?

Buddy is quiet for a while. They both drink their coffee.

BUDDY

He knows there's a risk involved.

STEMBRO

Oh, please!  
(drinks coffee)  
You got your gun?

BUDDY

Sure.

STEMBRO

Don't leave home without it. 'Cause  
I can't keep bustin' you out of the  
Springfield nuthouse.

EXT. DC DINER – NIGHT

As the snow falls, we see John Stembro get up, pat Buddy's back, and leave.

FADE OUT

