

Confessions of a spy

from Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington DC

Sixteen years after the event, one former US air force enlisted man has come forward to "confess" his involvement in the 1967 war. According to this source, who must remain anonymous, he and eight other American photo-reconnaissance personnel were flown to Israel's Negev desert on 4 June 1967 - just one day before Israel launched its devastating attacks on Arab forces. That attack set the stage for Israel's capture of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as the Golan Heights and the Sinai.

The air force reconnaissance technicians were joined later that day at a deserted airfield south-east of the large Israeli airbase at Beersheba by four US air force RF4C jets, modified versions of the F-4 Phantoms, flown by US air force pilots. The camouflaged jets were painted over with Israeli markings.

From 5 June, the day of Israel's attack, these American planes and personnel were used in coordination with the Israeli military to provide what the source terms "incredibly useful" damage assessment and battle formation information for the Israelis, allowing them to have considerable reconnaissance information they could not have obtained on their own. According to the informant, Israelis actually ran the cameras and communications gear from the backseats of the twin-seat RF4Cs. Back at the base, American technicians worked closely with the Israelis, though the Israelis themselves did all of the photo interpretation of the film which was brought back.

This entire effort was necessary,

according to the former airman, because the Israelis did not have the capability or equipment at that time to attempt such sophisticated reconnaissance operations on their own. The US RF4Cs were equipped with sophisticated and highly secret cameras including forward and side-looking radar. In addition, only the American planes were able to fly at night and were fully equipped with infra-red facilities to trace movements of Arab troops and armour. In effect, the American military personnel were sent on a secret spy mission working with the Israeli military against the Arabs.

This airman says that he and the eight other American reconnaissance experts who were involved in this secret mission were based at Upper Heyford, near Oxford, England, but the planes and pilots came from a base in Germany. They were roused from their sleep on 4 June and told they were going to Moron in Spain for a training exercise. But when they got to Moron they were told they were being ordered to Israel to provide support for the Israelis. They were also told it was top secret and they must never discuss what they were about to participate in. The nine US air force personnel were issued civilian passports and clothing and then given manuals printed by Aero-Tech Corporation of Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas. If anything went wrong, they were told to say only that they were civilian contract employees hired by the Israeli government.

Charges of direct American military assistance for Israel during the '67 war were first raised earlier this year by Stephen Green in his

new book *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel*. It was Green who orchestrated recent press interviews with the former American airman. According to Green, the American night reconnaissance flights on 8-9 June made it possible for the Israeli military to "accurately assess the Jordanian and Egyptian strength that remained and thus facilitated decisions about which units could be sent north to undertake the attack upon Syria, and exactly when these units could be safely moved".

Green has concluded that the authorisation for this use of American military personnel must have come from President Lyndon Johnson and his national security adviser, Walt Rostow, but so far he has been unable to provide any direct evidence. Whoever authorised the mission took tremendous risks, according to Green. "At a time when Arab soldiers and civilians were dying by the thousands under an Israeli *blitzkrieg*, one can imagine the revenge that would have been taken against Americans across the Middle East" had the truth become known.

Meanwhile, the state department continues to refuse to comment about what it now terms a "diplomatic exchange" that has taken place between the US government and the Jordanian government on this matter. A cable went from the state department to the American embassy in Amman early in March instructing the ambassador how to respond to the charges of American military participation in the '67 war that have been headlined in Jordan.

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