

U.S. 'spying' for Israel

By Mark Bruzonski
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SIXTEEN years after the event, one former U.S. air force enlisted man has come forward to "confess" his involvement in the 1967 Arab-Israeli 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 June 4, 1967, just one day before Israel launched its devastating attacks on Arab forces in what has been described as the largest co-ordinated air attack ever undertaken in the Mid-east.

That attack set the stage for Israel's capture of east Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as the Golan Heights and 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 U.S. air force RF4C jets, modified versions of F-4 Phantom jet fighters, flown by U.S. air force pilots. The camouflaged jets were painted over with Israeli markings — Israeli air force tail numbers and a white Star of David on a blue background on the rear fuselage.

Beginning on June 5, the day of Israel's attack, these American planes and personnel were used in co-ordination with the Israeli military to provide, what the source terms "incredibly useful" damage assessment and battle formation information to the Israelis allowing them to have considerable reconnaissance information they otherwise could not have obtained on their own.

According to the American airman, Israelis actually ran the cameras and communications gear flying in 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. But the pilots, the planes, and the ground technicians were all part of the U.S. air force.

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 American RF4Cs were equipped with highly 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 infrared facili-

ties 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.

The one airman who is the source of this story says that he and the eight other American reconnaissance experts, who were involved in this secret mission, were roused from their sleep on June 4 and told they were going to Moron, Spain, for a training exercise. They were all with the 17th tactical reconnaissance squadron of the 66th tactical reconnaissance wing based at Upper Heyford, outside Oxford, in England.

But when they got to Moron they were told they were being ordered to go to Israel on a secret mission 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.

They were issued civilian passports and given manuals in plastic binders 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. Then they exchanged their military clothing for plain civilian fatigues.

It is now being assumed by those who have been investigating these charges that the U.S. air force pilots who came from a U.S. airbase at Ramstein, West Germany, were given similar instructions.

Charges of direct American military participation in the 1967 war on Israel's side were made by some of the Arab governments at the time. But those charges were of direct American combat involvement, not photo reconnaissance which was in fact what the Israelis needed most.

The charges of American military help with photo reconnaissance were first raised earlier this year by author Stephen Green in his new book *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel*, published by Morrow in February in the U.S. and now by Faber in England.

It was Green, hoping to add further credibility to his book and increase sales, who orchestrated the recent private press interview with the former American airman who was one of his principal sources.

The interview took place Last Monday with correspondents from CBS News, United Press International, and the Christian Science Monitor. News reports were expected to begin to appear in the U.S. later this week.

Early in February NBC evening news did briefly mention the charges raised by the Green book — itself the result of more than 100 freedom of information requests and nearly three years of research effort by the author. And UPI did do a story on the book, focusing on these charges at that time. But only now has Green been able to bring forward a live source who was a direct participant and seems fully credible.

Green feels that the Israelis did not need even the American photo reconnaissance help to win the six-day war. But, he writes, it did substantially help them to achieve "certain territorial objectives within a very finite, limited time."

The American night reconnaissance on June 8 and 9, Green says, 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 Mid-east" had the truth become known.

Meanwhile, it has been further learned that the State Department continues to refuse to comment about what it now terms a "diplomatic exchange" that has taken place between the U.S. government and the Jordanian government on this matter. A cable went from the State Department to the American embassy in Amman about 10 days ago instructing the ambassador how to respond to the charges of American military participation in the 1967 war that had appeared in Jordanian newspapers. It is still uncertain whether there have been any "official" demands for explanations from the Jordanian or other Arab governments.

Yet this week's revelations from the involved American airman, coupled with King Hussein's exceedingly negative comments in a major front-page interview featured in the *New York Times*, could have serious ramifications on further developments in the Mid-east.