

Lt. Colonel Kislev passed the attack authorization and instruction to establish contact with the torpedo boats in the vicinity, to Regional Control 501 (on Band 186) ³⁶. The control unit passed on the instructions to the IAF planes.

The two "Mirage" aircraft reached the ship at approximately 1400 hours. The formation leader, Captain Spector, descended to a height of 3000 feet and circled the vessel twice; his number two executed one identification run. These runs revealed to the pilots that the ship was not an Israeli vessel since she did not have the identifying markings (a white cross on a red background). The ship was colored battleship grey, had a foremast, one smokestack and two guns on her bow. No flag or other identifying sign was discerned. The formation leader reported this to the torpedo boats and Control and then the aircraft received permission to attack.

At 1400 hours the "Mirage" planes attacked the "Liberty" and executed four strafing runs, firing only with their guns since they had no other ordnance available. Good hits were scored by the strafing runs. Damage could be discerned on the body of the ship and fire broke out on her portside. ³⁷ According to the commander of the "Liberty", the American flag, which was flying on the mast during the attack, was also knocked down. ³⁸

While the "Mirage" attack was proceeding, the Commander of Regional Control 501 experienced momentary doubts as to the identity of the vessel. It appeared that with the start of the attack, when the commander of Regional Control 501 informed the Navy representative at Regional Control of the ongoing operation the latter was not yet aware of the assault and immediately called Fleet Operations Control Center. Any doubt was immediately removed when the Navy representative at Regional Control announced that it was "okay". ³⁹ The entire clarification lasted a short time and in effect the attack was not interrupted at all. Meanwhile, Lt. Colonel Kisslev directed an additional aircraft formation to the ship. This was a pair of Super-Mystere aircraft ("Royal" formation) on its way to the Mitla Pass. Control informed Lt. Kisslev that this formation was armed with napalm, not effective for attacking ships. But in spite of this fact he instructed the formation to join the attack with "whatever they have". ⁴⁰

The "Royal" formation passed over the ship at a height of 15,000 feet, as the previous formation was executing its last strafing run. The formation executed two attack runs with napalm, and one napalm bomb struck the ship.