



H-080-1: Operation “No Name” –The U.S. Navy in the Lebanon Crisis, 1982-84

About the author: In the summer of 1976, Midshipman Fourth Class Sam Cox, like other plebes at the U.S. Naval Academy, was required to read two articles from the front page every day and expect to be quizzed by upperclassmen. With the Lebanese Civil War and a U.S. non-combatant evacuation (NEO) underway, he opted to always read articles on Lebanon, with the survival strategy of building up enough expertise so that in the event he didn't have time to read an entire article, he could still bamboozle his way past any upperclassman and not get “fried.” His interest in Lebanon continued such that on his second deployment, on board USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69), he was the designated Air Wing SEVEN (CVW-7) intelligence “expert” on Lebanon. This resulted in him being selected to be the strike intelligence briefer for the series of retaliatory strikes that were planned, but not executed, against terrorist targets in Lebanon in the aftermath of the suicide bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in October 1983. Earlier in that deployment, he had prepared and presented a “Who’s Who in Lebanon” brief for the air wing. Immediately upon conclusion, the 12MC intercom lit up with, “CVIC, Ready 3. So, who are the “good guys?” His point, exactly.

Part 1: Background–Lebanon 1958-81

Operation Blue Bat: First U.S. Intervention in Lebanon, 1958

At 1500 on 15 July 1958, 1,700 fully armed and combat-ready marines of Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/2 stormed ashore at Red Beach, about four miles south of Beirut near Beirut International Airport (BIA). According to the Marine Corps history, the assault force was “forced to pick their way gingerly through beach obstacles presented by bikini-clad sunbathers and vast numbers of soft drink and ice cream vendors.” (The Lebanese capital city, Beirut, was once known as the “Paris of the Middle East.”) By the time the U.S. intervention in Lebanon by 14,000 U.S. Marines and Army personnel was over in October 1958, no U.S. personnel had been killed in combat, and the mission of stabilizing the situation in Lebanon had been accomplished—for the time being. During the next major U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1982–84, the U.S. Marines (and U.S. Navy) would not be so lucky.

Operation Blue Bat was the first U.S. military intervention in Arab lands since the Barbary Wars of the early 1800s. It was also the first test of the “Eisenhower Doctrine,” which declared that the U.S. would intervene to support governments threatened by “International Communism.” The U.S. intervention

was requested by the pro-Western president of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun, who was a Maronite Christian. At the time, Lebanon was threatening to descend into a full-scale civil war between Christian and Muslim factions, with the Muslims being egged on (and aided and abetted) by Egypt and Syria. Neither Egypt nor Syria were Communist, but they had become increasingly aligned with and supported by the Soviet Union.

For centuries, what is now known as Lebanon was about a dozen provinces within the Ottoman Empire, traditionally part of "Greater Syria." With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, France was given a mandate over what became Lebanon, and over Syria as well. (The British had the misfortune to be given the mandate over what became Palestine, and later, Israel). The French then proceeded to unify Lebanon, to the consternation of the Syrians who to this day still consider Lebanon to be part of Syria. However, when France was overrun by Nazi Germany in 1940, the French effectively lost political control and Lebanon declared independence in 1943, which was formally recognized by France at the end of World War II.

In 1943, the Lebanese established a government that ostensibly shared power among the three major religious groups—the Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims—but heavily favored the Christians (thanks to continued French influence). Each of the various religious groups had multiple factions within it, and there were a multitude of other ethnic/religious minorities as well, such as the Druze and Alawites. For example, among the Christians were Maronite Catholics (the largest group) as well as Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and even some Protestants. (These were the remnants of the Christian "Crusader states" that were driven into the sea by the Arabs between 1000 and 1200 C.E., when the Crusades failed).

The unwritten Lebanese "National Pact" of 1943 was that the president would always be Christian (invariably Maronite), the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim.

Other positions were allocated along religious and ethnic lines. For example, the position of chief of staff of the army was allocated to the Druze minority (not a bad choice given the traditional martial characteristics of the Druze). Each of the groups tended to be dominated by particular families, with political leadership more or less hereditary within the groups. (To understand how Lebanese politics worked, watching the movie *The Godfather* would help.)

This "power sharing" worked for a while when the populations of the three major groups were roughly equal. However, by the mid-1950s the Muslim population had grown much faster than the Christian population, particularly among the Shia. Nevertheless, the political power structure continued to favor the minority Christians heavily, while the Shia in particular became increasingly economically deprived and politically marginalized.

Over time, the major groups in Lebanon, and most of the groups within the major groups, developed their own armed militias, over which the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) had no control. The militias operated much like street gangs, except that they were armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). The result was predictable, and by 1958 the whole system was at risk of falling apart, with Syria threatening to invade on behalf of the Muslims, and a couple thousand Christian and Muslims killed in inter-factional fighting.

On 14 July 1958, Lebanese President Chamoun formally requested assistance from the U.S. and the United Kingdom, and the intervention was approved by President Eisenhower. Admiral James L. Holloway (the future CNO's father) was placed in charge of Operation Blue Bat, as Commander in Chief, Specified Command Middle East (CINCSPCOM). Admiral Holloway's "day job" was Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (CINCNEA—forerunner of CINCUSNAVEUR) in London. Admiral Holloway embarked on the command ship USS *Taconic* (AGC-17) for the duration of the operation.

More than 70 U.S. ships and 40,000 sailors were committed to Operation Blue Bat, under the tactical control of the commander of U.S. Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral Charles R. "Cat" Brown, then headquartered at Villefranche-sur-Mer, France, but underway for the operation on heavy cruiser USS *Des Moines* (CA-134). (During the 1956 Suez Crisis between Israel, Egypt, Britain, and France, CNO Arleigh Burke sent a message to Vice Admiral Brown, "Situation tense; prepare for imminent hostilities." Brown responded, "Am prepared for imminent hostilities, but whose side are we on?" This quote does not appear in Naval Academy's "Reef Points.")

In addition to *Taconic* and *Des Moines*, the U.S. Navy force committed to Blue Bat included attack carriers USS *Saratoga* (CVA-60), USS *Essex* (CV-9), and USS *Wasp* (CVA-18) along with guided-missile heavy cruiser *Boston* (CAG-1), and two destroyer squadrons. Of note, embarked on *Essex* was U.S. Naval Academy Midshipman Robert McFarlane, who would play a key role in the 1983 Lebanon Crisis.

By chance, there were three marine battalion landing teams (BLTs) afloat in the Mediterranean at the time, so the response was very quick. BLT 2/2 went ashore at Red Beach near Beirut on 15 July, followed the next day by BLT 3/6. BLT 1/8 went ashore at Yellow Beach near the port of Juniyah, a few miles north of Beirut, in the predominantly Christian area of Lebanon. The approximately 5,700 marines were later joined by about 8,500 U.S. Army airborne and infantry troops

The presence of more than 14,000 U.S. combat troops in Lebanon did in fact deter Syrian intervention (for the time being) and did bring about sufficient stability such that national elections were held on 23 September and the violence abated. The marines and U.S. Army were out of Lebanon by 18 October 1958.

The Destabilization of Lebanon by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Black September, 1970

On 5 June 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt in what became known as the "Six-Day War." The war was a debacle for the Arabs, with Egypt losing the entire Sinai Peninsula as the Israelis advanced all the way to the Suez Canal. Jordan made the mistake of honoring the defense treaty with Egypt and launching attacks on Israel, only to be defeated and driven out of the "West Bank" (historically Judea and Samaria) and Israel regaining all of Jerusalem. Syria jumped in on the fifth day, resulting in Syrian forces being driven off the Golan Heights. Palestinian "fedayeen" guerilla/terrorist groups were also driven out of the Sinai and the West Bank, with the largest group, Yasser Arafat's Fatah, taking refuge in Jordan.

(Of note, on 8 June 1967, the U.S. Navy intelligence collection ship USS *Liberty* [AGTR-5] in international waters just north of the Sinai was strafed and rocketed by two Israeli jets, napalmed by two more Israeli jets, and then machine-gunned and hit by one torpedo (of five fired) by three Israeli patrol boats. This resulted in 34 U.S. personnel dead and 171 wounded, and a Medal of Honor for Captain William McGonagle for saving his ship while severely wounded. Israel apologized for the attack.)

After the Six-Day War, various Palestinian groups in Jordan fell under the nominal control of the umbrella Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) under Yasser Arafat. These groups continued to conduct cross-border attacks into Israel, provoking Israeli counter-strikes into Jordan, which resulted in deaths of Jordanian civilians in addition to Palestinian terrorists. The large Palestinian presence seriously affected the stability of Jordan as these groups were increasingly defiant of Jordanian authority.

On 6 September 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked two civilian airliners, an American airliner (TWA 741) and a Swiss airliner, and forced them to land at Dawson's Field in Jordan. The PFLP attempt to hijack an Israeli El Al

airliner the same day failed, and one hijacker was killed and the other captured (Leila Khaled, who became a Palestinian folk hero).

The next day, the PFLP hijacked a British airliner to Dawson's Field and a U.S. Boeing 747 (Pan Am 93) to Cairo. The passengers were taken off the planes (and all eventually released), but the PFLP blew up all the aircraft in Jordan in spectacular fashion in front of invited international media on 12 September (the PFLP had previously blown up the Pan Am 747 in Cairo, the first 747 ever lost). The event was a huge embarrassment to Jordan. King Hussein decided he'd had enough, and ordered the Jordanian army to expel the PLO and associated groups from Jordan.

Between 16 and 27 September 1970, the Jordanian army engaged in a short but bloody war with the PLO, and also defeated a Syrian attempt to intervene with armored forces on behalf of the Palestinians (with tanks with "Palestine Liberation Army" markings). About 3,400 Palestinians were killed (and 120 Syrian tanks and armored vehicles destroyed), with the result that the PLO was expelled from Jordan, mostly taking refuge in Lebanon, where they then proceeded to destabilize that country. This battle became known to the Palestinians as "Black September," and is the origin of the name of the Palestinian terrorist group that killed 11 Israeli athletes and coaches and one West German police officer at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

The U.S. Sixth Fleet went on alert in response to the PFLP hijackings, and on 8 September President Richard Nixon ordered (or authorized, depending on the account) U.S. forces to bomb PFLP positions in Jordan. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird did not carry this out, principally at the behest of the British, since the hostage passengers of British and other nationalities were then still at risk.

Civil War in Lebanon, 1975

In 1975, the whole Lebanese "house of cards" governmental structure unraveled, aggravated by the

presence of the large numbers of Palestinian refugees and the PLO, and the country descended into civil war. The once beautiful city of Beirut became a shooting gallery as rival militias carved up the city, including creating a "Green Line," at which neither Christians nor Muslims dared cross to the other side.

In early 1976, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad brokered a cease-fire between the fighting Lebanese factions, but began covertly moving Syrian troops into Lebanon, again ostensibly as the "Palestine Liberation Army." In May 1976, Lebanese President Suleiman Frangieh was defeated for reelection (by another Maronite Christian), but refused to step down and requested Syrian intervention. The Syrians duly obliged with 12,000 troops in June 1976. This also resulted in Christians fighting among themselves, as well as a Christian militia massacre of more than 1,000 Palestinians in a refugee camp.

The period after 1976 was incredibly complex as the Syrians were opposed to the PLO (i.e., on the same side as Israel), as they tried to hunt down cells of Sunni Muslim religious extremists (Muslim Brotherhood and others) that were a threat to the secular Syrian regime. Long story short, the upshot is that the Bekaa Valley (the eastern half of the northern two thirds of Lebanon) effectively became Syrian territory.

Operation Fluid Drive: Lebanon Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO), July 1976

In July 1976, the protracted factional fighting became so intense that President Gerald Ford gave orders for the U.S. Sixth Fleet to execute Operation Fluid Drive, a non-combatant evacuation, because fighting had disrupted the original plan to evacuate by road convoy to Damascus, Syria. The Sixth Fleet flagship, guided-missile light cruiser USS *Little Rock* (CLG-4), with Vice Admiral Frederick C. Turner embarked, took station off Beirut. USS *America* (CV-66), provided air cover.

On 20 July 1976, *LCU-1645* from dock landing ship *USS Spiegel Grove* (LSD-32) entered Beirut harbor and went alongside the pier. Dockside security (believe it or not) was provided by the PLO and leftist Palestinians, who at this point were fighting the Syrians. *LCU-1645* took aboard 267 evacuees (110 U.S. citizens and 157 foreign nationals), and disembarked them to *Spiegel Grove* lying three miles off shore. *Little Rock* came alongside to greet the evacuees, and then a five-ship U.S. convoy took them to Pireaus, Greece, escorted by frigate *USS Connode* (FF-1056) and shadowed by three Soviet warships, including the *Kara*-class guided missile cruiser *Kerch*. An additional 155 Americans and 145 foreign nationals were taken out by sea on amphibious transport dock *USS Coronado* (LPD-11) on 27 July.

The inter-factional fighting and politics in Lebanon between 1976 and 1982 were incredibly convoluted and beyond the scope of this paper, as is the 1978 Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon, which resulted in the establishment of a Maronite Christian “Free Lebanon State” buffer strip along the northern Israeli border. Suffice it to say that by 1982, the PLO had become essentially a law unto itself, occupying much of southern Lebanon, outside any control of the Lebanese government, and the “buffer” wasn’t serving as much of a buffer, nor was the United Nations Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) of much use. The PLO reverted to their old ways, conducting numerous cross-border attacks through UNIFIL “observers” and the Free State into northern Israel (Galilee), which resulted in Israeli counter-strikes into Lebanon.

Part 2: Paved With Good Intentions—Lebanon 1982

Operation Peace for Galilee: Israeli Invasion, June 1982

In June 1982, the “Abu Nidal” Palestinian terrorist group attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom in London, which proved a “last straw” for the Israeli government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. On 6 June 1982, Israel

launched Operation Peace for Galilee, a full-scale invasion of southern Lebanon. The Israeli attack quickly achieved catastrophic success, driving right through the UNIFIL force (some of whom were killed), and through some Syrian army forces, with the Lebanese Armed Forces pretty much nowhere to be found. In a matter of days the Israeli army was on the heights around Beirut, with the remnants of the PLO (and thousands of Palestinian refugees) surrounded in Beirut. Israeli jets pounded PLO positions in the already ruined city of Beirut, for which Israel received widespread condemnation (both outside and within Israel, as the war was not popular with many Israelis).

Operation Mole Cricket: Largest Air Battle Since Korea, June 1982

One major problem for the Israelis during Operation Peace for Galilee was that the Syrians had previously moved a significant number of highly lethal SA-6 surface-to-air missile batteries into the Bekaa Valley, where they were a threat to Israeli aircraft striking Palestinian positions on the western side of Lebanon.

During the 1973 “Yom Kippur” Middle East War (a surprise attack by Egypt against Israel, joined in by Syria) the Israelis lost 109 aircraft in 18 days to Egyptian and Syrian air defenses that were vastly superior to those deployed in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Soviet-supplied SA-2, SA-3, and the newer, mobile SA-6 had proved very lethal. Israel had lost 50 aircraft to the Syrian air defenses. However, the Israelis had learned much from these losses, such that between 1973 and 1982 they had acquired systems and developed tactics expressly designed to defeat a Soviet integrated air defense system.

On 9 June 1982, the Israeli air force executed Operation Mole Cricket, a preemptive strike against the Syrian SA-6 batteries in the Bekaa Valley, which would also result in the largest (and most lopsided) air-to-air engagement in the world since the Korean War.

The Israeli E-2C Hawkeye squadron, formed in 1978 and configured for air-to-air refueling, along with a Boeing 707 configured for electronic-countermeasures and extensive Israeli signals intelligence capability, would prove crucial to the operation. The Israelis also used IAI Scout remotely piloted vehicles (RPV) for reconnaissance of the Bekaa. Some Scout RPVs were stationed over Syrian airfields (undetected by the Syrians) to monitor Syrian air force reaction.

The day began with Israeli Kfir and A-4 Skyhawks conducting close air support along the west coast of Lebanon. Then, the Israelis sent in a wave of Mastiff drones to stimulate the Syrian missile battery radars. The Syrians took the bait, mistaking the drones for actual aircraft. The first wave of 96 F-15 and F-16 aircraft went in providing cover for dozens of F-4 Phantom II jets firing AGM-78 Standard and AGM-45 Shrike anti-radiation missiles (ARMs). The combination of ARMs and jamming resulted in 56 Syrian SA-6 missiles fired for no effect. A second wave of more than 90 F-15/F-16 jets provided cover as the missile batteries were bombed. Over the course of this and the next day, 29 of 30 Syrian missile batteries were destroyed, as well as most of a Syrian armored brigade.

The Syrians initially recalled their combat air patrol when the Israeli attack began, then decided to fight, launching about 100 MiG-23 Flogger and MiG-21 Fishbed fighters and even some SU-20 Fitter fighter-bombers. The Israelis successfully jammed the Syrian ground-control intercept controllers upon which the Syrian pilots were totally dependent. In addition, Syrian radar-warning and electronic countermeasures were completely ineffective against the Israeli AIM-7F Sparrow and AIM-9L air-to-air missiles. Soviet military journals would claim that 67 Israeli aircraft were shot down. The reality is that two Israeli F-15s were damaged in the course of shooting down between 82 and 86 Syrian aircraft.

Lebanon NEO, June 1982

The first U.S. carrier to arrive in the eastern Mediterranean during the 1982 Lebanon War was the USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67), which had just come through the Suez Canal on a return transit to Norfolk following an Indian Ocean deployment. At the time, the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69), in the Mediterranean since January, was conducting the first port visit by a nuclear-powered carrier to Monaco. *IKE* departed Monaco on 16 June and was ordered to proceed to the eastern Mediterranean and prepare to support a potential NEO from Lebanon as the fighting closed in on Beirut. *IKE* relieved the *JFK* on 17 June, enabling *JFK* to resume her transit to Norfolk.

On 17 June, Amphibious Squadron FOUR (PHIBRON 4), under the command of Commodore (Captain) Richard F. White, with the 32nd Marine Amphibious Unit (32nd MAU) embarked, relieved PHIBRON 8/34th MAU as Task Force 61/62 in the Mediterranean. PHIBRON 4 included USS *Guam* (LPH-9), USS *Nashville* (LPD-13), USS *Hermitage* (LSD-34), USS *Manitowoc* (LST-1180), and USS *Saginaw* (LST-1188). Two days earlier, PHIBRON 4/32nd MAU had been placed on three-hour alert to conduct an evacuation of Lebanon by sea as the road from Beirut to Damascus was no longer passable due to heavy shelling and Beirut International Airport was closed for the same reason.

PHIBRON 4/32nd MAU received orders to execute a noncombatant evacuation operation at a date to be determined, with air cover to be provided by CVW-7 on *IKE*. There were more than 2,500 American citizens in Lebanon, and the U.S. force was directed to plan for 5,000 evacuees. Intensive planning ensued in both the PHIBRON and the *IKE* Battle Group for all possible contingencies, although the Israelis had already largely solved the potential Syrian air threat problem. With Israeli aircraft constantly bombing Beirut, the port of Juniyah, about five miles north of Beirut, was selected for the evacuation point. (Of note, Israeli jets would fly over water before turning toward shore to attack targets in Lebanon, squawking CVW-7 IFF codes as they did so). After several days waiting for execute orders, the NEO finally commenced on 24 June.

As ordered, at 0800 24 June, the first utility landing craft (LCU) pulled dockside in Juniyah to commence evacuating several thousand people. No one was there. Eventually evacuees began to trickle in aboard busses overloaded with too much luggage. By the end of the day, only 580 people had shown up to be lifted by the LCUs to *Nashville* and *Hermitage*. In the delay between the alert order and execution, the Israelis had halted their advance, and a period of relative calm ensued. This did not cause cancellation of the NEO, but it did cause many potential evacuees to change their mind and opt to stay in Lebanon. Those who did choose to leave were taken to Larnaca, Cyprus, for further transportation by air.

IKE departed for a 30 June port visit in Palma and was relieved by *USS Independence (CV-62)* on the way, before then returning to Norfolk. The PHIBRON/MAU remained off Lebanon. Thus ended the great 1982 Lebanon NEO (I don't believe it was ever dignified with a name).

The Multi-National Force (MNF) in Lebanon, August 1982

On 23 June, TF-61/62 was placed on a two-hour alert so that Marine helicopter squadron HM-261 could provide transportation for the White House special envoy, Ambassador Philip Habib, and the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Morris Draper, to conduct "shuttle diplomacy" between Beirut, Damascus, and Tel Aviv in an effort to bring about an end to the conflict. This would become known as the "Cammie Cab Service" and HM-261 flew 62 diplomatic shuttle missions over the next four months.

During July and into August, the Israelis were in a dilemma. The PLO was trapped inside Beirut and was being pounded by air. However, the constant TV coverage of Israeli aircraft bombing the city was turning international opinion against Israel and resulting in considerable criticism inside Israel as well. However, the Israeli army had absolutely no appetite for going into Beirut and engaging in building-to-building urban combat to root out the PLO, with the

inevitably high casualties both to Israeli soldiers and Lebanese civilians (many of whom had no love for the PLO either). As it was, the war would eventually result in 654 Israeli combat deaths between 1982 and 1985, which for Israel was a high cost for what quickly became an unpopular war.

As the Israelis besieged and bombed Beirut for seven weeks, Ambassador Habib's diplomatic effort finally paid off with a cease-fire agreement that went into effect on 21 August. Under the terms of the agreement, the Israelis would stay out of Beirut and cease bombing while a multi-national force (MNF) was formed to evacuate the PLO (willingly) from Beirut and provide security afterward. Most of the PLO "fighters" would be taken to Tunisia by ship, and some would go to Tripoli in the far north of Lebanon, north of the Christian area, also by ship. A large number of Palestinian civilians would remain in refugee camps in Beirut.

Four nations agreed to contribute military forces to the MNF: the United States, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Initially, the MNF was arbitrarily capped at 800 U.S., 800 French, and 800 Italians (a smaller contingent of British would come later). The mission of the MNF was initially to ensure the removal of the PLO from Beirut, but would quickly incur a massive case of "mission creep." Also, there would be no single commander of the MNF. Each participating country commanded its own contingent under its own national rules of engagement.

In another what appeared to be a positive development, the Lebanese National Assembly elected Bashir Gemayel as president. Gemayel was the scion of a prominent Maronite Christian family, with pro-Western views and considered friendly to Israel (which made him a traitor in the eyes of many Lebanese). Between 1976 and 1982, the Syrians had worn out their welcome, especially with the Maronites, even though they had been invited in. During that period, the Maronites had developed an increasingly cooperative relationship with Israel. Bashir was also the leader of the "Lebanese Forces"

(LF) militia (not to be confused with the actual Lebanese Armed Forces).

The LF was the armed militia of the Phalange Party, the largest Christian political party. Gemayel had united the various Christian militias by force. (Of note, Lebanese presidents were elected by the National Assembly, not by popular vote. By the 1943 National Pact, the Assembly was stacked in favor of the Christians over Muslims by a 6:5 ratio, even though by the 1980s the Christians were only about a third of the population of Lebanon.)

The U.S. contingent of the MNF was provided by the 32nd Marine Amphibious Unit, embarked on the ships of PHIBRON 4. 32nd MAU included 1,746 Marines and 78 Navy personnel. On 16 August, the commander of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral William H. Rowden, had issued orders for the PHIBRON to take station off the coast of Lebanon and prepare to land embarked marines on order, possibly as early as 20 August, to be part of the MNF. The carriers *Independence* and USS *Forrestal* (CV-59) were ordered to the area to provide air cover. H-hour and L-day would actually be 0500 25 August. Before landing, the marines received a message from President Ronald Reagan:

You are about to embark on a mission of great importance to our nation and the free world. The conditions under which you carry out your vital assignment, I know, are demanding and potentially dangerous. You are tasked to be once again what Marines have been for more than 200 years—peace-makers.

Your role in the Multi-National Force—along with that of your French and Italian counterparts—is crucial to achieving the peace that is so desperately needed in this long tortured city.

I expect that you will perform with the traditional spirit and discipline for which the Marine Corps is renowned.

*God speed.
Ronald Reagan*

A cartoon in *Army Times* may have explained the mission better, showing a senior marine talking to a junior marine: “Look, I’ll explain it once more—we’re U.S. Marines defending PLO terrorists who are celebrating their ‘victorious’ expulsion from Beirut. Now what’s so difficult to understand about that?”

Evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, August 1982

The French contingent of the MNF arrived in Lebanon first, on 21 August, consisting of the French 2nd Foreign Legion Airborne Battalion, numbering about 860 personnel. The French established security around the port of Beirut and took on the mission of escorting PLO members to the port in trucks provided by the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Italian contingent of about 575 troops arrived on 26 August.

At 0500 25 August, the first LCU disembarked the lead elements of Battalion Landing Team 2/8 at the port of Beirut, where they were met by Ambassador Habib and a host of U.S., Lebanese, and other dignitaries. At 0600, the French turned over security of the port to the marines. The marines promptly hauled down the French flag and raised the Lebanese flag over the port, to the considerable approval of Lebanese and Arab press present.

At 0915, the Greek ship *Sol Georgious* docked at the port and immediately began taking aboard arriving PLO personnel as marines provided security. The PLO members retained their weapons and engaged in wild celebratory gunfire before entering the Marine perimeter, shooting in the air as if they had won a great victory. The antics of the PLO required incredible discipline on the part of the marines to prevent things from getting out of hand. Also, because it was a “peacekeeping mission” the Marines were armed, but their weapons were unloaded. By the end of the day, 1,066 Palestinians had been embarked aboard ship and transported out of the harbor. Over the next days, 6,436 PLO members would pass out of the port.

The date for the departure of PLO leader Yasser Arafat was a closely guarded secret, as was whether he would leave by air or by ship. On 29 August, the marines were informed he would leave by ship the next day. At 1000, the merchant ship *Atlantis* docked, and Arafat arrived at the port at 1100 with a contingent of 25 bodyguards and a fairly large escort of French troops led by the French ambassador and acting more like an honor guard. For a time, the situation became very tense as the French and PLO bodyguards wanted to escort Arafat through the marine perimeter and onto the ship, which had not been previously agreed. The marines held firm, and although some French vehicles were allowed in, the marines escorted Arafat onto the ship.

Although there had been some discussion at the diplomatic level of retaining the MNF in Lebanon beyond the evacuation of the PLO, which the newly-elected President of Lebanon requested, the U.S. Marines were withdrawn back aboard ship on 9 September. The PHIBRON departed for port visits to Naples and Taormina, Sicily. Under the original agreement, the MNF was supposed to provide security for the Palestinian civilians left behind in the refugee camps in West Beirut. However, by 11 September, the French and Italians had pulled out as well. Then things went to hell in Lebanon.

The Assassination of Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, 14 September 1982

On 14 September, the newly elected president of Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel, was killed by a bomb planted in a room above where he was giving his farewell address as leader of the Lebanese Forces and the Phalange Party as he took over the role as president of the country and commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces. An additional 26 Phalange politicians were killed in the blast. Given Bashir's previous role as a ruthless leader of Christian militias, credibly accused of atrocities against Muslims, and his pro-Israeli and anti-Syrian views, there was a long list of suspects. It would later be determined that the bomb was planted by a Maronite Christian who was a

member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party because he believed Gemayel had sold out the country to Israel. The perpetrator was also a Syrian intelligence agent and almost certainly had covert Syrian support for the assassination.

The Sabra and Shatila Massacre, September 1982

On 15 September, in violation of the cease-fire agreement, the Israeli army moved into West Beirut and surrounded the Palestinian refugee camps (Sabra and Shatila). In addition to housing large numbers of Palestinian civilian refugees, these had previously also been one of three primary PLO terrorist training grounds. The Israelis were concerned that as many as 2,000 Palestinian fighters might have remained behind in the camps.

The Israeli Army did not want to go into the alleyways of the densely crowded camps to root out PLO stay-behinds. Rather, on the night of 14/15 September, the chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), General Raphael Eitan, met with leaders of the Phalange Party to arrange for the Lebanese Forces to go into the camps to search for any PLO fighters who were still there.

The new leader of the LF was the group's previous intelligence chief, Elie Hobeika, whose family had been murdered by Palestinians in the Damour Massacre in 1976, which was in turn a response to the massacre of Palestinians and Lebanese Shia by Christian militia two days earlier in the Karantina Massacre. Hobeika had recruited a smaller group that had previously been expelled from the LF, but now operated under his direct orders.

On 15 December, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon met with General Eitan at a forward observation post near the Shatilla Refugee Camp. RPG and light weapons fire was directed at the post from the camp, cementing the Israeli view that some PLO fighters were still there.

At sunset on 16 December, LF militiamen were allowed by the Israelis to pass through Israeli lines, in some cases driving Israeli-supplied vehicles with Israeli-supplied weapons. The Israelis fired illumination rounds over the camps during the night. The Israelis reportedly had instructed the LF to behave as a “dignified” army.

During the course of the night, instead of engaging any PLO fighters, the LF Phalangists perpetrated a brutal massacre of men, women, and children in the camps. Any young men were summarily executed. The exact number of civilians killed is unknown, but estimates range from 460 to 3,500 civilians, with credible reports of well over a thousand. The killings were ostensibly in revenge for the killing of Bashir Gemayal (even though the Palestinians had nothing to do with the assassination) and went on until the morning of 18 September. The Israelis received reports of atrocities being committed as they were happening, but took no action to try to stop them. By some accounts, it was Hobeika’s smaller group within the LF, acting on his orders, who perpetrated the atrocities.

The international fallout from what became known as the Sabra and Shatila Massacre came quickly, with the United Nations General Assembly declaring it an act of “genocide.” The U.S. disputed the use of that term but did not dispute the criminality of the massacre. The international reaction and subsequent Israeli investigation into who knew what when (the Kahan Commission) is beyond the scope of this piece, although it did lead to the resignation of Ariel Sharon as defense minister (but didn’t stop him from later becoming prime minister in 2001).

Shortly after the massacre, the *New York Times* quoted Yasser Arafat as demanding the MNF return to Beirut, with him saying, “The dignity of three armies and the honor of their countries is involved.... I ask Italy, France, and the United States: What of your promise to protect the inhabitants of Beirut?”

The MNF Returns, September 1982

The deliberations within the Reagan Administration as to whether the U.S. should participate in a return of the MNF to Beirut were extremely divisive (and built on the already ongoing turf wars between the Department of Defense, Department of State, and the National Security Council). The division would eventually prove debilitating toward forming coherent policy. The details are beyond the scope of this paper, but good accounts can be found in Secretary of the Navy John Lehman’s autobiography, *Command of the Seas* and in USNA graduate and former marine Robert Timberg’s *The Nightingale’s Song*. In a nutshell, the Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Vessey, and the rest of the Joint Chiefs were strongly opposed and continued to argue against the mission creep that ensued. The Secretary of State, George Shultz, and the National Security Advisor, William Clark (and Clark’s deputy, Robert McFarlane), were strongly in favor of going back in. The two factions never did achieve consensus, but President Reagan initially went along with the argument to intervene.

On 22 September, the ships of PHIBRON 4 got under way from Naples to return to Lebanon, except for *Manitwoc*, which got underway from Taormina, Sicily. The 32nd MAU would again be the U.S. contribution to the reconstituted MNF. The French provided a battalion equivalent of Foreign Legion, paratroopers, and gendarmerie. The Italians also provided a battalion equivalent of paratroopers, infantry, and marines. The British would later provide elements of the 1st Queen’s Dragoon Guards armored reconnaissance regiment.

On 23 September, the Lebanese National Assembly elected Amin Gemayal as president. Amin was Bashir’s older brother, and was considered somewhat more moderate in that he had fewer enemies than Bashir. However, he was less capable of holding the fractious Christian Phalangist coalition together, let alone the country.

The MNF returned at the request of the Lebanese government. As before, although there was significant coordination and collaboration, the MNF had no single commander, and countries' forces operated under their own national rules of engagement. The generally accepted mission of the MNF was:

- Ensure withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon (implicitly the Israelis and Syrians)
- Train the Lebanese Armed Forces (Lebanon's "official" army, but mostly manned by Christians and some Druze)
- Restore the sovereignty of the Lebanese government
- And, support the promotion of national unity and reconciliation, along with strengthening all national institutions, including the army

None of these missions was achievable with the size of forces any of the participating nations were willing to commit (compare to 14,000 U.S. Marines and soldiers in 1958). This is why the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the mission. This was the view of most lower-echelon military commanders as well, who were nevertheless prepared to carry out whatever orders they were given. Initially, public and political opinion in the U.S., given the shock and horror of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, was generally in favor of going back in. A vocal exception was Senator John McCain, who knew a quagmire when he saw one.

A cartoon in the Raleigh, North Carolina, *News and Observer* pretty much summed up what was to follow: A senior marine is briefing a group of junior marines, "OK, Marines—we're faced with Druze and Shia Moslems being backed by the Syrians against the Christian Phalangists. The Druze and Shia are divided among themselves, as are the Christians. The Israeli pullout is leaving a gap that the 'Lebanese Army' probably can't fill and the PLO is creeping back in.... Nobody likes *us*, and it's all preceded by 2,000 years of bloodshed. Any questions?" In the cartoon, the "map

of Lebanon" is a shell crater and the marines have a bullseye on the back of their flak jackets.

Beirut II, 25 September-1 November 1982

On 29 September, the marines of 32nd MAU commenced their return to Beirut. U.S. Marine Corps history calls this period "Beirut II." At 1158, *Manitowac* docked in Beirut harbor to disembark personnel, followed at 1340 by *Saginaw* to discharge vehicles that would take the marines to their positions around Beirut International Airport. Additional marines began landing by helicopter at BIA at 1400. All three rifle companies were ashore by 1700. Tanks and artillery remained aboard ship for the duration of this period of the operations. The marine helicopters remained aboard *Guam*. About 1,400 marines would be ashore, while the remainder remained in reserve aboard ship. Ships of the PHIBRON would remain offshore to extract the marines if necessary.

On 30 September, the first marine was killed in the operation, and three other Marine combat engineers were wounded, by an unexploded cluster munition, one of many that littered the area around the airport, which they were attempting to clear.

Under this second period of the MNF, the U.S. Marines took responsibility for stabilizing the area at and around BIA, about five miles south of Beirut on the coast. The Italians took the sector to the north of BIA, while the French took the sector north of that in the western part of the city.

BIA was on low ground along the coastal plain, dominated by the Shouf mountains to the southeast. The Shouf mountains were primarily populated by Druze, but at the time were occupied by the Israelis. The area adjacent to BIA to the east consisted primarily of a densely populated, poor Shia Muslim urban area, although there were a couple Christian and Druze villages nearby, which were frequently the scene of factional fighting from which stray rounds periodically impacted in the marines' area. There were multiple militias within the Shia area. The largest

at the time belonged to the home-grown Lebanese Shia Amal Party. However, Amal was gradually losing influence to Iranian-backed groups that would eventually coalesce into Lebanese Hezbollah (“Party of God”).

From a purely military defensive perspective, the marine positions at the airport made no sense—between the sea on one side and commanding heights on the other, with a potentially hostile urban area very close on the east side between the airport and the mountains. The rules of engagement for the U.S. MNF allowed for “active self-defense,” and naval gunfire and air support were authorized in the event of hostile action from Syrian-controlled areas. However, the marines were expected to demonstrate a “neutral” presence rather than a warlike or aggressive appearance as the mission was “peacekeeping.” The Marine Corps history characterizes this period as a “Mission of Presence.”

The period following the evacuation of the PLO and after the Sabra and Shatilla massacres was comparatively calm. However, periodic fighting between Maronite LF militia and the militia of the Druze Progressive Socialist Party started in June 1982 and slowly escalated, threatening to rekindle a full Lebanese civil war.

Beirut III, 1 November 1982-15 February 1983

In late October 1982, Amphibious Squadron SIX, Commodore (Captain) Vernon C. Smith in command, with 24th MAU embarked, arrived off Lebanon. The PHIBRON included USS *Inchon* (LPH-12), USS *Shreveport* (LPD-12), USS *Fort Snelling* (LSD-30), USS *La Moure County* (LST-1194), and USS *Sumpter* (LST-1181). The 24th MAU went ashore to relieve 32nd MAU. After backloading 32nd MAU, PHIBRON 4 commenced a return transit to the United States.

The Marine Corps history characterizes this period as “An Expanded Experience,” arguably a polite term for “mission creep.” Although not targeted at the marines, a car bomb explosion on the highway

near the airport greeted the arrival of 24th MAU. On 1 November, the Secretary of Defense approved daylight motorized patrols into Beirut and other areas near the airport. The marines significantly ramped up training of the Lebanese Armed Forces, including developing a rapid reaction force. Although the LAF was ostensibly the national army, most of the Lebanese Muslim population viewed it as just another Christian militia since it was composed primarily of Christians, with a disproportionately large number of Druze relative to the size of the Druze population in Lebanon (about 5 percent). The LAF hadn’t done much since 1976 except man checkpoints to guard Christian areas.

This period was comparatively calm, resulting in a string of VIP visits to the Marines by senior military and congressional delegations, as well as senior foreign delegations. Marines, as well as some sailors from the ships, were even able to go on ski trips in the Lebanese mountains, while some marines were able to go on port visits with the PHIBRON to Athens and Antalya, Turkey. Marines even began foot patrols in areas adjacent to the airport. Things were looking pretty good.

Beirut IV, 15 February-29 May 1983

Amphibious Squadron TWO, (Commodore (Captain) George Bess in Command), with 22d MAU embarked, arrived off Beirut in early February. PHIBRON 2 included USS *Guadalcanal* (LPH-7), USS *Raleigh* (LPD-1), USS *Pensacola* (LSD-38), USS *Spartanburg County* (LST-1192), and USS *Fairfax County* (LST-1193). The turnover between 24th MAU and 22nd MAU went smoothly and PHIBRON 6/24th MAU commenced a return home. This time, marine tanks, amphibious assault vehicles (amtracks), and artillery were brought ashore.

Marine Corps history characterizes this period as “Circumstances Change, Presence Continues.” The political situation in Lebanon, tenuous at best, began to change for the worse, as fighting between different factions began to ramp up. Israel still occupied

positions around Beirut as well as most of southern Lebanon, but the war had become increasingly costly as well as unpopular back in Israel. On 11 November 1982, a suicide car bomb leveled the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, Lebanon (south of Beirut, on the coast), killing 75 Israelis and about 20 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners. Prime Minister Begin was under increasing public pressure to get the IDF out of Lebanon.

On 20 February, Lebanon experienced the heaviest snowfall in memory, isolating villages and stranding many people on the roads in the mountains east of Beirut. After the Lebanese government received permission from Syria (since much of the affected area was Syrian-controlled), U.S. Marine amtracs and helicopters conducted precarious rescues of a couple hundred Lebanese, earning considerable gratitude. However, this was short-lived. It was downhill from there.

Part 3: The Road to Hell—Lebanon 1983

U.S. Embassy Bombing, 18 April 1983

At 1300 on 18 April 1983, a suicide van packed with about 2,000 pounds of gas-enhanced explosive entered the U.S. embassy compound in West Beirut, passed a sleeping Lebanese guard, and rammed the front entrance of the main building. The ensuing explosion killed a total of 63 people, including 17 U.S. and 32 Lebanese (mostly embassy staff), and 14 visitors and passers-by. More than 120 people were injured, including the U.S. ambassador. The marine manning Post 1 was killed and eight other marines were wounded. Three U.S. Army personnel were killed.

The blast decimated the largest and most experienced Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) post in the Middle East. Eight of the dead were CIA personnel, making this the deadliest single day in CIA history. Among those killed were the station chief, the CIA's top Middle East analyst, and the director for the Near East. The loss of these personnel would be a critical

factor in the U.S. failure to understand the rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon. In addition, the deputy director of the U.S. Agency for International Development was also killed.

U.S. Marines immediately responded to provide security to the rescue and recovery operations, aided by surgical teams from *Guadalcanal*. The *Raleigh* was recalled from a port visit to Athens, as were marines from a training facility in France.

Initially, it was not known for sure who carried out the attack, but it was not done by a local group. Responsibility for the blast was claimed by a then-unknown terrorist group, Islamic Jihad Organization, a subset of what would soon become Lebanese Hezbollah. Led by Imad Mugniyah, who would later be responsible for multiple terrorist attacks around the world, Islamic Jihad was supported by Iran, in particular by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the most religiously fanatic armed force in Iran, responsible for destabilizing nations throughout the Middle East following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It would later be learned that the Syrians allowed the IRGC to set up a terrorist training facility at a former Lebanese army barracks at Baalbek, in the Syrian-occupied Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. So long as the IRGC didn't try to destabilize the secular regime of Syria, the Syrians turned a blind eye to IRGC activity focused against Israel and the United States.

Beirut V, 30 May–19 November 1983

U.S. Marine Corp history titles this period “Disaster Strikes.”

Between 5 and 8 May, fighting among Christian, Muslim, and Druze factions intensified significantly, including bombardments with rockets and artillery hitting the Christian areas of East Beirut and Juniyah, and the Muslim area of West Beirut. On 5 May, a marine Huey helicopter with the MAU commander on board was hit by three 7.62mm rounds while attempting to sight a battery that was firing on French positions. The helo recovered safely.

USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, CTF-60 Flagship, Arrives, May 1983

On 8 May 1983, the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CV-69) Battle Group (IKE CVBG) relieved the USS *Nimitz* Battle Group. IKE was commanded by Captain (later Vice Admiral) Edward W. Clexton, Jr, making his second Mediterranean deployment in command of the carrier. On 13 May, aboard IKE, Rear Admiral Jerry O. Tuttle relieved Rear Admiral Edward H. Martin as Commander Task Force 60 (CTF 60). Aboard for the change of command were Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, and Vice Admiral William H. Rowden, Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet. Martin would shortly thereafter relieve Rowden as Commander, Sixth Fleet.

The turnover between Rear Admiral Martin and Rear Admiral Tuttle marked a change in command and control of the carrier battle groups in the Sixth Fleet. Prior to this, command of CTF 60 would be the senior of whatever carrier battle groups were deployed to Mediterranean (prior to the Iranian hostage crises, the U.S. maintained a 2.0 carrier presence in the Mediterranean). This resulted in a revolving door of CTF 60 commanders. From this point on, Tuttle would remain continually in command of CTF 60 in the Mediterranean, rotating from carrier to carrier, with occasional short periods ashore in Naples.

The *Dwight D. Eisenhower* deployed from Norfolk on 27 April 1983. IKE embarked Carrier Air Wing SEVEN (CVW-7), commanded by Commander D. L. McCrory, who would be relieved by Commander Joseph W. Prueher on 25 June. (Prueher would go on to four-star Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. ambassador to the People's Republic of China.)

CVW-7 included F-14A Tomcat fighter squadrons VF-142 "Ghostriders" and VF-143 "Pukin Dogs"; A-7E Corsair II light attack squadrons VA-12 "Clingers" and VA-66 "Waldos"; A-6 Intruder medium attack squadron VA-65E/KA-6D "Tigers"; EA-6B electronic warfare squadron VAQ-132 "Scorpions"; E-2C Hawkeye airborne early warning squadron VAW-121 "Bluetails"; S-3A Viking anti-submarine squadron

VS-31 "Topcats"; and SH-3H Sea King helicopter anti-submarine warfare squadron HS-5 "Night Dippers." VF-143 was equipped with the then-new Tactical Aerial Reconnaissance Pod System (TARPS).

The IKE CVBG included her ever-faithful consort, nuclear guided-missile cruiser USS *Virginia* (CGN-38). Additional ships in the CVBG included USS *Belknap* (CG-26), USS *Mahan* (DDG-42), USS *Arthur W. Radford* (DD-968), USS *John Rogers* (DD-983), USS *Antrim* (FFG-20), USS *Flatley* (FFG-21), USS *Jack Williams* (FFG-24), USS *Joseph Hewes* (FF-1078), USS *Harris* (FF-1094), USS *Bowen* (FF-1079), and USS *Moinster* (FF-1097). *Mahan* was equipped with the first Terrier New Threat Upgrade (NTU) combat system with the improved RIM-67 Standard Missile Two Block II (Extended Range) surface-to-air missile.

Bowen and *Jack Williams* would depart the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal on 18 May to meet a Persian Gulf commitment, returning on 3 August. *Antrim* and *Flatley* would replace *Bowen* and *Jack Williams* in the Persian Gulf, departing the Mediterranean on 3 August and returning 4 November.

The carrier *America* and its escorts had come through the Suez Canal on 4 May on a return transit to Norfolk from the Indian Ocean, but left the Mediterranean about 23 May after a well-earned port call in Malaga. USS *Coral Sea* (CV-43) and its escorts came through the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal from 12 June to 4 August on an around-the-world deployment from Alameda to Norfolk. Other than these periods, IKE would be the only carrier in the Mediterranean able to respond to the situation in Lebanon until the arrival in the Mediterranean of the *John F. Kennedy* CVBG and the *Independence* CVBG on 28 October and 12 November respectively.

In the first weeks of May, U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz conducted shuttle diplomacy using the Marine helicopter "Cammie Cab Service" from U.S. ships. As a result, on 17 May, Israel and the government of Lebanon signed an agreement that included Israeli withdrawal from the Shouf Mountains

overlooking Beirut, with measures in southern Lebanon to guarantee Israel's security. However, it would be honored by almost no one, as Israel's acquiescence was predicated on withdrawal of Syrian and PLO forces from Lebanon, neither of which was a party to the agreement. The agreement also caused increased animosity toward the Lebanese government among the various factions in Lebanon.

On 17 May, the newest Soviet *Kiev*-class V/STOL aircraft carrier, *Novorossiysk*, entered the Mediterranean through the Turkish Straits. Although beyond the scope of this paper, tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the summer of 1983 was the highest since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 due to events related to missile deployments in Europe and the Soviet fear that NATO was going to attack. As a result, the number of Soviet warships in the Mediterranean was at a high level and interactions between U.S. and Soviet ships and submarines were nearly constant throughout this period. On 28 May, a VA-65 A-6E off IKE crashed in very close proximity to a Soviet ship escorting the *Novorossiysk*, killing both the pilot and the bombardier/navigator. Soviet IL-38 May anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft, based at Tiyas Airfield in Syria, frequently conducted surveillance of U.S. ships in the eastern Mediterranean. Soviet ships also maintained a continuous presence at the Syrian port of Tartus, including usually at least one diesel submarine (of the half dozen or so other Soviet diesel and nuclear submarines operating in the Mediterranean). Soviet-supplied Foxtrot-type diesel submarines in Syria and Libya were also considered a potential threat.

By late May, PHIBRON 8 with 24th MAU returned to the coast of Lebanon, both for the second time since the establishment of the MNF. Commanded by Commodore (Captain) Morgan M. France, PHIBRON 8 included CTF-61 flagship USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2), USS *Austin* (LPD-4), USS *Portland* (LSD-37), USS *Harlan County* (LST-1196), and combat cargo ship USS *El Paso* (LKA-117). The 24th MAU went ashore at Beirut on 29 May under the command of Colonel Timothy J. Geraghty, USMC. After turnover, PHIBRON 2/22nd

MAU commenced a return transit to the United States.

Following the conclusion of a port visit to Taranto, Italy on 3 June, IKE made a direct transit to the eastern Mediterranean. Under the direction of Rear Admiral Tuttle, and in keeping with his aggressive approach, IKE steamed right down the three-mile limit off Lebanon in full view of Beirut and the Marines at the airport. This display of U.S. military might (some called it "gunboat diplomacy") reportedly earned a rebuke from EUCOM. (Lebanon, Syria and Israel were at the time in EUCOM's area of responsibility). IKE was then directed to approach no closer than 25 miles to the coast. (Interestingly, this does not appear in IKE's command history. However, I have photos of Beirut from the flight deck to prove it.)

On 25 June, the marines conducted a joint patrol with the Lebanese Armed Forces for the first time. Although this was seen as a natural extension of the ongoing training effort, it was viewed by various Muslim factions as siding with the Christians and compromising U.S. neutrality.

In anticipation of Israeli withdrawal, fighting intensified in the Shouf Mountains among the Druze, Christian militias, the Lebanese Armed Forces, and Palestinians (who had been infiltrating back into the country). Fighting within Beirut itself intensified, yet the marines' mission of "peacekeeping presence" remained unchanged.

On 21 July, IKE departed Livorno, Italy, for the eastern Mediterranean, with a relay of Soviet "tattle-tale" *Krivak*-class guided-missile frigates and Mod *Kashin*-class guided-missile destroyers, for what would become a Mediterranean record of 93 consecutive days at sea (which would shortly thereafter be eclipsed by *Independence's* 106 days). There was rarely a time when a Soviet warship or intelligence collection ship (AGI) was out of sight of the IKE for the duration of the deployment.

On 22 July, President Ronald Reagan announced that Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane

would relieve Ambassador Habib as Special Middle East Envoy. McFarlane had already been in the region, including attendance at a secret meeting nine days earlier with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad (in which Assad spent much time talking about extraterrestrial activity). McFarlane was a strong supporter of the MNF mission and advocated for an increased size of the force in order to move to higher ground and enforce the withdrawal of both the Syrians and Israelis. MacFarlane also made extensive use of the marine helos, as well as the communications capability of the *Iwo Jima* (see my personal account below to read how that worked out).

Marines Under Fire at Beirut International, August 1983

Throughout the summer, the marines at BIA had been subject to stray, and occasionally aimed, small-arms fire. However, on 22 July, the Druze shelled BIA with both 102mm mortar and 122mm rocket fire, wounding two marines and a sailor. The next day, the leader of the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Walid Jumblatt, announced the formation of the Syrian-backed “National Salvation Front” to oppose the 17 May Lebanon-Israel agreement brokered by Secretary Shultz. Jumblatt would later also urge all Druze serving in the Lebanese Armed Forces to desert and join the Druze militia.

The Chad Distraction, July-August 1983

On 30 July, an ongoing crisis in Chad boiled over into fighting between French-backed Chadian government forces and Libyan-backed occupying forces at the Faya Largeau oasis in the middle of nowhere in the Sahara Desert. On 1 August, IKE was ordered to proceed from station south of Cyprus to respond to the crisis. IKE arrived the next morning off Libya, and VF-142 F-14 fighters immediately tangled with a pair of Libyan MiG-23 Floggers. None was shot down, but there were multiple other interactions in which Libyan fighters turned away before intercepts could be completed.

IKE was ordered to back off and operate in the central Mediterranean, which caused Libyan jets to come out even farther than normal. On 5 August, IKE F-14s intercepted two Libyan Mirage V fighters north of the Gulf of Sidra. VF-143 F-14s also intercepted five Libyan MiG-23 Flogger fighters. Again, no aircraft were shot down. All the while, Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi was threatening to sink the IKE if U.S. forces crossed his self-declared “Line of Death” in the Gulf of Sidra, threats that made U.S. national news (my wife was not amused),

Eventually, “higher authority” determined that there wasn’t much U.S. naval forces could do about the situation in Chad, more than 800 miles from the sea. IKE was ordered back to eastern Mediterranean, and on 10 August, the Libyans recaptured Faya Largeau.

On 3 August, *Bowen* and *Jack Williams* returned from the Persian Gulf via the Suez Canal and rejoined the IKE CVBG. *Bowen* would soon make history.

Between 10 and 16 August, the Druze shelled BIA multiple times, with 35 rounds of mortar and rocket fire hitting the marine positions and wounding one marine officer. Most of these were aimed at the LAF air force flight line, which hadn’t done any combat flying in years. Supplied with two new U.S Army field artillery schools target acquisition batteries (FASTAB) with AN/TPQ-36 counter-mortar/counter-artillery radar, the marines were able to pinpoint the Druze launchers and fire 81mm mortar illumination rounds overhead, effectively silencing them. Factional fighting continued to spread as the LAF began clashing with Muslim Shia Amal militia in the southern and western Beirut suburbs, adjacent to BIA.

Exercise Bright Star, August 1983

Despite the rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon, IKE was ordered once again to leave station south of Cyprus, this time to participate in Exercise Bright Star with the Egyptians. The exercise was useful for giving flight time to CVW-7 attack squadrons. Despite the crisis, the IKE battle group was short of flight hours

(due to Navy funding shortfalls) and the continuous coverage by E-2C, F-14 fighters, and S-3 ASW aircraft was using up all the flight hours actually available, while attack/bombing skills were atrophying (VAW-121 was setting all-time records for E-2C flight hours in a single deployment). The exercise also resulted in some great photos of CVW-7 aircraft in formation with a variety of Egyptian Soviet-supplied aircraft types over the pyramids.

During exercise Bright Star, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman came aboard IKE to do his reserve duty as a Navy commander and A-6 bombardier/navigator, flying a simulated strike mission over Egypt with the commander of CVW-7, Commander Joe Prueher, as pilot. More importantly, Secretary Lehman and Commander, Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral Martin, did the honor of frocking VAW-121 intelligence officer Sam Cox to lieutenant.

Sometime after Bright Star concluded, IKE had a “swim call” in the open Mediterranean south of Cyprus. As the first group was exiting the water, a couple of sharks showed up and spoiled the party. Even worse, two Soviet IL-38 May ASW/surveillance aircraft launched from Tiyas Airfield in Syria. Caught dead in the water with boats out (the shark guard), IKE could not launch fighters for intercept due to lack of sufficient wind over the deck. However, IKE could and did launch an E-2C and a couple of S-3A Viking ASW aircraft. Under E-2C direction, the S-3s made a successful intercept and escorted the Mays as they made a close fly-by of the carrier.

Marine Casualties Mount, August-September 1983

On 26 August, Rear Admiral Tuttle had IKE make another ostentation display of American naval presence, driving the carrier right down the three-mile limit in full view of Beirut, this time garnering extensive international media attention. The French carrier *Foch* and other French and Italian ships followed IKE's example. This apparently didn't deter the escalating violence in Beirut.

On 28 August, heavy fighting broke out between the LAF and other militias that lasted four days. More than 100 rounds of 82mm mortar and 122mm rocket fire impacted the BIA area. Marines returned small-arms fire for the first time. The next day, Druze mortar fire continued to land on marine lines and returning illumination rounds didn't deter further fire. At 0940, several mortar rounds killed one marine, mortally wounded another, and wounded two others. The Druze were firing rockets at the rate of one every 15 seconds.

At 1150 29 August, guided-missile cruiser *Belknap* fired two 5-inch illumination rounds over the offending Druze position. The Druze kept firing. The marines then fired six 155mm artillery rounds that impacted the Druze position with pinpoint accuracy, killing and wounding a number of Druze. Two marine Cobra attack helos responded to incoming fire on a joint marine/LAF checkpoint, one Cobra hit the machine-gun position with a Zuni rocket. The other Cobra sustained three hits and had to make an emergency landing on *Iwo Jima*. This was the first time the marines fired artillery in anger during the Lebanon operation.

On 30 August, fighting between the LAF and Shia militias in the southern suburbs of Beirut spilled over, with rounds impacting near marine positions. Marines returned fire several times.

In a significant development that further compromised the marines' waning “neutrality,” on 1 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered PHIBRON 8 to transfer 500,000 rounds of 5.56mm ammunition for the MAU to deliver to the LAF. Tensions with the Soviet Union continued to rise. That same day, a Soviet fighter shot down a South Korean airliner (KAL-007), mistaking it (so the Soviets said) for a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft entering Soviet airspace in the Northern Sea of Japan. The attack killed 269 people, including a U.S. congressman.

Israel Pulls Out—Chaos Ensues, September 1983

On 4 September, the Israelis executed their withdrawal from the Shouf Mountains without coordinating or notifying anyone in advance. This set off a mad scramble between the LAF, Christian militias, and the Druze (aided by Palestinians) to occupy positions vacated by the Israelis. Reports of massacres of civilians by both Christian and Druze militias further inflamed the situation. As the LAF was forming up at BIA, incoming fire impacted marine positions. The marines responded with small arms, machine guns, and five rounds from a tank. Five Marines were wounded. Rockets continued to impact: 21 rounds between 0345 and 0530 on 5 September killed two marines and wounded two more. By this time, the Druze had figured out how the marines' counter-battery radar worked (tracking ballistic trajectory) and thwarted it by using 105mm recoilless rifles in a direct-fire mode down gullies from the mountains.

Also on 5 September, the Druze routed the Christian Lebanese Force militia in the Shouf, which set up a battle between the Druze and the LAF for the strategic town of Suq al-Gharb that would rage for days.

On 6 September, Robert McFarlane had returned to the region after meeting with President Reagan on 3 September. He continued to lobby for greater U.S. involvement as the battle over what to do next raged in the Washington, DC, bureaucracy while the situation in Lebanon continued to deteriorate. After a round of meetings, including in Damascus with the Syrians, McFarlane sent a lengthy cable from *Iwo Jima* that critics derisively called "The Sky Is Falling Cable," and others the "Fish or Cut Bait Cable," warning that the LAF and Lebanese government were in imminent danger of collapse. The result was that President Reagan authorized the use of force, including naval gunfire, to defend the LAF. This placed the U.S. on one side of the developing civil war.

F-14 Combat TARPS Missions, September 1983

On 7 September, two VF-143 F-14s launched from IKE to fly a TARPS photo-reconnaissance mission over Lebanon to identify gun positions threatening the marines. The jets briefly penetrated Syrian airspace, but there was no indication the Syrians detected them. However, the jets were fired upon by anti-aircraft guns and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles over Syrian-occupied territory in Lebanon. The Syrians may have mistaken the F-14s for Israeli aircraft and after the debacle the year prior, the Syrians certainly knew that any aircraft overhead weren't their own. This was the first "combat" TARPS mission. It was the first of 39 VF-143 TARPS missions over Lebanon and, in almost every one of them, the F-14s were fired on. The same day, the French launched two Super Étendard jets from the *Foch* on reconnaissance over Lebanon, with more to follow.

The U.S. Navy Opens Fire, 8 September 1983

Also on 7 September, several Druze rounds impacted inside the marine perimeter. The marines responded with six 155mm artillery rounds on the suspected Druze fire direction center. That same day, the commander of Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, Lieutenant General John Miller, and the commanding general of 2nd Marine Division, Major General Alfred Gray, arrived for a visit with the marines, which by this time had suffered four killed and 28 wounded since July. At 1130 on 8 September, three rockets impacted within 200 yards of the two generals at an observation post.

In a coordinated (but delayed) response, the marines fired six 155mm artillery rounds and four 5-inch rounds from frigate *Bowen* destroying several artillery pieces and a fire control tower in the mountains southeast of BIA. Under the command of Commander Arthur P. Drennan II, *Bowen's* shots were the first time that naval gunfire was employed in support of the marines ashore in Beirut, and the first U.S. Navy gunfire against a hostile target since the end of the Vietnam War.

Over the next days, Druze mortar fire directed at the LAF air force Hawker Hunter jets at BIA continued to impact around the Marines. Ferocious fighting around Suq al-Gharb continued unabated, and on 10 September an LAF company was overwhelmed and the commander hacked to death with an axe. The U.S. National Security Council concluded that a successful LAF defense of Suq al-Gharb was necessary for the defense of the marine position at BIA. McFarlane continued to push for more aggressive rules of engagement to intervene on the side of the LAF.

On 12 September, Amphibious Squadron ONE with 31st MAU embarked came through the Suez Canal, diverted from their Indian Ocean deployment to augment the marines ashore in Beirut if necessary. PHIBRON 1 included USS *Tarawa* (LHA-1), USS *Duluth* (LPD-6), and USS *Frederick County* (LST-1184), arriving off Beirut on 14 September. The 31st MAU remained aboard ship for the duration before returning to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal with the PHIBRON on 10 October.

On the night of 16 September, the Lebanese ministry of defense headquarters and the U.S. ambassador's residence received heavy shelling. *Bowen* and USS *John Rodgers* (DD-983) responded with six NGFS (naval gunfire support) missions, firing a total of 72 5-inch rounds on six targets and silencing the batteries. This was the first combat employment of the 5-inch/54-caliber Mk. 45 lightweight gun and Mk. 86 fire control system. Coordination with the marine counter-battery radar was key to the accuracy.

The situation for the LAF in Suq al-Gharb was increasingly precarious as the Druze, supported by Palestinians, made gains as the LAF was running low on ammunition. The LAF then requested NGFS from the United States.

On 17 September, the LAF air force flew their first combat mission in memory with their three flyable Hawker Hunters. One jet was shot down and the pilot rescued at sea by an HS-5 helicopter from IKE. A second jet was damaged and made an emergency

landing on a highway. The third jet flew to Cyprus, where the pilot requested asylum.

On 19 September, the IKE left her escorts behind and took off on a maximum-speed solo transit to the west, drawing the Soviet tattle-tale with it, but leaving it in its wake. At dusk, IKE encountered a four-ship Soviet task group in the process of refueling. Without slowing down, IKE blew through the middle of the formation, with the *Slava*-class guided missile cruiser *Slava* and a *Mod-Kashin* guided-missile destroyer passing down IKE's port side on an opposite course at close range, while a *Riga*-class frigate and *Desna*-class oiler passed down the carrier's starboard side. This was the first Mediterranean deployment by the recently commissioned *Slava* and was the same ship (renamed *Moskva*) that would be sunk by the Ukrainians in April 2022.

Shortly before noon on 19 September, as IKE was undertaking its diversion and in response to Lebanese government request, nuclear guided-missile cruiser *Virginia*, destroyer *Arthur W. Radford*, and *Bowen* opened fire on anti-government positions in the Shouf Mountains. Over a five-hour period, the three ships fired more than 360 5-inch rounds, hitting two battalions of Palestinian tanks and infantry, and causing them to break and run. Although the United States stated the firing was in self-defense of the marines at the airport, pretty much everyone on the ground saw it as a direct U.S. intervention on behalf of the Lebanese government (which it was).

Over the next days, the Lebanese ministry of defense and the U.S. ambassador's residence were heavily shelled, which caused fires at the residence. On 20 September, *John Rodgers* and *Arthur W. Radford* fired more than 90 rounds at various anti-government positions. On 23 September, *Virginia* and *Arthur W. Radford* fired on more targets in response to a four-hour shelling of the marines.

Battleship New Jersey Arrives, 21 September 1983

Also on 23 September, Special Envoy McFarlane met again with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and informed him that the battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62) would arrive off Lebanon in the near term, which turned out to be the next day. After a rendezvous with IKE, *New Jersey* made her presence known off Beirut on 25 September. The idea to bring *New Jersey* from the Pacific to the Mediterranean was reportedly first raised by McFarlane's military assistant, Commander (future Rear Admiral) Philip Dur, and was broached by MacFarlane when he was in Washington in early September.

New Jersey came under the operational control of CTF-60 on 21 September. The battleship had been reactivated in 1982 (for a third time) as part of Secretary Lehman's 600-ship program and was recommissioned that December. *New Jersey* departed Long Beach on 9 June for a Western Pacific deployment, but on 24 July was ordered to the west coast of Central America in response to Soviet and Cuban arms shipments to the new Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. *New Jersey* arrived off Nicaragua on 26 August, and then received orders on 8 September to steam to Lebanon via the Panama Canal. Captain Richard D. Milligan relieved Captain (later Rear Admiral) William M. Fogarty on 15 September 1983 as the second commanding officer since the recommissioning.

The deployment of *New Jersey* to Lebanon was strongly opposed by the Secretary of Defense and the commander in chief of U.S. European Command, General Bernard Rogers. However, McFarlane's doom-laden cable of 6 September resulted in the deployment going forward. *Jack Williams*, recently returned to the Mediterranean from duty in the Persian Gulf, was assigned as anti-air escort for *New Jersey*.

On 23 September, eight French Super-Étendard fighter-bombers off *Foch* struck gun positions in the Shouf Mountains that had previously fired on French

positions, killing a lieutenant colonel. The strike was conducted in two waves of four. It was unclear who was actually manning the gun positions. In a subsequent mission over the area by a Super-Étendard photo-reconnaissance jet and an F-8 Crusader fighter escort, the Crusader was hit but managed to recover on the French carrier with a barricade arrestment. About this time, rockets hit the main Italian ammunition depot, causing a major explosion that somehow killed no one. (The two French carriers, *Foch* and *Clemenceau*, would alternate on station off Beirut.)

Cease-Fire (Sort of), 25 September 1983

Whether McFarlane's implied threat of the arrival of *New Jersey* had anything to do with it is unknown, but on 25 September, the Saudi-Arabian special envoy, Prince Bandar bin Sultan and the Syrian foreign minister announced in Damascus that a cease-fire was in effect. Somewhat surprisingly, given the history of many previous broken cease-fires in Lebanon, this one appeared to hold—sort of. Palestinian fighters used the cease-fire to attempt to infiltrate back into the Sabra and Shatila camps. The relative quiet also lulled people into complacency.

On 29 September, Congress voted to invoke the 1973 War Powers Act and authorized the marines to remain in Lebanon for 18 months by a bipartisan vote of 270 to 161. This was the first time the War Powers Act had been invoked, and the first time a time limit had been placed on the U.S. presence in Lebanon. The Reagan administration (and every other presidential administration) was opposed to invoking the act, which gave Congress the power to cut off funding for military operations Congress didn't like. However, the administration's official position was to retain the marines in Lebanon, and it therefore supported the resolution. However, Senator John McCain, as well as 27 other Republicans who voted to defy the administration, opposed keeping the marines in the country. Underneath the administration's show of support for the mission, dissension in Defense, State, and the National Security Council continued

unabated, and the Secretary of Defense advocated moving the Marines to ships off shore.

By 5 October, things were calm enough for CNO James Watkins and Commander, Sixth Fleet, Vice Admiral Martin, to visit the marines at BIA and ships offshore.

The cease-fire obfuscated the fact that by the end of September, none of the initial conditions for putting the marines in Lebanon with the MNF still applied. The environment was clearly hostile. The assurances obtained by the Lebanese government from various factions were no longer operative as the extralegal militias were poised to resume fighting. In addition, the MNF, and in particular the U.S. Marines, were viewed as pro-Israel, pro-Christian Phalange, and anti-Muslim. The marines were no longer viewed as a neutral force. This impression had been strongly reinforced by the shelling by U.S. Navy warships of Druze and Muslim positions.

Throughout early October, the marines at BIA received occasional aimed sniper fire. On 14 October, a marine was hit in the chest and evacuated to *Iwo Jima*, but he died of his wounds. On 16 October, several marines were wounded by small-arms and RPG fire, and on 19 October, four more marines were wounded. Despite the small-arms fire, shelling had stopped since the cease-fire, although numerous sources on the ground warned of an increasing terrorist threat, which was relayed up the chain of command from CTF-61/62.

On 10 October USS *Nicholson* (DD-982) and USS *Lawrence* (DDG-4) came briefly under CTF-60 operational control as they passed through the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf via the Suez Canal.

Nevertheless, the situation was perceived as calm enough for the *IKE* to be released from station south of Cyprus, arriving at Naples on 21 October after 93 days at sea. On 22 October, a USO band entertained the marines at the headquarters and barracks of the battalion landing team at BIA. The barracks billeted about 300 men.

U.S. Marine Corps Barracks Bombing, 23 October 1983

Early Sunday morning, 23 October, a yellow Mercedes truck made a loop around the parking lot outside the fence in front of the battalion landing team barracks. At 0622, the truck returned, looped around the parking lot picking up speed, then crashed through the wire gate, rammed through an iron obstacle, past two sentries who didn't have enough time to chamber a round and fire, and then drove right into the front lobby of the building. The truck detonated with the equivalent of about 12,000 pounds of explosive, pancaking the reinforced-concrete building. The building had been selected because it provided good protection from artillery and provided good 360-degree observation from the roof. It could not withstand what was effectively an internal explosion.

At 0700 (midnight 22–23 October in Washington, DC), Commodore France on *Iwo Jima* sent a flash message: "Explosion at BLT 1/8 HQ...a large explosion at BLT 1/8 collapsed the roof and leveled the building. Large numbers of dead and wounded. Are using MSSG 24 and Italian MNF Medical and will medevac out of LS Brown.... French report a Bldg in their sector also bombed...unkown injured; BLT Hq destroyed. Amplifying info to follow." Colonel Geraghty sent an OPREP-3 Pinnacle Front Burner message (the MAU headquarters and BLT headquarters were in different buildings).

Care of the wounded was hampered as the battalion surgeon had been killed in the blast, and by sporadic sniper fire. Commodore France sent medical teams to the airport as well as working parties from *Harlan County* and *Portland*. Medical teams from *New Jersey* and *Virginia* were activated and flown to BIA by helicopter. Other nearby ships also sent working parties ashore. *Austin* was immediately recalled from a port visit in Alexandria, Egypt. *New Jersey's* marine detachment was sent ashore to provide added security. *IKE*, in port Naples, received no orders to do anything, although preparations were made to conduct an emergency recall of personnel, many of whom were as far away as Rome.

The casualties from the explosion were appalling, and constituted the largest loss of life for the U.S. Marines in a single day since the first day of the assault on Iwo Jima in World War II. A total of 241 personnel were killed outright or succumbed to wounds (two more did so many years later). The dead totaled 220 marines, 18 U.S. Navy personnel, and 3 U.S. Army personnel. The Navy dead included a chief electronics technician, an intelligence specialist, and the rest were hospitalmen/hospital corpsmen. This was the single deadliest day for the U.S. armed forces since the first day of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam in 1968. One Lebanese civilian was also killed in the blast.

Within a couple minutes of the blast at the BLT barracks, a suicide truck bomb hit the French barracks, killing 58 French paratroopers and five Lebanese civilians (including four children). This was the worst loss of life for the French military since the end of the Algerian War in 1962.

It would be some time before the perpetrators of the bombing would be identified although it was claimed by the Islamic Jihad Organization and the Free Islamic Revolutionary Movement. Whatever the group was called, it was not a home-grown Lebanese operation. Rather, it was an Iranian-financed and -supported operation via the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, the same as the American embassy suicide bombing earlier in the year, using operatives that would become part of Lebanese Hezbollah (except for the two dead drivers). Although the timing of the attack may have been triggered by U.S. Navy shelling in support of the LAF, planning and training for this attack was well underway before the United States lost the patina of neutrality. The attack almost certainly had more to do with the Islamic Republic of Iran's efforts to drive the United States out of the Middle East than anything happening in Lebanon.

On 25 October, IKE finally received orders to return to the vicinity of Lebanon. Executing the emergency recall, the carrier got underway late on 25 October, leaving very few personnel on the beach. Part of the recall process was to have an SH-3 helo fly around

the Bay of Naples with its dipping sonar lowered—it actually worked (I saw it from Sorrento).

On 26 October, Vice President Bush arrived at BIA and observed the destroyed headquarters. While he was there, 15 mortar rounds impacted in the general vicinity and the marines responded with 21 81mm mortar rounds. The Vice President then proceeded to *Iwo Jima* and presented Purple Hearts to the many wounded. Over the next days and weeks, numerous messages warning of car bomb attacks were received from higher headquarters.

Acting on the advice of Marine Corps Commandant General P. X. Kelley, Secretary of Defense Weinberger convinced President Reagan to appoint a “blue ribbon” commission to investigate the disaster. Announced on 29 October 1983, the commission was headed by Admiral Robert L. J. Long, the recently retired commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, and prior to that the Vice Chief of Naval Operations. What would become known as the “Long Commission” commenced work on 7 November, with a report due to SECDEF by 20 December.

To Retaliate or Not to Retaliate, That Is the Question—October–November 1983

In the days after the Marine Barracks bombing, discussion raged among the Department of State, Department of Defense, and the National Security Council about how to respond to the terrorist attack. No real consensus was achieved, as some argued strongly in favor of retaliation while others argued strongly against. The primary argument “against,” was that it was not initially clear who was really responsible. Even if it could be determined who the perpetrators were, it was likely that they would have gone into hiding, so there was thus no obvious target to attack. Another consistent argument “against,” was that any attack would likely kill innocent people and would compromise U.S. “neutrality” in the escalating conflict—those espousing this failing to see that the neutrality horse had already left the barn. A significant factor in the lack of knowledge about “who did it”

and where they might be was due to the previous decimation of the CIA station in Beirut in April.

IKE reached the vicinity of Lebanon within a day and a half of departing Naples, but no orders were received to do much of anything except steam in circles south of Cyprus and prepare to conduct possible strikes at an undetermined time against undetermined targets. Soon, the USS *John F. Kennedy* Battle Group arrived, on its way to the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal. That transit was cancelled and the JFK CVBG was directed to remain with IKE in the Eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, IKE was nearing the end of her scheduled six-month deployment. However, IKE's relief, the USS *Independence* Battle Group, had been diverted and delayed by participation in Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada.

John F. Kennedy (CV-67), commanded by Captain (later Rear Admiral) Gary F. Wheatley, had departed Norfolk on 27 September and transited to the Mediterranean by the roundabout way of a port visit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during 13–16 October. Commanded by Rear Admiral Roger E. Box (Commander Carrier Group SIX), the JFK CVBG entered the Mediterranean on 28 October with Carrier Air Wing THREE (CVW-3) embarked.

The JFK CVBG included USS *Harry E. Yarnell* (CG-17), USS *Claude V. Ricketts* (DDG-5), USS *Tattnal* (DDG-19), USS *Richard L. Page* (FFG-5), USS *Clark* (FFG-17), USS *Fahrion* (FFG-22), USS *Gallery* (FFG-26), USS *Steven W. Groves* (FFG-29), USS *Garcia* (FF-1040), USS *W. S. Sims* (FF-1059) and USS *Paul* (FF-1080). *Steven W. Groves* would relieve *Jack Williams* as anti-air escort for *New Jersey*.

Commanded by Commander (later Vice Admiral) John J. Mazach, CVW-3 included F-14A Tomcat squadrons VF-11 "Red Rippers" and VF-31 "Tomcatters"; A-6E Intruder squadrons VA-75 "Sunday Punchers" and VA-85 "Black Falcons"; EA-6B squadron VAQ-137 "Rooks"; S-3A Viking squadron VS-22 "Checkmates"; E-2C Hawkeye squadron VAW-126 "Seahawks"; and HS-7 SH-3H Sea King "Dusty Dogs." CVW-3 was unique in

that it had two A-6 Intruder squadrons instead of the typical two A-7 Corsair II and one A-6 squadrons.

On 1 November, *Deyo* (DD-989) and *Thomas C. Hart* (FF-1092) returned to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal and continued on a transit to the United States, departing the Mediterranean via Gibraltar on 8 November. On 4 November, *Antrim* (FFG-20) and *Flatley* (FFG-21) came through the Suez en route homeward, departing via Gibraltar on 10 November along with most of the ships of the *IKE* CVBG.

On 4 November, the Israeli headquarters in Tyre, Lebanon, was hit for a second time by a suicide vehicle bomb, this time killing 29 Israelis and 32 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners/detainees. This resulted in ever-greater public pressure in Israel to get out of Lebanon in a war that was increasingly being described as "Israel's Vietnam."

Hurry Up and Wait—and Do Nothing: November 1983

Shortly after JFK's arrival in eastern Mediterranean, a courier arrived aboard *IKE* with a target plan developed by Vice Admiral "Ace" Lyons, the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Operations (OP-06) (before the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the CNO staff did have an operational role). After some initial confusion as to whether *IKE* was still the CTF-60 flagship (apparently Washington thought Rear Admiral Tuttle had already transferred his flag), Rear Admiral Tuttle directed *IKE* and JFK to plan a combined strike.

CVW-7 CAG Prueher was directed to assign a strike leader and lead planner, who was Commander (future four-star) William "Fox" Fallon, the executive officer of VA-65. CVW-3 CAG Mazach was directed to come over to *IKE* with his lead planner, who was Commander Paul Bernard, executive officer of VA-85. The CTF-60 intelligence officer (N2), Commander Frank Notz, recommended that the VAW-121 intelligence officer, newly frocked Lieutenant Sam Cox, be assigned to provide intelligence support to the planning effort, which was accepted by CAG Prueher. The plan was

extremely close hold, with initial planning done by this very small group in the IKE CO's in-port cabin. Eventually, the team took over the mission-planning space in the carrier intelligence center (CVIC) as a few more aviators were read in to assist with the planning.

The target was the Sheikh Abdullah Army Barracks in Baalbek, Lebanon. The former Lebanese army barracks was in the Syrian-occupied area of the Bekaa Valley, not far from the Syrian border. The Syrians had essentially turned it over to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and had turned a blind eye to IRGC activity so long as it didn't threaten the stability of Syria. Although it was not completely clear at the time, the IRGC was believed to have at least assisted, and probably trained, elements of the Lebanese Shia Muslim Group "Islamic Jihad Organization" (IJO) that was assessed to have conducted the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut in April and the bombing of the Marine Barracks. Whether any IJO personnel would still be at the target was an unanswered question. This was not a concern of the strike planners on the carrier, but was a big concern in Washington, DC, and in EUCOM headquarters.

The Sheikh Abdullah Barracks made a great target: a large building (but not too big), surrounded by a sand buffer, with only some civilian encroachment at one corner. The ancient Roman ruins on an acropolis overlooking Baalbek made for a great radar-offset aim point. The target would not be hard to find. The defenses in the area were limited to man-portable SAMs and smaller-caliber anti-aircraft guns that were not radar-guided.

In short order, Commander Fallon and his team developed a plan involving a night-strike by 12 A-6 Intruders. The plan called for four A-6s from each A-6 squadron (VA-65 on *IKE* and VA-75 and VA-85 on *JFK*) with total of 144,000 pounds of bombs, enough to effectively obliterate the target. The ingress route was planned to avoid threat envelopes until the actual target area, where the effect of night and surprise was expected to minimize effective air defense. Extensive effort went into a deception plan in order to prevent

the ever-present Soviet "tattle-tale" from providing warning to the Syrians.

At one point this effort was so far along that on one night the planes were loaded and the pilots were briefed and ready, all in anticipation of a final execute order from higher in the chain of command. The order never came and the strike package stood down during the night. This "be ready to strike tonight," followed by no final authorization to do so, occurred a couple more times in early November.

On 8 November, the new AEGIS guided-missile cruiser USS *Ticonderoga* (CG-47) came under CTF-60 operational control. Commanded by Captain (later Rear Admiral) Roland G. Guilbault, this was the first deployment by an AEGIS-class cruiser.

As the days went by, it was increasingly unlikely that the perpetrators of the attack would still be at the Baalbek target and a new target was assigned. This one was trickier, in that it was a nondescript building in a small village called An-Nabi Shit (a name which provoked much juvenile humor). It was a tougher target than Baalbek in that it was tucked right up on the Syrian border in the mountains, right at the edge of the envelope of mobile Syrian SA-6 batteries. Although the Syrians tended not to move the SA-6s very often, there was risk that with any kind of warning, they could do so on short notice. Unlike the Israelis in 1982, the U.S. carriers had no remotely piloted drones that could fake out the Syrian SA-6 missile radars. But, like previous iterations, this strike was extensively planned, but not executed.

By this time, the French carrier *Clemenceau* arrived (relieving *Foch*), and planning commenced for a simultaneous U.S.-French strike into Lebanon, with the French providing some tactically useful information from their own sources. Given the losses the French had suffered on the same day as the Marine Barracks bombing, it was clear that the French were determined to retaliate—against something.

On 12 November, carrier *Independence* came under CTF-60 operational control. INDY CVBG was initially commanded by Rear Admiral Richard C. Berry (Commander Cruiser Destroyer Group EIGHT), until he shifted his flag to *Ticonderoga* when relieved by Rear Admiral James H. Flatley III (Commander Carrier Group EIGHT). *Independence* was commanded by Captain (later Vice Admiral) William A. Dougherty, Jr. With *Independence* were USS *Richmond K. Turner* (CG-20), USS *Caron* (DD-970), and USS *Moosebrugger* (DD-980), all participants in the Grenada operation.

Carrier Air Wing SIX (CVW-6), embarked on *Independence*, was commanded by Commander Edward K. “Hunyak” (“Honiak” in some accounts) Andrews, and included F-14A squadrons VF-14 “Tophatters” and VF-32 “Fighting Swordsmen”; A-7E Corsair II squadrons VA-15 “Valions” and VA-87 “Golden Warriors”; A-6E Intruder VA-176 “Thunderbolts”; EA-6B squadron VAQ-131 “Lancers”; S-3A Viking squadron VS-32 “Maulers”; E-2C Hawkeye squadron VAW-122 “Steeljaws”; and SH-3H squadron HS-15 “Red Lions.”

The arrival of *Independence* in the Mediterranean had been delayed by her participation in Operation Urgent Fury on 25 October, in which it had provided air support to U.S. Marine and Army forces that took control of Grenada following a Marxist coup. As a result, IKE’s deployment in the Mediterranean was extended, and IKE and *Virginia* did not depart with the rest of the IKE CVBG ships on 10 November as originally scheduled. So much for “home by Thanksgiving.”

As intense planning for strike operations continued, along with a very high level of F-14 combat air patrol (CAP) activity, CVW-3 on JFK suffered a series of operational mishaps in November. On 8 November, one VF-31 F-14 crashed into the sea for no obvious reason, killing the pilot and radar intercept officer (RIO). On 11 November, a second VF-31 F-14 crashed under similar circumstances, with the RIO unhurt but the pilot suffering severe injuries. On 24 November, the JFK’s carrier on-board delivery (COD) aircraft, a C-1A Trader “Caroline,” crashed, killing two.

On 12 November, Robert McFarlane relinquished the role of Special Mideast Negotiator to Donald Rumsfeld. A few days later, McFarlane would replace William P. Clark as the President’s National Security Advisor. A Navy veteran, Rumsfeld had been Secretary of Defense in 1975–77 in President Gerald Ford’s administration, but had come out of the private sector at the request of President Reagan.

Unknown to anyone in CTF-60, a decision to bomb Baalbek didn’t even reach the President until 14 November, during a contentious meeting at the White House over whether to do so, with both SECDEF Weinberger and Chairman Vessey opposed. General Vessey did assure the President that U.S. forces were ready to do so by the morning of 16 November (the U.S. Navy forces were ready long before that). The President approved coordination with the French (which was already going on at the CTF-60 level). Accounts are murky as to whether the President specifically directed a strike or not. Some accounts claim that Secretary Weinberger deliberately did not carry out the President’s order. Regardless, direction—if it was given—never made it to CTF-60 through the chain of command.

On 16 November, what was planned as a coordinated U.S. Navy–French navy strike on the Sheikh Abdullah Barracks in Baalbek turned into a French-only strike. The French carrier repeatedly queried IKE as to whether authorization for U.S. forces to strike had been received. No authorization from higher U.S. headquarters ever came. Finally, the French gave up asking and launched their strike with Super Étendard fighter-bombers off Clemenceau. The strike was a success in that the French hit the target and suffered no losses. However, the damage was a fraction of what it would have been had U.S. carrier aircraft conducted the strike. As it was, Lebanese police reported that 39 people were killed and 150 wounded, but the reports didn’t indicate whether these were Lebanese civilians, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Syrians, or any other miscreants associated with that facility.

With the arrival of *Independence*, the strike planning morphed into a four-carrier strike operation, with additional targets being added by EUCOM, each iteration becoming more complex and cumbersome. They included aircraft flying all over Lebanon, including A-7s armed with Walleye TV-guided bombs, all increasingly likely to draw considerable anti-aircraft opposition.

On 18 November, INDY and IKE conducted turnover, with Rear Admiral Tuttle shifting his flag. IKE remained for several days before commencing a direct transit back to Norfolk, departing the Mediterranean on 24 November and arriving in Norfolk on 2 December.

Part 4: The Hopeless Cause

Beirut VI: The End of the USMNF, 20 November 1983–26 February 1984

Delayed by participation in Operation Urgent Fury, Amphibious Squadron FOUR (PHIBRON 4), with 22nd MAU embarked, arrived off Beirut in mid-November. Commanded by Commodore (Captain) Carl R. Erie, PHIBRON 4 included USS *Guam* (LPH-9), USS *Trenton* (LPD-4), USS *Fort Snelling* (LSD-30), USS *Manitowoc* (LST-1180), and USS *Barnstable County* (LST-1197)

On 17 November, the advance party of 22nd MAU went ashore at Beirut off *Guam* for their third deployment to Lebanon. By the end of the next day, all of 24th MAU had re-embarked, with BLT 1/8 relieved by BLT 2/8. Brigadier General James R. Joy, USMC, relieved Colonel Geraghty at 1000 on 19 November. *Harlan County*, *Austin*, and *El Paso* had commenced a return transit to the States on 18 November. *Iwo Jima* and *Portland* departed the Beirut area after the turnover between 24th MAU and 22nd MAU. 24th MAU would receive the Combat Action Ribbon for the deployment.

On 24 November, the U.S. carriers resumed TARPS missions over Lebanon.

With the arrival of *Independence* as IKE's relief, JFK was ordered to resume her originally planned transit to the north Arabian Sea to meet the Indian Ocean commitment. Prior to departing the Mediterranean, JFK was allowed to conduct a port visit in Haifa, Israel (something IKE was not allowed to do as it would compromise the image of U.S. neutrality. By this time, that was considered a moot point). JFK was in port Haifa from 28 November to 3 December for much-needed liberty for the crew and to prepare the ship and air wing for a Suez Canal transit, which included downloading ordnance from aircraft.

As JFK came out of Haifa on 3 December, the Israeli air force executed a large bombing raid, flying over water before turning inland and hitting targets east of

Beirut. (Apparently the target was An Nabi Shit, which the United States had decided not to hit).

Having made preparations for departing the Mediterranean, JFK was somewhat surprisingly directed to fly an F-14 TARPS mission into Lebanon, which turned out to be on the heels of the Israeli strike.

On 3 December, as ordered, JFK launched a VF-31 F-14 TARPS and F-14 escort. The TARPS aircraft was flown by Commander John C. Burch and RIO Lieutenant (future Vice Admiral) John W. "Fozzie" Miller. The flight came under anti-aircraft fire, including at least 10 shoulder-launched SAMs. Both aircraft returned safely with no damage, and the intense opposition was reported up the chain all the way to the White House.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Thayer and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Vessey briefed President Reagan. There are multiple accounts of what happened at this point, but none make clear why this particular incident provoked a response when many previous TARPS missions had been fired on by man-portable SAMs without any response. These accounts don't necessarily match, because no one wanted to claim ownership of the fiasco that followed. Some claim this event was just an excuse to conduct a retaliatory strike for the bombing of the Marine Barracks. If so, it was a classic case of too little, too late, not to mention the wrong targets. However it really came about, President Reagan authorized a strike, but did not dictate the timing.

The Air Strike, 4 December 1983

In the late afternoon of 3 December, CTF-60 received direction via the chain of command to conduct a strike the next day. This in itself was a challenge, as JFK had gone from a 4-hour to 24-hour alert status, expecting to depart the Mediterranean imminently. There was also a scramble to assign appropriate targets. EUCOM ruled out striking the Sheikh Abdullah Barracks in Baalbek under the principle that anyone there who

had anything to do with either the Marine Barracks bombing or the missile firings was long gone, and that the French had already hit it anyway.

Instead of Baalbek, EUCOM substituted four sets of targets: three Syrian AAA sites and one radar site in Lebanon to the east of Beirut. Rear Admiral Tuttle didn't think any "were worth a damn as military targets." Tuttle rejected one of the AAA sites as too heavily defended. The target sets had been previously identified, and the three remaining were off-the-shelf designated Ready Strike (RS) 7, 8, and 16. RS7 and RS8 were small and radar-insignificant AAA sites; they could only be located by eyeball. RS16 was a large white building with radar serving as an electronic junction connecting Syrian AAA and missile batteries in Lebanon.

As air wing planners worked the details of the strike, it was determined that the strike would include 12 A-7Es and 6 A-6Es off INDY and 10 A-6Es off JFK. The planners determined that the most effective weapon against the AAA sites was Rockeye (a cluster munition). Each A-6 was to be loaded with 10 Rockeyes. This required extensive work by ordnancemen, as INDY's aircraft were loaded for close air support of Marines ashore and for "SUCAP" (surface combat air patrol) against a potential small suicide boat threat (of which many reports had been received). JFK had to undo much of the work that had been done in preparation for the Suez transit (ordnance had already been taken off the aircraft).

The Syrian threat in the target area was limited to AAA, SA-7 shoulder-launched SAMs, and SA-9 SAMs (a wheeled vehicle with missile characteristics not much different than a man-portable system). To avoid the worst of the threat, the strike would go in at about 10,000 feet, above the 8,000 feet effective altitude of the SA-7/SA-9 threat and most of the AAA. In order to find the small targets, the strike would have to go in during daylight.

Rear Admiral Tuttle was under the reasonable impression that, as the on-scene commander, he had control of the timing of the strike, and set launch for

1100 (Lebanon time) and 1130 time over target (TOT). This was a tight timeline to get the right ordnance on the aircraft, and the aircrews properly rested and briefed, but was considered doable. CAG Mazach on JFK, and CAG Andrews on INDY planned accordingly. Most everyone, except the ordnancemen who worked throughout the night, went to get some sleep in advance of the strike.

At 0530, Rear Admiral Tuttle was awakened and informed that orders had been received to launch the strike at 0630 for a TOT of 0700. This set off what has been described in various accounts as a "mad flail" and many more obscene variations thereof. Tuttle argued for an extension back to his planned timeline, but was granted only one additional hour. Accounts of the command and control during this period are vague and contradictory. To this day, it is not known at which level of the chain of command the 0630 launch time was directed, or the only one-hour extension granted. However, there does appear to have been a mix-up in calculating time zones for correct Lebanon time. Regardless, it threw the whole flight deck operation into confusion.

As a result of the changed time, many of the aircraft would launch with the incorrect ordnance, or only partial loads. Aircrew had insufficient time to adequately brief the mission. There was no time to execute a deception plan, so the Soviet AGI monitoring the activity had ample time to report and provide warning to Soviet authorities, which almost certainly was passed to the Syrians.

Early morning was also the worst time of all to conduct a strike into that part of Lebanon. The already hard-to-find targets would be even harder to find, shrouded in shadow and mist. The aircrew would have the sun in their eyes, while the Syrian gunners would have the sun at their backs, highlighting the aircraft against the darker western sky.

The launch commenced on time, at a cost of almost none of the planes having the correct ordnance, and pilots and bombardier/navigators (B/Ns) only minimally prepared for the mission and targets.

Forming up the groups took longer than planned, so the push to target was delayed, and required some communications easily intercepted by the Soviets. The Syrians probably had at least 30 minutes of warning.

Although most accounts state 28 aircraft were launched, that only accounts for the strike aircraft. The mission was supported by E-2Cs, EA-6Bs, and KA-6D tankers. VF-11 provided CAP and VF-31 was designated to provide rescue CAP for any effort to rescue a pilot shot down over land. The S-3s and SH-3s also provided support.

CAG Andrews in an A-7E of VA-15 led INDY's CVW-6 strike package of five A-6s of VA-176 and 13 A-7s of VA-15 and VA-87. The plan called for INDY's aircraft to hit the targets first, crossing the beach south of Beirut, turning northeast to the target and egressing to the northwest over Christian areas of Lebanon and going feet-wet north of Juniyah.

CAG Mazach led the 10 A-6s of JFK's CVW-3, including 7 from VA-85 and 3 from VA-75, with their strike timed to hit just after CVW-6, from a different direction. CVW-6 went in north of Beirut, turned southeast to the targets, and then on to egress to the southwest.

Most of the aircrews had no combat experience and Syrian anti-aircraft fire was shockingly intense. At least 40 portable SAMs were launched during the raid and AAA fire was very heavy. Nevertheless, all aircraft pressed to their targets, and flares, chaff, jinking maneuvers and altitude defeated the SAMs. However, on the egress from the target, INDY/CVW-6 aircraft flew over what was described as a "SAM-infested" ridgeline (near the target that Rear Admiral Tuttle had rejected as too heavily defended).

CAG Andrews would be awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts in making SAM-launch calls to other aircraft, which kept many from being hit. However, his own A-7 reportedly had an inoperable flare-ejection system and he was hit. He was able to coax the aircraft out over water before ejecting, where he was rescued by friendly Lebanese fishermen, although he was badly injured. His plane, however,

kept flying, reversed course and then crashed into a house in the Christian area near Juniyah, injuring (or killing, in some accounts) seven or eight civilians. One other A-7 was damaged but made it back to the carrier.

Meanwhile, CAG Mazach and his 10 A-6s were approaching the target area from the northwest. One of the last planes in the formation was the only one with close to a full load of bombs—six 1,000-pound Mk. 83s. As such, this plane may have been slower and less maneuverable than the others. Flown by pilot Lieutenant Mark A. "Doppler" Lange and bombardier/navigator Lieutenant Robert O. "Bobby" Goodman of VA-85, this A-6 was hit by a missile before any of the aircraft began dispensing flares and chaff. In the barrage of Syrian fire that followed, no one initially saw Lange's plane go down. The defensive tactics worked for the rest of the aircraft. However, there was a period of confusion coming off target trying to determine which aircraft was missing. Mazach's bombs hung on the rail and did not drop. The 10 lightly loaded A-6s dropped 4 Mk. 83 bombs and 14 APAM cluster bombs on target, not much more than one A-6 was capable of delivering.

Lange's A-6 went down before dropping any bombs. He was able to keep his flaming aircraft airborne long enough for Goodman to have barely enough time to eject. However, Lange's own ejection was a split second too late and he did not achieve separation from his seat before hitting the ground. He was quickly found by the Syrians, still alive in the seat, with one leg severed. Had the Syrians rendered aid, he might have survived, but instead he bled to death.

Goodman was knocked unconscious, broke several ribs, and injured a shoulder and a knee. Captured by the Syrians, the next thing Goodman knew was that he was in a truck heading for Damascus.

After the strike, the Department of Defense spokesman claimed it was "very successful" with a SAM site demolished and 11 point targets struck, including an ammunition dump. Few of those directly involved in the strike would have characterized it as

“very successful.” The Syrians claimed to have lost only 2 killed and 10 wounded, which was probably about as accurate as the DoD spokesman’s statement.

In hitting targets of minimal significance, in its first aerial combat action since Vietnam, the U.S. Navy lost two of 28 aircraft, with one pilot dead and his B/N captured. After all the intensive planning and training for strikes into Lebanon, this action bore no resemblance to any of it. Almost no one considered this a success, and as a result most accounts afterward get pretty vague. What is certain was that the blame did not lie with the pilots and B/Ns who bravely pressed to the targets in the face of intense opposition. Rather, the blame lay with a purely arbitrary decision on timing by “higher authority” (never held to account, or even identified) dictating a tactical decision over the judgment of the on-scene commander.

Rear Admiral Tuttle was an irascible, aggressive commander, who rode his staff extremely hard and did not suffer incompetence gladly; most everyone would do their best to stay out of his line of fire. Yet there was an almost universal belief among the air wing in IKE that if you ever had to go to war, Jerry Tuttle was who you wanted to follow. Everyone believed he was handed a raw deal, and deserved better than this cluster-goat rope.

After the fact, there would be much second-guessing about why aircraft were used instead of *New Jersey*. However, at this point, *New Jersey* was an untested capability, and without the aid of forward spotting, accuracy was in question. Given EUCOM’s record in opposing anything to do with the battleship, it’s unlikely approval would have been given anyway.

Heavy Marine Casualties, 4 December 1983

Although reportedly not directly related to the airstrike, the Marine positions at BIA came under four hours of intense shellfire from Syrian-backed militias on 4 December. At 2204, a 122mm rocket made a direct hit on Checkpoint 7. When the shelling

started, six off-duty Marines had gone forward to aid the four at the checkpoint. As a result, eight Marines were killed and two wounded at the checkpoint. *Ticonderoga*, *Tattnal*, and *Claude V. Ricketts* responded with 5-inch gunfire.

On 7 December, the Syrians delivered the body of Lieutenant Lange to the U.S. embassy in Beirut, but retained Goodman as a prisoner. Negotiations for Goodman’s return were already underway, but were not making much progress.

On 9 December, a U.S. Navy Seabee supporting the Marines was wounded when an RPG hit his bulldozer.

On 13 December, F-14s on a reconnaissance mission over Lebanon were fired upon. *Ticonderoga* and *Tattnal* responded with 50 rounds of 5-inch gunfire in a 15-minute bombardment.

New Jersey Opens Fire, 14 December 1983

On 14 December, F-14s were again fired on. *Ticonderoga* and *Tattnal* again responded within five minutes with 30 rounds each of 5-inch. This time, however, *New Jersey* opened fire for the first time since her 1969 deployment to Vietnam. The battleship fired 11 16-inch shells. Rear Admiral Tuttle’s request to fly a F-14 TARPS mission to gain an accurate battle damage assessment (BDA) was refused by EUCOM for unknown reason. This denial of BDA by EUCOM after *New Jersey* fire missions would not be the last.

On 15 December, the Marines came under 23mm cannon and mortar fire. *New Jersey* responded with a 20-minute barrage of 40 5-inch shells. Her big guns were not used as the targets were only about two or three miles inland and near populated areas. Yet again, a request to fly TARPS BDA was denied by EUCOM.

Claude V. Ricketts conducted multiple fire missions in support of the Marines on 13, 18 and 19 December (and possibly other dates).

On 21 December, the French were hit by another truck bomb. This time only one French soldier was killed, but 14 Lebanese died. Another terrorist bomb killed four people at a Western-owned bar. On 27 December, Beirut International was shelled again.

Absolution of Accountability—December 1983

On 27 December, having received the highly critical results of the Long Commission report, President Reagan issued a statement: "I do not believe that the local commanders on the ground, men who have suffered quite enough, should be punished for not fully comprehending the nature of today's terrorist threat.... If there is to be blame, it properly rests here in this office and with this president." On the one hand, President Reagan's gesture was magnanimous; on the other hand, it short-stopped further efforts at accountability. Much of the Long Commission report was quickly shelved and forgotten. Meanwhile, congressional pressure to withdraw the Marines was increasing rapidly.

The Long Commission report was unsparing in its criticism of the actions (and inactions) of the entire chain of command in the lead-up to the Marine Barracks bombing (much of which was applicable to the 4 December air strike). The report went into great detail regarding confusion regarding what the rules of engagement actually said, and how they were interpreted in a "peacekeeping" mindset in an environment where there was no longer peace to keep. Many of the Long Commission recommendations for streamlining the chain of command, among others, were effectively ignored by the affected commands, in the absence of accountability afterward. The non-implementation of the Long Commission report would be referenced in future terrorist attacks (including 9/11) as "lessons not learned."

On 2 January 1984, the British were the first to complete a pull-out from Beirut with their relatively small force, ending their participation in the MNF.

Lieutenant Goodman Released by Syria Thanks to Jesse Jackson—3 December 1983

The U.S. made multiple attempts to get the Syrians to release Lieutenant Goodman, but without success. Then, in late December 1983, somewhat to the administration's chagrin, the civil rights activist (and outspoken Reagan administration critic) Reverend Jesse Jackson traveled to Damascus, Syria, with a fairly large delegation that included Louis Farrakhan and two of Jackson's sons. Jackson made a personal appeal to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad for the release of Goodman. Assad acquiesced and Goodman was released to the delegation on 3 January 1984. President Reagan graciously met with Lieutenant Goodman and Jackson at the White House on 4 January. As a result of the positive publicity, Jesse Jackson shortly thereafter announced his candidacy to be Democratic Party nominee for President in the 1984 election (former Vice President Walter Mondale would win the nomination).

Throughout December and into January, the marines continued to strengthen their positions at the airport. Material was brought in by the large cargo ship *Transcolumbia* and by helicopter from Larnaca, Cyprus. Construction was accomplished by 74 U.S. Navy Seabees and 99 marine combat engineers, who emplaced more than 400 sea-land containers, 192 bunkers, and 156 two-man fighting holes.

On 15 January, the marines at the airport endured a three-hour bombardment by 23mm cannon fire and 122mm rockets that set a fuel depot on fire. *New Jersey* and *Tattnal* responded with a combined total of 120 5-inch rounds (no 16-inch rounds were fired).

On 24 January, *Tattnal* suffered a serious fire. *Claude V. Ricketts* rendered assistance. The fire does not appear to have resulted in any deaths or serious injuries, but did cause significant equipment damage, rendering the ship unable to use anti-aircraft weapons or Harpoon missiles. *Tattnal* proceeded to Naples for initial repair, but the damage was extensive enough that it had to return to the States.

On 28 January, an SA-7 shoulder-launched SAM was fired at a marine CH-46 helicopter, but missed and impacted in the sea. On 30 January, rocket-propelled grenade and small-arms fire from Shia Amal positions killed yet another marine and wounded another.

On 5 February, the Lebanese prime minister and the cabinet resigned. Extensive fighting between Shia and Druze militias raged just outside Beirut, while the city itself was reportedly descending into chaos. The LAF was rapidly disintegrating into religious factions. This would be the primary stated reason for U.S. withdrawal, not because of the terrorist attacks.

On 6 February, the marines at the airport came under small-arms and heavy-caliber fire, which killed one marine. For the only time in the MNF deployment, a marine forward air controller called in an airstrike. A VA-75 A-6 Intruder off JFK hit the designated target with two laser-guided bombs. The Marine Corps history indicated that naval 5-inch gunfire responded as well, although it is not clear from which ship.

The End of MNF—A Big Bang, Then a Whimper, February 1984

On 7 February 1984, finally convinced that the marines ashore in Beirut could serve no further useful purpose, President Reagan issued the order to withdraw the 1,700 personnel in the country. Before withdrawing, however, the Navy-Marine Corps team executed yet another noncombatant evacuation of civilian personnel from the U.S. embassy, with 40 personnel flown by marine helicopter to *Manitowoc* on 7 February and 49 more the next day to *Guam*. By 11 February, 787 people had been evacuated either by helicopter or by boat from Juniyah to PHIBRON ships, with which they were then taken to Larnaca, Cyprus. On 11 February, one female civilian was hit and wounded by a stray round and flown to *Guam* for treatment. Other than that, the NEO was executed without significant issue.

The Big Bang, 8 February 1984

On 8 February, shelling in East Beirut had become intense near the Lebanese presidential palace and the U.S. ambassador's residence. More than 5,000 Syrian artillery rounds fell on the area, causing serious civilian casualties. As a result, the Lebanese government once again requested U.S. fire support, which was granted.

Later that day, *New Jersey* and *Caron* moved into firing position (the Marine Corps account states *Moosebrugger* rather than *Caron*). *New Jersey* unleashed a barrage of 288 16-inch shells at Syrian and Druze targets, while *Caron* fired 300 5-inch rounds. Over the course of nine hours, each ship fired on 15 targets. Rear Admiral Tuttle's request to fly TARPS missions to gain accurate damage assessments was denied yet again by EUCOM for reasons that remain unclear. As a result, the Syrians got the jump on the public relations campaign, with a spokesman claiming that only innocent civilians and goats were killed by the battleship's shelling.

It was later determined that many *New Jersey* shells did miss, probably due to an unreliable powder problem that had not yet been recognized. Nevertheless, several Syrian artillery batteries subsequently "disappeared" from the Syrian order of battle. The *New Jersey* did, in fact, hit a command post and killed the general commanding Syrian forces in Lebanon along with several other senior officers, which the Syrians didn't admit.

By 20 February, the Italians completed their pull-out from Lebanon.

On 25 February, the district near the U.S. ambassador's residence was shelled again. *Caron* responded with 70 5-inch rounds. By the next day, all of the marines were out of the Beirut area except for an increased contingent to guard the U.S. embassy and the ambassador's residence. The excess equipment that had been built up at the airport over the preceding two years had been loaded onto *Manitowoc* and *Barnstable County* and taken to Haifa,

Israel, for transshipment to the United States on the large cargo ship *Transcolumbia*. The marines left little behind except sandbags. Within six minutes of the last marines leaving Beirut International, Shia Amal militia flags were flying over the former U.S. positions.

On 26 February, an hour after the last marines departed by ship, an F-14 reconnaissance flight over Beirut was fired upon. *New Jersey* and *Caron* responded with 16 16-inch and 50 5-inch rounds in an impressive but largely futile gesture. These would be the last shots fired in anger by *New Jersey* (as she missed Desert Storm) before she would be decommissioned for the last time in February 1991. *New Jersey* had fired 310 16-inch shells in Lebanon, adding to the 5,866 fired in Vietnam, for a career total—including World War II and Korea—of almost 7,700, the most of any U.S. battleship. (During Desert Storm, *Missouri* fired 759 and *Wisconsin* fired 324 for a total of 1,083 rounds.)

The last U.S. Navy fire support mission occurred on 29 February 1984, when a team of forward observers were fired upon. USS *W. S. Sims* (FF-1059) responded with three rounds of 5-inch fire before the Mk. 42 gun jammed. Out with a whimper.

On 31 March, the last French troops withdrew from Beirut, thus ending the futile MNF mission. The U.S. Marines would remain on PHIBRON 6 ships offshore until 10 April 1984. On 24 July 1984, the plussed-up contingent of marines guarding the U.S. (and British) embassy re-embarked on PHIBRON 4 ships by helicopter and amtrac.

Conclusion

In his autobiography, Secretary of the Navy Lehman made astute observations regarding the Lebanon operation. He said, “The ferocious struggles for turf during the Reagan administration among the State Department, the Defense Department, and the NSC had already made Kissinger’s Byzantine plots of the 1970s charmingly innocent by comparison.” This infighting proved debilitating to the adaptation of

policy in the face of a rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon, in which the initial conditions for entry no longer applied. Mired in “turf wars,” the U.S. national security leadership and bureaucracy could not keep up with the “enemy.”

Secretary Lehman also observed, “In fact, there was no strategy and there were no contingency plans for this rapidly developing ‘worst case.’ As unfortunately happens all too often with our bloated, layered bureaucracy in Washington, we had fallen behind events and were merely improvising reactions. Therein lay a tale that, when finished, wrecked the President’s entire Middle East Policy and cost the lives of 241 young Americans. Our military’s most basic structure, the chain of command, was proved hopelessly ineffective in a scathing inquiry that laid the blame where it belonged. Because of the inconvenience of these findings, the inquiry was ignored and quickly forgotten, and the stage set for the repetition of failure, which came inevitably just months later.” (The “scathing inquiry” was the Long Commission report.)

Everything that Secretary Lehman said was true, with the exception of the cost, which was higher. Although 241 U.S. military personnel died as a result of the Marine Barracks bombing, adding those military personnel killed in the terrorist bombing on the U.S. embassy, in shelling and sniping around the Beirut airport, and in the 4 December airstrike, the number was 265. This included 19 U.S. Navy personnel: one pilot in the airstrike and 18 in the barracks bombing. Including deaths for operational accidents related to the operation takes the toll even higher. Exact numbers of those wounded, many seriously, are not exact but are on the order of about 160. The French suffered 89 deaths, including 58 in the bombing of their barracks, while the Italians suffered two killed in action. Whether U.S., French, or Italian, these military personnel answered the call of duty to the fullest. Whether it was “worth it” is debatable.

Afterward—Mudgun and Super CAG

In May 1984, as a result of the experience in Lebanon, Secretary Lehman signed an order to create the Navy Strike Warfare Center (NSWC) at NAS Fallon, Nevada. The purpose was to create an intense training environment for strike aircraft, similar to that provided by Topgun for fighter aircraft. The first commanding officer of NSWC was Captain Joe Prueher, formerly CVW-7 Commander on IKE during the Lebanon Crisis. Wags would refer to the new command as “Strike U” or “Mudgun” but it would prove its worth many times over in Navy strike operations in operations to include Praying Mantis, Desert Storm, Deliberate Force, Allied Force, Southern/Northern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom, along with some lesser actions.

Another innovation derived from the Lebanon experience was the creation of what at the time was known as “Super CAG,” which increased the grade for an air wing commander to captain/O-6, along with a deputy air wing commander (DCAG), a beefed-up air wing staff (with an intelligence targeteer), and with an alternate path to aviation flag officer that did not require command of an aircraft carrier. This also proved effective in future combat operations.

Sources include:

Frank, Benis M. *U.S. Marines in Lebanon, 1982–1984*. Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1987.

Lehman, John F., Jr. *Command of the Seas: Building the 600-Ship Navy*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988.

Martin, David C., and John Wolcott. *Best-Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America’s War Against Terrorism*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

“Modern Naval Battles: U.S. Naval Gunfire in Lebanon (1983–1984)” at influenceofhistory.blogspot.com.

Naval History and Heritage Command *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFs) at history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs.html.

Timberg, Robert. *The Nightingale’s Song*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

Wilson, George. *Super Carrier: An Inside Account of Life Aboard the World’s Most Powerful Ship, the USS John F. Kennedy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986.