

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #571
The Hijacking Of The Achille Lauro
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Transcript

[00:00:00] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about the [hijacking](#)¹ of the cruise ship, the Achille Lauro.

[00:00:29] It's a story that brings together terrorism, guns, [grenades](#)², the Middle East, and a diplomatic incident that almost caused two close NATO allies to turn their guns on each other.

[00:00:43] So, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:00:47] If you look up the definition of "cruise ship" in a dictionary, you'll probably find something like "a large ship that carries people on voyages for pleasure, typically [calling in at](#)³ several places".

[00:01:04] For one American couple, Leon Klinghoffer and his wife Marilyn, this was exactly what they were hoping for.

¹ taking control of it by force

² small bombs that can be thrown by hand

³ stopping at them during a journey

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[00:01:13] They were celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary and bought a ticket on the Achille Lauro, a large ship that would take them from Genoa in northern Italy, around the Mediterranean, stopping at Naples and Syracuse, then continuing to Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Greece, before returning to Genoa 11 days later.

[00:01:37] It would be a wonderful trip, one that was [firmly](#)⁴ in the “for pleasure” category.

[00:01:44] Leon Klinghoffer, however, would never make it off the ship.

[00:01:49] Or at least, would never make it off the ship alive.

[00:01:54] On October 14, 1985, his [lifeless](#)⁵ body [washed up](#)⁶ on a Syrian beach, with gunshot wounds to the head and chest.

[00:02:06] Eleven days beforehand, he and 750 or so other passengers had [embarked](#)⁷ at Genoa, in northern Italy.

⁴ strongly, with certainty

⁵ dead, without life

⁶ brought to the shore by the sea

⁷ got on the ship to begin the journey

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[00:02:15] The ship wasn't a classic luxury liner, but it was perfectly well-equipped: two swimming pools on the roof, a cinema, a gym, and cabins with private [balconies](#)⁸, which were something of a [novelty](#)⁹ for cruise ships at that time.

[00:02:33] Most of the passengers were Italian—it was an Italian cruise liner after all—but there were some Brits and Americans too, as well as a [smattering](#)¹⁰ of other nationalities.

[00:02:45] There were also four young men who [kept themselves to themselves](#)¹¹.

[00:02:50] One of them had been on the same cruise a few times before, which seemed odd, but he had a valid ticket.

[00:02:59] A member of staff recognised him and, trying to [strike up](#)¹² a conversation, asked him where he was from. He didn't seem very interested in talking and replied with one word: Norwegian.

⁸ small platforms outside rooms, with a railing

⁹ something new or unusual

¹⁰ a small number or amount

¹¹ stayed private, didn't talk much to others

¹² start

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[00:03:13] This also seemed a little odd, as he didn't have classic Nordic features: he had dark hair and [olive¹³](#) skin, he looked more like a southern Italian or someone from the Middle East than someone from Scandinavia.

[00:03:30] Another member of the group, when asked, said that he was Argentinian, but he didn't seem to understand when a passenger [engaged¹⁴](#) him in Spanish.

[00:03:41] Odd, again, but the men had valid tickets, they were paying customers. Perhaps they simply preferred their own company.

[00:03:51] On Monday, October 7th, four days after setting off, and after stops in Naples and Syracuse, the cruise ship pulled into Alexandria in Egypt.

[00:04:04] The plan was for the passengers to [disembark¹⁵](#) and go on a tour of the pyramids. While this was happening, the ship would make its way to Port Said, a couple of hundred kilometres to the east, and the passengers would rejoin the ship there.

[00:04:22] And sure enough, most of the passengers got off, climbed into buses and headed off to visit one of the seven wonders of the world.

[00:04:32] Just [shy of¹⁶](#) 100 passengers remained on board.

¹³ a tree fruit; here meaning skin colour like people from the mediterranean

¹⁴ involved him in a conversation

¹⁵ get off the ship

¹⁶ a little less than

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[00:04:37] Shortly afterwards, the four quiet, odd, men revealed themselves as not so innocent after all.

[00:04:46] As the remaining passengers were having their lunch in the ship's dining room, the men charged into the room with machine guns, firing their weapons in the air.

[00:04:57] There were [shrieks](#)¹⁷ and cries from the terrified passengers. The men were heavily armed: guns, [grenades](#), and [ammunition](#)¹⁸ wrapped around their waists.

[00:05:09] Quickly, they [rounded up](#)¹⁹ all the passengers on board and [frogmarched](#)²⁰ them into the dining room.

[00:05:16] The ship's captain was called and instructed to set sail for the Syrian port of Tartus.

[00:05:24] The captain had no option but to [obey](#)²¹, and the ship [steamed](#)²² northwards.

¹⁷ high-pitched cries of fear or pain

¹⁸ bullets and explosives for weapons

¹⁹ gathered them together in one place

²⁰ forced them to walk forward by holding their arms tightly

²¹ do what he was told

²² moved forward quickly

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[00:05:31] At the beginning, it was unclear who these men were and what they wanted.

[00:05:38] Their motivations seemed to be political, as they said things like “Reagan no good, Arafat good”.

[00:05:47] Yasser Arafat, as you may remember, was the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the PLO.

[00:05:55] But the men hadn’t made any demands; they hadn’t **explicitly**²³ stated what they wanted.

[00:06:02] It was also unclear how many attackers were on board the ship.

[00:06:07] They told the captain there were twenty of them, but the captain could only see four.

[00:06:12] And in fact, this claim of twenty was a **bluff**²⁴; there were only four.

[00:06:19] The men instructed the ship’s crew to continue as if everything was normal, not to send out any sign of **distress**²⁵ or notify the coastguard that anything had happened.

²³ very clearly and directly

²⁴ a trick or false threat

²⁵ a strong signal asking for help

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[00:06:31] But before they had the chance to shut down the radio systems, an officer on the ship was able to send out an SOS message, which was picked up by a monitoring station all the way up in Sweden, in Gothenburg, to be precise.

[00:06:47] The Swedes notified their international allies that this ship had been [taken hostage](#)²⁶, and it was here that things started to [ratchet up a notch](#)²⁷.

[00:06:59] Given that there were Americans on board, the US Defence Department soon [sprang into action](#)²⁸. Special forces were [dispatched](#)²⁹ to the region, and American allies were instructed not to allow the ship to [dock](#)³⁰, so that it remained in international waters.

[00:07:19] International waters, of course, meaning that the ship wasn't under the [jurisdiction](#)³¹ of any country, and could be [stormed](#)³² by marines without it being considered an attack in the sovereign territory of another nation.

²⁶ captured to force others to act

²⁷ become more intense

²⁸ started acting quickly

²⁹ sent out

³⁰ go into a harbour and be tied up

³¹ legal power or control

³² attacked suddenly and with force

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[00:07:33] The other major international player here was Italy. The ship was an Italian ship, it had set sail from Italy, and most of the passengers—and therefore most of the [hostages](#)³³—were Italian citizens.

[00:07:50] But Italy was more [cautious](#)³⁴ in its response than the US. At this point, in the mid-1980s, Italy had taken on the role of something of a regional [power-broker](#)³⁵ in the Mediterranean, and had been [nurturing](#)³⁶ its relationship with Arab states in the region.

[00:08:11] Nobody had claimed responsibility for the [hijacking](#), and the men hadn't yet issued any demands, so the Italians were [cautious](#) about [pointing the finger](#)³⁷ at anyone.

[00:08:23] [Suspicion](#)³⁸, however, fell immediately on the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the PLO for short.

[00:08:32] The gunmen had been expressing their support for Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, and the international community suspected the PLO was behind it.

³³ people captured by force and kept as prisoners

³⁴ careful, avoiding risk

³⁵ a country with influence in making big decisions

³⁶ helping it grow or develop

³⁷ blaming

³⁸ a belief that they might be guilty or involved

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[00:08:44] Yasser Arafat, however, denied it.

[00:08:47] And he didn't just deny it; he offered to send assistance in putting an end to the incident.

[00:08:55] The following morning, 24 hours after the gunmen had [stormed](#) the dining room, things became a little clearer.

[00:09:04] The men started questioning the [hostages](#), asking their nationality and taking their passports. They were looking for British and American citizens, Jews, in particular.

[00:09:17] When they discovered that an elderly man was Jewish, they hit him over the head with their guns.

[00:09:24] And at 11 o'clock that morning, they issued their first demand, via a radio broadcast to the Syrian authorities, with an instruction for the message to be passed on to Israel.

[00:09:37] The men were from the PLF, the Palestinian Liberation Front, and unless 50 Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli prisons, they would start [executing](#)³⁹ the hostages.

[00:09:52] Israel had until 3 pm: five hours.

³⁹ killing them as punishment or to make a threat

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[00:09:57] Now, as a brief overview of the very complicated situation in the Middle East at that point, Israel as a state was less than 40 years old.

[00:10:09] Since its creation in 1948, the region had seen repeated wars, mass [displacement](#)⁴⁰, and a [bitter](#)⁴¹, unresolved [struggle](#)⁴² between Israel and the Palestinians, a [struggle](#) that seems, unfortunately, no closer to a resolution.

[00:10:26] And by the mid-1980s, this conflict was no longer confined to Israel and the occupied territories.

[00:10:35] Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon had driven Yasser Arafat and the PLO out of Beirut, [scattering](#)⁴³ Palestinian [factions](#)⁴⁴ across the region.

[00:10:46] Hundreds of militants were in Israeli prisons, and smaller [splinter groups](#)⁴⁵ carried out attacks abroad to try to force prisoner releases.

[00:10:57] One of these groups was the Palestinian Liberation Front, the PLF.

⁴⁰ forcing people to leave their homes

⁴¹ full of anger and hatred

⁴² a hard fight or conflict

⁴³ spreading out in different directions

⁴⁴ small groups inside the bigger group

⁴⁵ small groups that had broken away from a larger group

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[00:11:03] It was loyal to a man called Abu Abbas, and while it was technically linked to the PLO—the main [umbrella group](#)⁴⁶ led by Yasser Arafat—it often operated more independently, and in this case, it's believed without Arafat's direct authorisation.

[00:11:23] So, to put it simply, it seemed like these men were trying to use the Achille Lauro as a [bargaining chip](#)⁴⁷.

[00:11:32] They thought that with almost a hundred hostages, including Americans, the Israelis would have no choice but to [comply](#)⁴⁸.

[00:11:41] But there was a problem. Both Israel and the United States had a very [strict](#)⁴⁹ policy of not [giving in](#)⁵⁰ to terrorist demands.

[00:11:52] And with Syria refusing to let the Achille Lauro [dock](#), the ship was left circling at sea, stuck [in limbo](#)⁵¹ with armed men threatening to kill its passengers.

⁴⁶ the main group that included smaller ones

⁴⁷ something used in talks to get what they wanted

⁴⁸ do what was asked

⁴⁹ following rules exactly, without exceptions

⁵⁰ agreeing to demands

⁵¹ stuck with no clear result or decision

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[00:12:05] As the deadline approached, the [tension](#)⁵² on board the ship was unbearable.

[00:12:10] [Hostages](#) sat in fear, not knowing if they would live or die.

[00:12:15] The [hijackers](#)⁵³ were growing more [agitated](#)⁵⁴. The hours [ticked by](#)⁵⁵ with no response.

[00:12:22] As 3 pm approached, the gunmen started to move.

[00:12:27] By this point, the hostages had been [shepherded](#)⁵⁶ to an upstairs [lounge](#)⁵⁷.

That is, all but one of the hostages.

[00:12:36] One man, a 69-year-old American called Leon Klinghoffer, was [confined to](#)⁵⁸ a wheelchair and had no way of making it up the stairs.

⁵² nervousness or worry

⁵³ people who had taken control of the ship by force

⁵⁴ very nervous, worried, or upset

⁵⁵ passed slowly

⁵⁶ guided or moved together in one direction

⁵⁷ a comfortable room for sitting and relaxing

⁵⁸ forced to stay in

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[00:12:47] The gunmen, we can certainly use the word “terrorists” at this point, had decided to let him stay there.

[00:12:55] And shortly before 3 pm, one of the terrorists returned to find him.

[00:13:01] He [wheeled⁵⁹](#) Klinghoffer to the [rear⁶⁰ deck⁶¹](#), out of sight of the other [hostages](#), and shot him, once in the chest and then in the head.

[00:13:12] He ordered the ship’s staff to throw his body into the sea, and importantly, not to tell any of the other [hostages](#) what had happened.

[00:13:24] When his wife, Marilyn, asked what had happened to her husband, the terrorists told her that he wasn’t feeling well and had been taken to the ship’s [infirmary⁶²](#).

[00:13:35] Don’t worry, they told her, you’ll see him soon.

[00:13:39] The men informed the Syrian authorities that they had killed one of the [hostages](#) and would continue to do so until their demands were met. Pass on the message to the Israelis, they said.

⁵⁹ pushed (something on wheels)

⁶⁰ back

⁶¹ a floor on the ship

⁶² small hospital or medical room

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[00:13:53] But the Syrians refused.

[00:13:56] Syria, it seemed, would be of no assistance.

[00:14:01] A [breakthrough](#)⁶³ came with the help of one of the men offered by Yasser Arafat to assist.

[00:14:08] As a reminder, Arafat was the leader of the PLO, and the terrorists said they were part of the PLF, a splinter group of the PLO.

[00:14:18] One of these men, Abu Abbas, secretly sent a message to the ship using the code-name “Abu Khaled”.

[00:14:27] The message instructed the men to treat the [hostages](#) kindly and to return immediately to Port Said, in Egypt.

[00:14:37] When the hijackers heard this message, they reportedly responded very positively and immediately ordered the ship to turn around and head for Port Said, as instructed.

[00:14:49] They hadn’t intended on [hijacking](#) the ship, they said. They had planned to travel to Israel and launch an attack there, in [retaliation](#)⁶⁴ for the Israeli attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis a week before. But there had been a mistake and they’d had to change plans. We’ll release the [hostages](#), don’t worry, they said.

⁶³ an important step forward or solution

⁶⁴ doing harm in return for harm done

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[00:15:12] Now, the [irony](#)⁶⁵ here is that the man who sent this message to the hijackers, “Abu Khaled”, was Abu Abbas, the man supposedly [negotiating](#)⁶⁶ with the gunmen, alongside the Egyptians and the Italians.

[00:15:27] He was not some [well-intentioned](#)⁶⁷ peace [negotiator](#)⁶⁸.

[00:15:32] He was the leader of the PLF and the very man who had planned and [orchestrated](#)⁶⁹ the entire mission.

[00:15:40] He was the terrorists’ boss, not some [kindly](#)⁷⁰ diplomat.

[00:15:46] When the Americans [joined the dots](#)⁷¹, and realised his role in the mission, this created a [delicate](#)⁷² situation indeed.

⁶⁵ when something is the opposite of what you expect

⁶⁶ talking to reach an agreement

⁶⁷ meant to do good, not harm

⁶⁸ a person who tried to reach an agreement

⁶⁹ planned and organised carefully

⁷⁰ friendly or gentle

⁷¹ put the facts together to understand the situation

⁷² easy to damage; needing careful handling

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[00:15:56] He was a PLO [loyalist](#)⁷³, and much of the international community, including the United States and Italy, had been trying to [foster](#)⁷⁴ closer relations with the PLO, as its primary link to Palestine.

[00:16:11] But this PLO loyalist had been [outed](#)⁷⁵ as someone who the terrorists recognised by name, someone it looked highly likely had organised the entire mission.

[00:16:24] Still, if the PLO were accused, there was the risk of the situation [blowing up](#)⁷⁶, and Abbas seemed like the best person to [defuse](#)⁷⁷ it.

[00:16:35] The ship neared Port Said, entering Egyptian territorial waters and making any kind of American military intervention impossible.

[00:16:46] The captain [radioed in](#)⁷⁸ to the Egyptian authorities and told them that everyone on board was safe and unharmed.

⁷³ someone who strongly supported his group

⁷⁴ encourage or support the growth of them

⁷⁵ revealed or made known

⁷⁶ becoming much worse or more serious

⁷⁷ make it less serious

⁷⁸ sent a message by radio

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[00:16:55] The terrorists would release the [hostages](#) on the condition that they would be [granted safe passage](#)⁷⁹ out of Egypt.

[00:17:03] It seemed like diplomacy had [prevailed](#)⁸⁰. The Italian foreign minister proudly [boasted of](#)⁸¹ Italy's role as a [mediator](#)⁸² in the crisis, [defusing](#)⁸³ an extremely [delicate](#) situation without a drop of blood being [spilled](#)⁸⁴.

[00:17:22] In the afternoon of October 9th, the Achille Lauro arrived back in Port Said and the [hijacking](#) formally ended. The gunmen released the [hostages](#), and to the relief of the Italian and American authorities, the passengers walked free.

[00:17:41] As you know, though, not every passenger walked free.

[00:17:46] The captain had told the authorities that everyone was safe and well, but he knew that Klinghoffer had been murdered by the terrorists.

[00:17:56] He had only lied because one of the terrorists was pointing a gun to his head.

⁷⁹ allowed to travel safely without being stopped

⁸⁰ won or succeeded in the end

⁸¹ spoke with pride about it

⁸² someone who helped the two sides solve the problem

⁸³ making the situation less serious

⁸⁴ run or dropped

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[00:18:02] And when he told the Italian authorities later that day about Klinghoffer, this added a whole new [dimension](#)⁸⁵ to the situation.

[00:18:11] The Egyptians, with the help of the Italian authorities, had allowed four murderers [to get off scot-free](#)⁸⁶, and it looked like they were going to help them [flee](#)⁸⁷ the country.

[00:18:24] And, what's more, the murdered man was American.

[00:18:28] The Americans were [furious](#)⁸⁸, and demanded the Egyptian authorities prosecute the men, or to quote the American ambassador, "we insist that they prosecute those [sons of bitches](#)⁸⁹".

[00:18:41] But at this time the terrorists, now [outed](#) as murderers, were about to board a commercial flight out of the country, to Tunis, where the PLF was headquartered.

[00:18:54] So, to [take stock](#)⁹⁰, we have these four men getting on this plane, assisted by the Egyptian authorities. In fact it's not just the four men at this point; it includes Abu

⁸⁵ aspect or side

⁸⁶ escape without being punished

⁸⁷ run away from danger

⁸⁸ very angry

⁸⁹ very insulting words for bad people

⁹⁰ stop and think about the situation

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Abbas, by now clearly the leader of the mission, but the man who was pretending to be working with the Egyptians and Italians to [defuse](#) the situation.

[00:19:18] It's now clear that a man was murdered on the boat. The Americans are [furious](#), and the Italians are sort of stuck in the middle.

[00:19:29] A plan is [hatched](#)⁹¹ to [intercept](#)⁹² the plane on its way to Tunis.

[00:19:35] The Americans thought this would be possible because Egypt had pretty poor relations with Libya at this point, so the plane would have to go through international airspace.

[00:19:47] And sure enough, as the EgyptAir plane crossed the Mediterranean, four US Navy F-14 fighter [jets](#)⁹³ pulled up alongside it, and instructed it to follow them to a NATO base in Sicily.

[00:20:02] The pilot tried to radio in to the Egyptian authorities, but the Americans had [scrambled](#)⁹⁴ the airwaves, making communication impossible.

⁹¹ designed or put together

⁹² stop it before it reaches its target

⁹³ fast military aeroplanes

⁹⁴ disturbed or made them unintelligible

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[00:20:13] Being **tailed**⁹⁵ by American fighter jets, the pilot had little choice but to agree.

[00:20:19] It was forced to land at the NATO base at Sigonella, on the Italian island of Sicily.

[00:20:26] And this is where the story took an extraordinary **twist**⁹⁶.

[00:20:30] The Americans expected to **take custody of**⁹⁷ the hijackers immediately. It was an American mission, a NATO airbase, and these men had killed an American citizen. It was an American problem to resolve.

[00:20:46] But the Italians refused.

[00:20:48] The Achille Lauro was an Italian ship; the passengers were mostly Italian citizens, and the crime, the Italians argued, had been committed under their jurisdiction.

[00:21:01] **Tensions**⁹⁸ escalated rapidly.

⁹⁵ followed closely behind

⁹⁶ a surprising change

⁹⁷ take official control of them

⁹⁸ feelings of anger or nervousness

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[00:21:04] At one point, American and Italian soldiers faced each other on the [runway](#)⁹⁹ at Sigonella, the Sicilian base, weapons loaded, in a [standoff](#)¹⁰⁰ between two NATO allies.

[00:21:18] Eventually, after [tense](#)¹⁰¹ negotiations, and Italian promises that the men would be [prosecuted](#)¹⁰², common sense [prevailed](#).

[00:21:28] The Italian authorities [took custody of](#)¹⁰³ the hijackers, arrested them, and later put them on trial in Italy.

[00:21:36] Abu Abbas, however, [slipped away](#)¹⁰⁴.

[00:21:40] Despite being the [mastermind](#)¹⁰⁵, he was allowed to leave Italy a free man, supposedly because there wasn't enough evidence to prosecute him at that point.

⁹⁹ the strip of ground where planes took and landed

¹⁰⁰ a situation where the two sides faced each other without agreement

¹⁰¹ full of nervousness or stress

¹⁰² taken to court for their crimes

¹⁰³ took official control of them

¹⁰⁴ escaped quietly

¹⁰⁵ the main planner

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[00:21:51] He flew on to Yugoslavia, then to the Middle East, and for years remained [at large](#)¹⁰⁶.

[00:21:58] The four gunmen, though, would not escape justice.

[00:22:02] In 1986, they were [tried](#)¹⁰⁷ and convicted in an Italian court.

[00:22:07] One received a 30-year sentence, two received life sentences, and the fourth, who had cooperated with the investigators, received a shorter term.

[00:22:17] And as for the Achille Lauro herself, it was not all “[plain sailing](#)¹⁰⁸”, as the expression goes.

[00:22:25] In 1994, while sailing off the coast of Somalia, en route to South Africa, and with almost 900 passengers on board, she caught fire. The crew tried to fight the fire, but it spread uncontrollably.

[00:22:41] The morning afterwards, the ship was [evacuated](#)¹⁰⁹. Two passengers died in the process.

¹⁰⁶ free, not caught

¹⁰⁷ brought to court for their crimes

¹⁰⁸ easy and without problems

¹⁰⁹ emptied, had its passengers moved to a safe place

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[00:22:46] As the rest were ushered away¹¹⁰ in lifeboats, they watched as the Achille Lauro burned and slowly slipped¹¹¹ between the waves, lost forever in the Arabian Sea.

[00:22:59] And as for its legacy, it had consequences far beyond the tragedy of Leon Klinghoffer's death and the courtroom trials¹¹² of the gunmen.

[00:23:08] It shocked public opinion, hardened¹¹³ attitudes against negotiating with terrorists, and pushed governments to act.

[00:23:17] Shortly afterwards, the world's major powers had agreed the SUA Convention, a treaty¹¹⁴ that made ship hijacking an international crime.

[00:23:28] It was also seriously damaging in Italo-American relations. Italy's decision to let Abu Abbas walk free left Washington furious and exposed deep cracks¹¹⁵ in the NATO alliance.

¹¹⁰ guided away

¹¹¹ moved quietly or smoothly

¹¹² court cases to decide guilt

¹¹³ Made them stronger, less soft or less kind

¹¹⁴ an agreement between countries

¹¹⁵ weaknesses or problems

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[00:23:43] And for Palestinians, the image of a murdered, wheelchair-bound tourist was [catastrophic¹¹⁶](#), undermining Yasser Arafat's efforts to present the PLO as a [credible¹¹⁷](#) diplomatic partner.

[00:23:58] So, as a final thought, the Achille Lauro may now lay on the [seabed¹¹⁸](#), [rusting away¹¹⁹](#), but its name remains tied to one of the most [infamous¹²⁰](#) acts of terrorism of the 1980s, one in which only one person died, but that serves as a reminder of how a single act could shake governments, [strain¹²¹](#) alliances, and even change international law.

[00:24:24] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on the Achille Lauro.

[00:24:28] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:24:32] As always, I would love to hear your thoughts on this episode. Do you remember the Achille Lauro crisis? How could it have been handled differently, and what do you think some of the long-lasting consequences have been?

¹¹⁶ very serious and causing great damage

¹¹⁷ believable, able to be trusted

¹¹⁸ the bottom of the sea

¹¹⁹ slowly breaking down because of rust

¹²⁰ famous for something bad

¹²¹ stress or pressure

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[00:24:46] I would love to know, and the place for that is our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com.

[00:24:53] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:24:58] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Hijacking	taking control of it by force
Grenades	small bombs that can be thrown by hand
Calling in at	stopping at them during a journey
Firmly	strongly, with certainty
Lifeless	dead, without life
Washed up	brought to the shore by the sea
Embarked	got on the ship to begin the journey
Balconies	small platforms outside rooms, with a railing
Novelty	something new or unusual
Smattering	a small number or amount
Kept themselves to themselves	stayed private, didn't talk much to others
Strike up	start
Olive	a tree fruit; here meaning skin colour like people from the

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mediterranean

Engaged involved him in a conversation

Disembark get off the ship

Shy of a little less than

Shrieks high-pitched cries of fear or pain

Ammunition bullets and explosives for weapons

Rounded up gathered them together in one place

Frogmarched forced them to walk forward by holding their arms tightly

Obey do what he was told

Steamed moved forward quickly

Explicitly very clearly and directly

Bluff a trick or false threat

Distress a strong signal asking for help

Taken hostage captured to force others to act

Ratchet up a notch become more intense

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Sprang into action	started acting quickly
Dispatched	sent out
Dock	go into a harbour and be tied up
Jurisdiction	legal power or control
Stormed	attacked suddenly and with force
Hostages	people captured by force and kept as prisoners
Cautious	careful, avoiding risk
Power-broker	a country with influence in making big decisions
Nurturing	helping it grow or develop
Pointing the finger	blaming
Suspicion	a belief that they might be guilty or involved
Executing	killing them as punishment or to make a threat
Displacement	forcing people to leave their homes
Bitter	full of anger and hatred
Struggle	a hard fight or conflict

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Scattering	spreading out in different directions
Factions	small groups inside the bigger group
Splinter groups	small groups that had broken away from a larger group
Umbrella group	the main group that included smaller ones
Bargaining chip	something used in talks to get what they wanted
Comply	do what was asked
Strict	following rules exactly, without exceptions
Giving in	agreeing to demands
In limbo	stuck with no clear result or decision
Tension	nervousness or worry
Hijackers	people who had taken control of the ship by force
Agitated	very nervous, worried, or upset
Ticked by	passed slowly
Shepherded	guided or moved together in one direction
Lounge	a comfortable room for sitting and relaxing

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Confined to	forced to stay in
Wheeled	pushed (something on wheels)
Rear	back
Deck	a floor on the ship
Infirmary	small hospital or medical room
Breakthrough	an important step forward or solution
Retaliation	doing harm in return for harm done
Irony	when something is the opposite of what you expect
Negotiating	talking to reach an agreement
Well-intentioned	meant to do good, not harm
Negotiator	a person who tried to reach an agreement
Orchestrated	planned and organised carefully
Kindly	friendly or gentle
Joined the dots	put the facts together to understand the situation
Delicate	easy to damage; needing careful handling

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Loyalist	someone who strongly supported his group
Foster	encourage or support the growth of them
Outed	revealed or made known
Blowing up	becoming much worse or more serious
Defuse	make it less serious
Radioed in	sent a message by radio
Granted safe passage	allowed to travel safely without being stopped
Prevailed	won or succeeded in the end
Boasted of	spoke with pride about it
Mediator	someone who helped the two sides solve the problem
Defusing	making the situation less serious
Spilled	run or dropped
Dimension	aspect or side
To get off scot-free	escape without being punished
Flee	run away from danger

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Furious	very angry
Sons of bitches	very insulting words for bad people
Take stock	stop and think about the situation
Hatched	designed or put together
Intercept	stop it before it reaches its target
Jets	fast military aeroplanes
Scrambled	disturbed or made them unintelligible
Tailed	followed closely behind
Twist	a surprising change
Take custody of	take official control of them
Tensions	feelings of anger or nervousness
Runway	the strip of ground where planes took and landed
Standoff	a situation where the two sides faced each other without agreement
Tense	full of nervousness or stress
Prosecuted	taken to court for their crimes

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Took custody of	took official control of them
Slipped away	escaped quietly
Mastermind	the main planner
At large	free, not caught
Tried	brought to court for their crimes
Plain sailing	easy and without problems
Evacuated	emptied, had its passengers moved to a safe place
Ushered away	guided away
Slipped	moved quietly or smoothly
Trials	court cases to decide guilt
Hardened	made them stronger, less soft or less kind
Treaty	an agreement between countries
Cracks	weaknesses or problems
Catastrophic	very serious and causing great damage
Credible	believable, able to be trusted

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Seabed	the bottom of the sea
Rusting away	slowly breaking down because of rust
Infamous	famous for something bad
Strain	stress or pressure

Language spotlight

1. Keep to yourself / keep themselves to themselves

- **Meaning:** to stay private, not mix or talk much with others
- **Synonyms:** stay private, be reserved
- **Antonyms:** open up, be sociable
- **Examples:**
 - On the cruise, the couple **kept to themselves** and didn't join the other passengers.
 - He usually **keeps to himself** at work, but today he joined us for lunch.

2. Strike up (a conversation/friendship)

- **Meaning:** to begin talking or to start a relationship in a friendly way
- **Synonyms:** start, begin, initiate
- **Antonyms:** end, cut off, avoid
- **Examples:**
 - The passengers **struck up** a conversation with the crew.

- She quickly **struck up** a friendship with her new neighbour.

3. Point the finger

- **Meaning:** to blame someone or say they are guilty
- **Synonyms:** blame, accuse
- **Antonyms:** forgive, excuse, defend
- **Examples:**
 - After the hijacking, politicians began to **point the finger** at each other.
 - Instead of **pointing the finger**, we should try to find a solution together.

4. Get off scot-free

- **Meaning:** to escape without punishment or consequences
- **Synonyms:** escape, avoid punishment, go free
- **Antonyms:** be punished, face justice
- **Examples:**
 - Many people were angry that the hijacker **got off scot-free**.

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- He cheated in the exam and thought he would **get off scot-free**, but the teacher caught him.

5. Take stock (of something)

- **Meaning:** to pause and think carefully about a situation before deciding what to do
- **Synonyms:** reflect, evaluate, consider
- **Antonyms:** rush, act without thinking
- **Examples:**
 - After the crisis, the leaders met to **take stock** of what had happened.
 - It's good to **take stock** of your goals at the end of the year.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. Where did the Achille Lauro cruise ship begin its journey?

- a) Port Said
- b) Alexandria
- c) Genoa
- d) Naples

2. What did the hijackers demand from Israel?

- a) Weapons
- b) Money
- c) Release of 50 Palestinian prisoners
- d) A new ship

3. Who was Leon Klinghoffer?

- a) A ship's officer

b) The captain

c) A passenger in a wheelchair

d) One of the hijackers

4. Which country's fighter jets forced the hijackers' plane to land in Italy?

a) Syria

b) United States

c) Libya

d) Egypt

5. What later happened to the Achille Lauro ship?

a) It sank in a storm

b) It was turned into a museum

c) It was sold to another country

d) It was destroyed by fire

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True or False

6. The hijackers first pretended to be tourists before taking over the ship. (True/False)

7. Leon Klinghoffer survived the hijacking and returned home safely. (True/False)

8. The Italians and Americans agreed quickly on what to do with the hijackers.

(True/False)

9. Abu Abbas, the mastermind, was allowed to leave Italy. (True/False)

10. The hijackers were members of a Palestinian splinter group. (True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. There were also four young men who kept themselves to _____.

12. The Swedes notified their international allies that this ship had been taken hostage, and it was here that things started to ratchet up a _____.

13. Given that there were Americans on board, the US Defence Department soon _____ into action.

14. When the Americans _____ the dots, and realised his role in the mission, this created a delicate situation indeed.

15. And as for the Achille Lauro herself, it was not all “_____ sailing”, as the expression goes.

Vocabulary Practice

Choose the correct definition.

16. Hijacker

- a) A passenger on a cruise ship
- b) A person who takes control of a vehicle by force
- c) A member of the crew
- d) A government officer

17. Hostage

- a) A person who helps in negotiations
- b) A passenger on holiday
- c) A person held prisoner to force others to act
- d) A fighter pilot

18. Jurisdiction

- a) Legal power or control over something

- b) A type of weapon
- c) An agreement between countries
- d) A secret escape plan

19. **Bargaining chip**

- a) Something used in talks to get what you want
- b) A piece of food given to someone
- c) An extra ticket for a journey
- d) A broken part of a ship

20. **Mediator**

- a) A person who takes over a ship
- b) A politician in power
- c) A lawyer in court
- d) A person who helps two sides solve a problem

Answers

1. c) Genoa
2. c) Release of 50 Palestinian prisoners
3. c) A passenger in a wheelchair
4. b) United States
5. d) It was destroyed by fire
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. True
11. themselves
12. notch
13. sprang
14. joined
15. plain
16. b) A person who takes control of a vehicle by force
17. c) A person held prisoner to force others to act
18. a) Legal power or control over something
19. a) Something used in talks to get what you want
20. d) A person who helps two sides solve a problem