

**WHO WOULD THINK AN ENTIRE ARMY  
WOULD ATTACK A SHIP FULL OF  
UNARMED HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISTS?**

**Jerry Campbell**

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Jerry Campbell (1988) is an Australian citizen, and a nursing student at Griffith University in Australia. She joined the Gaza Freedom Flotilla with her husband Ahmed Luqman Talib and her sister-in-law Maryam Luqman Talib.

### **Why did you take part in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla?**

My ultimate goal in taking part in the Flotilla was to see the situation in Gaza at first-hand, as well as take a tour of the hospitals there. I had changed my university degree from international relations to nursing in 2009, after the horrific Israeli attacks on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009, with a plan to eventually enter the region and assist Gazans in any way that I could. I had the intention to go and prepare myself to fulfil that goal. Although we were unable to enter Gaza, I discovered throughout my journey that I was capable of dealing with a war-zone situation.

### **How was the atmosphere on the *Mavi Marmara* before the attack?**

Prior to the Israeli attack on the *Mavi Marmara*, the atmosphere was one of peace and camaraderie. Various people of different faiths and backgrounds were all working together for the same goal, and it was just beautiful to see everyone assisting each other. The people of the ship were in high spirits; often singing songs, gathering together for prayer, and getting to know one another in general.

### **Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere? I wonder about your personal experiences.**

I think a book could easily be written on any one of the passengers' experience, so I will try to stick to the main parts. I did not actually witness much of the attack until it was in its later stages since throughout the attack on the *Mavi Marmara*, I was in the makeshift aid room attending to the wounded. I will never forget this for the rest of my life. It is as if every detail is etched into my mind.

I remember the first person I attended to was shot approximately five times. We had extremely limited and basic equipment, so could only attempt to stop the bleeding. I remember cutting his clothes off and finding his body riddled with more bullets. And I was thinking to myself "What kind of carnage is going on up there?" I just kept repeating the *shahadah* (the Muslim declaration of belief) hoping he would repeat after me in case he died. Everyone I did this to, repeated and this gave them strength. Little did I know the room was soon to be filled with wounded bodies.

After attending to this man, I was helping one of the doctors cannulate an Indonesian man who had been shot in the forearm. It was at this time that I saw my husband, Ahmed Luqman Talib, car-

ried in. Honestly, I wasn't surprised. In my heart, I knew I would see him and was waiting for him. I asked the doctor for permission to leave and attended his side. He was shot twice in the leg, and since one of the bullets had gone straight through an artery, he was bleeding heavily. At that stage, however, he was okay compared to others, and I left him to attend others who were in a much more serious situation. My husband also told me to leave him as there were other brothers who needed our help. I continued attending the wounded and came back to check my husband every so often. He was deteriorating rapidly and losing a lot of blood. I was worried he would go into hypovolemic shock and knew he needed surgery immediately. There were extremely limited supplies and not enough IV fluids to go around. My husband kept pulling his out and telling me to give it to someone who needed it more. Little did he know it was him who actually needed it.

I remember so many more people kept flooding into our make-shift aid room that we started throwing bags off the seats in order to make room for the many wounded. Despite this, I had a feeling of calm and peace, and I sensed others had this, too. I don't think anyone was truly scared but more so anticipating what was to come. I also remember seeing a number of men being resuscitated, intubated and shocked with the defibrillators. These men died in front of my eyes, and there was nothing we could do.

**You were all taken captive on the ship, and then forced to sail to Ashdod Port. Could you please tell us your story about what happened during that time, both on board and in Israel? Did you experience or witness any torture or abuse, either psychological or physical?**

After the Israelis had captured the ship, they took all the men and women who were not wounded onto one of the upper decks. They searched and cuffed us, and left us in the sun for approximately seven hours in the summer heat, not allowing to shade. They reluctantly gave us water. After seven hours, they took us inside, but had turned off the air-conditioning and refused to turn it on. I witnessed one girl faint due to the conditions. They uncuffed the women at this stage and allowed us water; however, the men were still cuffed, and the women had to give them water. The soldiers often got angry, and would not let us give water to the men.

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Even after we arrived at Ashdod, we were left waiting on the ship for hours. When we were eventually let off, I was taken on both arms by two Israeli soldiers and processed. During this process, I was strip-searched. I had to take all my clothes off, and the female soldiers searched my clothes. As I am a convert to Islam, my passport picture is still without *hijab* (headscarf). The soldiers were showing others my passport to humiliate me. I grabbed it back off them and ordered them to stop. I also continually asked about my husband as I had no clue what had happened to him, or whether he was dead or alive. I was eventually told by an Israeli soldier that he was alive but they had not shot him. This just made me furious as I was with him myself. I also demanded to see someone from my embassy, a right which I was denied. I later found out my embassy was waiting at the port for us but could not get in contact.

In the jail, we were interrogated and refused the right to call our family. Also we were only allowed access to our embassy for about twenty minutes and to lawyers for five minutes. I could also not speak to my husband who was in a military hospital. I did not see him until we left Israel together.

Although the Israelis tried very hard to break us, they didn't succeed. The whole group was very courageous, and we insisted on demanding our rights.

**How was your family's reaction to your participation in the Flotilla?**

My family actually didn't know I was taking part until after the Flotilla was attacked, and they heard my name on the news in Australia. I chose not to tell them as I knew they would try to prevent me from going, and would only worry as they knew very little of the situation in Gaza. In hindsight, I wish I had told them, however, I did not anticipate that an attack of that scale would actually happen.



*Jerry Campbell treating her wounded husband Ahmed Luqman Talib*

Who would think an entire army would invade and attack a ship full of unarmed humanitarian activists?

My family was shocked and very happy to see me when I returned. They previously did not know much about Palestine and the siege imposed on Gaza. My father did his research soon after finding the reality out and was appalled at what he discovered. My family was very worried but also proud that we had decided to stand up against injustice.

#### **What about the Australian community's reaction?**

As for the Australian community, they of course knew little of the incident. It is rare for Australian media to broadcast much international news and when they do, it is very fleeting.

#### **What does the *Mavi Marmara* mean to you?**

My journey on the *Mavi Marmara* taught me more about life and myself than I had ever learnt up until that point. I am so grateful to have gone on that journey. I may not have been able to fulfil my goal of reaching Gaza and assessing the situation for myself, but I think I gained much much more. When I finish my nursing degree, I hope that I will be able to enter Gaza and assist those there in whatever way I can. My journey on the *Mavi Marmara* has only made me more determined to do so.