



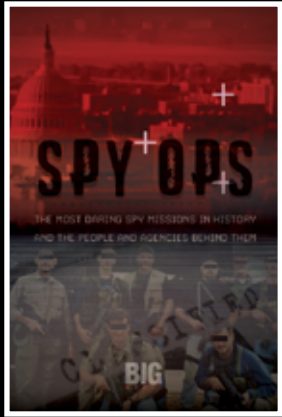
# COLE: AL QAEDA'S STRIKE BEFORE 9/11

Twenty-five years later, this revealing Three-Part Series explores the planning, execution, rescue, and ripple effects of Al Qaeda's First Attack on America's military and the International response that followed.

25th Anniversary of the Cole Attack, October 12, 2025

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# EXCLUSIVE ACCESS

BIG MEDIA has acquired exclusive rights to the best-selling book, *“Front Burner,”* Commanding Officer Kirk Lippold’s first-hand account of Al Qaeda’s attack on the USS Cole.

We’ve also secured unprecedented access to active and former senior leaders from the FBI, CIA, and NCIS, as well as other U.S. and international entities, including the Commander of the HMS Marlborough of the Royal Navy and French Air Force Commander involved in Medevac operations.



## KEY INTERVIEWS



**Mark Kelton**  
Deputy Director,  
National Clandestine  
Service for  
Counterintelligence  
[RET.]



**Gary Harrington**  
CIA Special Activities  
Division Operator  
in Yemen [RET.]



**Anthony Rix**  
Commander HMS  
Mulholland, RN [RET.]



**Debbie Courtney Powell**  
USS Cole Engineer  
Officer



**Ann Chamberland**  
USS Cole Navigator



## SERIES SYNOPSIS

October 12, 2000, was a devastating day for the U.S. Navy and a watershed moment in 21st-century warfare. The USS Cole, a destroyer, fell under attack by suicide bombers under the command of Osama Bin Laden while refueling in Aden Harbor, Yemen. The tragic event resulted in the loss of 17 sailors, including two women - the first ever killed in combat, while seriously wounding 39 others.

This marked the first time Al Qaeda directly targeted a U.S. vessel, a pivotal event that spurred an immediate international military response. While the U.S. was slowed down by diplomatic red tape, the French and British, in a demonstration of unity, immediately jumped into action to save the ship and its sailors. This act not only galvanized Western democracies but also set the stage for the global war on terror.

**COLE** blends archival news footage, dramatic reenactments, and cutting-edge CGI with an exciting original score. This gripping three-part series examines the events surrounding the bombing of the USS Cole. We journey from the tension-filled moments leading up to the bombing to the chaotic aftermath through first-hand accounts from those on the ground and at sea. This immersive exploration sheds light on previously untold stories of heroism by the crew and international allies in their efforts to save both the ship and the wounded and follows the relentless and painstaking pursuit by the FBI and CIA of the terrorists involved.

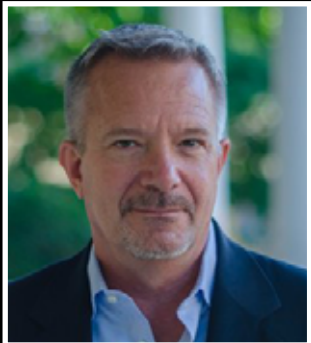
**2025 marks the 25th Anniversary of the USS Cole bombing.**

**COLE** examines fresh revelations regarding the attack and possible intelligence failures that may have impacted US efforts to combat Al Qaeda and poses the haunting question: Could 9/11 have been prevented?



**EPISODE  
ONE**

*"We had intelligence that indicated Al Qaeda was operating in Yemen, but that information wasn't relayed to the Commander of the Cole."*



**Gary Harrington**  
CIA Special Activities  
Division Operator  
in Yemen [RET.]



# EPISODE ONE: The Attack

*"The war on terror started with us."*

Commanding Officer Kirk Lippold

**ACT ONE:** Launched in 1995, the USS Cole is a state-of-the-art U.S. Navy destroyer named after Sergeant Darrell S. Cole, a World War II hero. Boasting advanced weaponry, and radar systems, and under the command of Kirk Lippold, it's a formidable vessel on the open seas.

**1999, NORFOLK, VIRGINIA:** As part of the USS George Washington aircraft carrier battle group, the USS Cole has prepared for its combat-ready deployment in the Persian Gulf. Commander Lippold, along with Executive Officer [XO] Chris Peterschmidt and Chief Engineer Deborah Courtney, ensure the crew is up for the task. Unlike many Naval vessels, Lippold expects key department heads to rotate duties in order to learn a diverse set of skills in the event of an attack - foresight that will prove critical in the months to come. During their deployment, the USS Cole makes several port visits in the Mediterranean before entering the Suez Canal and heading to Aden, Yemen, for a brief stop to refuel.

**ACT TWO/THREE: ADEN, YEMEN, OCTOBER 12, 2000**

As the scene shifts to the port of Aden, we learn the ship has followed established security measures [which many experts believe should have been heightened] without being given specific intelligence on the potential terrorist threat in the country. **CIA Officer, Gary Harrington** discusses undisclosed intelligence, including his warnings to the U.S. Ambassador in Yemen that the Cole and other U.S. warships are not safe in the Port of Aden, and the possibility of Al Qaeda operating in Yemen.





*"The guy on the boat waved, then pushed the detonator and... BOOM!"*

Survivor, USS Cole

**ACT FOUR:** Unaware of imminent danger, Commander Lippold and the crew go about their normal duties for refueling, while the rest of the crew gather below deck for an early meal in the mess hall. The stage is set for one of the most devastating acts of terrorism against the United States.

**ACT FIVE: 11:18 AM TRAGEDY STRIKES.**

Without warning, two men on board a small boat, disguised as trash removal workers approach the USS Cole. The boat is, in fact, a suicide vessel with two Al Qaeda operators and packed with explosives. As the boat approaches, one of the men waves at a sailor before detonating the explosives. A devastating blast tears a massive forty-foot hole into the side of the ship, killing or maiming everyone in its path.



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**EPISODE  
TWO**





## **EPISODE TWO:** The Aftermath

*"For the next 96 hours, the Cole crew fought valiantly – battling fires, flooding, and rescuing their shipmates under the most treacherous conditions."*

NCIS Investigator

**ACT ONE:** With communication systems down and dealing with an unknown threat, Commander Lippold grabs his sidearm – he and his crew are on a war footing, fully alert, not knowing if the attack came from Yemen or if another attack is imminent, all while trying to stabilize the disabled Cole. The Cole warns the harbor master that any vessel that approaches Cole will be fired upon.

The mess hall, having borne the full force of the explosion, is a scene of carnage. As a result of the blast, steel reinforcements, freezers, and large pieces of metal have trapped or obliterated many of the sailors waiting in line for lunch.

*"The attack on the U.S. vessel spurred an immediate international military response - the French and British, were the first to jump into action to save the ship and its sailors."*

British Ambassador, Djibouti, Yemen

**ACT TWO:** As word of the attack spreads, **HMS Marlborough** of the Royal Navy, along with USS Hawes and USS Donald Cook, arrive near the coast of Aden to offer assistance. While the U.S. Navy was preoccupied with following diplomatic protocols, thus delaying their rescue operations, the Royal Navy's HMS Marlborough sails into Aden Harbor to aid the embattled U.S. ship. The British forces were familiar with Aden, having governed that part of the world for many years. They knew that asking for permission would only show weakness.

Tipped off immediately by a reporter from Agence France Presse, **French Air Forces** immediately mobilize MEDEVAC operations for the severely injured, knowing that local hospitals would not be able to handle the wounded. French crews shuttle the wounded to nearby Djibouti for treatment, saving many lives.





*"In the case of the Cole, the entire ship was essentially a crime scene.."*

FBI, Forensics Officer

**ACT THREE:** When FBI and NCIS agents are sent to Yemen to help and investigate the bombing, they're met by Yemeni special forces with AK-47s. FBI Special Agents have to convince Yemeni forces that they have only come to help with the Cole and not invade the country. Cooperation from the Yemeni government is lacking - in one instance, CCTV video from a harborside security camera is requested by the FBI, but the crucial moment of the explosion had been deleted.

The FBI's Foreign Emergency Support Team focuses on collecting evidence but also helps Cole retrieve the bodies of dead sailors trapped in the twisted metal - some under the waterline of the ship. In all, 17 bodies are recovered. As each sailor is identified, crew members are called to the deck, wherein Naval military tradition, each of the fallen sailors is ceremoniously honored before being removed from the ship.

**ACT FOUR: October 30, 2000**

Commander Lippold refuses to leave the wounded ship and oversees its departure via a Norwegian transport ship while the rest of the USS Cole crew are evacuated on another US Naval vessel. After being ordered to join his crew, he relents, realizing the bravery and courage of his crew go beyond the symbolism of a Captain staying on his ship – they will all go home together.

**ACT FIVE:** As families of the fallen call for answers, we conclude with a glimmer of hope as investigations by FBI and NCIS start to yield results – the attack is traced back to Al Qaeda, hinting at missed intelligence signs of a potential assault, linking it to a previous failed attack on the USS Sullivan in the same port just a year earlier. The attempt failed when the boat weighed down by explosives sank; however, these same explosives were retrieved by Al Qaeda operatives, this time successfully used in the attack on the Cole.

**November 2000**, the meticulous investigation by NCIS, the FBI, and the Yemeni authorities identify bin Laden as the one who ordered the attack and provided financial support for its execution. With a clear understanding of those responsible, we set the stage for Part Three – The Hunt.



*"Our war with Al Qaeda began long before 9/11. The 1998 terror bombings of our Embassies in Africa and the assault on the USS Cole in 2000 were terrible moments in a long struggle against evil that culminated at Abbottabad on 01 May 2011 when justice was delivered to a killer in the names of all those we lost in that struggle."*



**Mark Kelton**  
Deputy Director, National Clandestine Service  
for Counterintelligence [RET.]





**EPISODE  
THREE**



## EPISODE THREE: The Hunt

*"The attack on USS Cole was an act of war. It was also an inexcusable intelligence failure on the part of the U.S. government."*

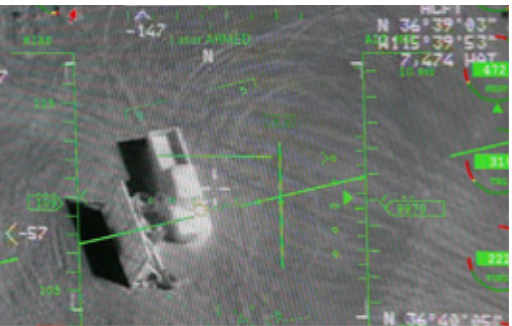
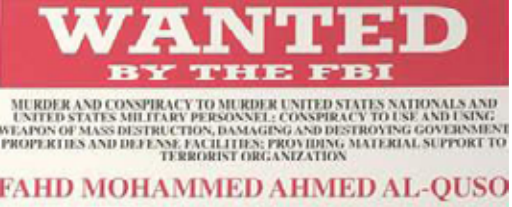
Commander Lippold

**ACT ONE:** After the USS Cole bombing, Commander Kirk Lippold faces scrutiny from the U.S. Navy and Congress, who attempt to hold him accountable for the attack despite evidence to the contrary. Meanwhile, arrests and interrogations reveal an Al Qaeda safehouse on Aden's harbor within clear view of the port and the docking of the USS Cole.

**ACT TWO:** Through interviews with intelligence officials, we shed light on the evolving understanding of Al Qaeda's capabilities and the urgency to disrupt their operations. We examine intelligence breakthroughs and the existence of the Able Danger program, a classified data-mining initiative designed to detect terrorist activities. The program had detected information related to the Cole attack but had not acted upon it. The lack of action and sharing of critical information within the intelligence community raises questions about accountability.

**ACT THREE:** The investigation also reveals that the Yemeni government was aware of the presence of radical Islamists, including members of Al Qaeda, within its borders. Despite this knowledge, we have to question why the Clinton administration decided to trust Yemen with hosting U.S. ships.





*“The wheels of the nation’s destiny were set into motion, culminating in the attacks of September 11, eleven months later.”*

Commander Lippold

**ACT FOUR:** The episode now shifts focus to the daring operation carried out by U.S. forces to capture or eliminate the perpetrators.

Jamal al-Badawi, one of the main organizers of the USS Cole bombing, is arrested and sentenced to death in Yemen, but the sentence is commuted to 15 years in prison. In January 2019, al-Badawi is killed in a U.S. airstrike in Yemen.

Fahd al-Quso, a senior member of Al Qaeda, was involved in planning the USS Cole attack, he is located in Yemen in 2012 and killed by a U.S. drone strike.

Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, a Saudi national, is the alleged mastermind behind the USS Cole bombing. Al-Nashiri is captured in 2002 and taken to a secret CIA prison, where he was subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques. Later transferred to Guantanamo Bay in 2006, he remains in U.S. custody awaiting trial.

**ACT FIVE:** As the series concludes, we reflect on the legacy of the USS Cole bombing and its profound impact on US counterterrorism efforts while shining a spotlight on missed opportunities and the real possibility of stopping 9/11.

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