

Issue Date: **July 10, 1976**

Israeli Airborne Commandos Rescue 103 Hostages Held in Uganda by Hijackers of French Airliner

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31 Killed in Airport Clash

Israeli commandos in three transport planes landed at Uganda's Entebbe Airport July 3 after a 2,500-mile flight from Tel Aviv and rescued 91 passengers and 12 crew members of an Air France plane that had been hijacked June 27 by seven pro-Palestinian guerrillas. After a clash at the airport in which 31 persons were killed, the three Israeli C-130 Hercules transports flew to Nairobi, Kenya to refuel. They returned to Tel Aviv July 4. Israeli authorities said the operation at the Ugandan field lasted almost one hour. [See 1976 [Middle East: Hijackers Seize French Jetliner](#)]

Killed in the fighting were all seven hijackers, 20 of about 100 Ugandan troops guarding the field, three Israeli hostages caught in the crossfire and Lieutenant Colonel Yehonathan Nethanyahu, 30, the U.S.-born head of one of the rescue units. During the Nairobi stopover, two seriously wounded Israelis were taken to a hospital. One Israeli woman, Dora Bloch, was left behind at a hospital in Kampala, Uganda, where she had been taken for treatment shortly before the Israeli raid.

The Israeli attackers landed at Entebbe airport under cover of darkness. Firing machineguns and hurling grenades, they rushed the old passenger terminal where the hostages were being held under guard, gunned down the hijackers, raced into the building and herded the hostages to the waiting planes.

In addition to the 20 Ugandan soldiers killed, President Idi Amin confirmed July 4 that 32 others had been wounded and that some Ugandan military planes on the field had been destroyed. Foreign news services said that 11 Ugandan MiGs as well as the terminal building had been destroyed.

Amin thanked his commanders for "repulsing the attack" and "overrunning the invaders." He said that the Ugandan troops had withheld fire for fear of killing "innocent people" aboard the arriving Israeli planes. This statement appeared to support some speculation that Israel had tricked Ugandan forces by radioing that the transports contained Palestinian prisoners the hijackers had demanded in exchange for the hostages.

Israeli officials July 4 denied that a ruse had been employed to bring the captives out of Uganda. Briefing the Knesset (Parliament), Premier Yitzhak Rabin said the government had decided on the need for the military operation when it became obvious that international efforts to free all the hostages had failed. The Israeli offer July 1 to negotiate with the hijackers was genuine and not a stratagem to gain time, he said.

Rabin also accused Amin of "fully cooperating with the hijackers while putting on false pretenses." The premier said the rescue mission "will become a legend" and called it Israel's "contribution to the fight against terrorism, a fight that had not yet ended."

Defense Minister Shimon Peres accused Amin and his army of having "cooperated with a group of hijackers to blackmail another country by threatening the lives of innocent passengers in an international aircraft."

Ugandan Collusion Charged

There were further reports of Ugandan cooperation with the hijackers. French officials and previously released hostages said in Paris July 4 that they had substantial proof of such collusion. An unidentified French official was quoted as saying that negotiations to release the hostages had become "much tougher" July 3 after Amin returned from a meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Mauritius. Amin was said to have refused to let Pierre Renard, French ambassador to Uganda, talk directly to the guerrillas. Upon resuming the role of mediator Amin repeated the hijackers' demands for the release of 53 pro-Palestinian prisoners in Israel, France, West Germany, Switzerland and Kenya in exchange for the captives. The prisoners included five Ugandans held in Kenya on charges of attempting to assassinate Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta, the officials noted. The officials also said that during the first 24 hours after the hijacked plane arrived at Entebbe, Ugandan soldiers guarded the passengers and crew to permit the hijackers to rest.

Evidence that the hijacked plane's arrival in Uganda had been pre-arranged was cited by a passenger, Michel Cojot. He said that soon after the plane landed at Entebbe, the Ugandan civilian manager of the airport had food and drink ready. Cojot quoted the manager as saying, "I was expecting you."

However, Michel Bacos, the French commander of the 11-man crew of the Air France plane, denied July 5 that Ugandan soldiers at any time replaced the hijackers as guards. "The watch over us was exclusively secured by the hijackers," he said. "Ugandan soldiers were never substituted for the hijackers."

Five of the hijackers were Arabs and two were believed to have been West Germans. The Ugandan government July 5 identified the Arabs as Fayed Jaber, Abdel Razzak Sammarraye, Jayel Al-Arja, Abu Khalidaj Khalali and Abu Ali.

Israeli officials said July 5 that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine had lost key operatives in the Israeli attack. They listed Jaber as the most important of the agents killed, describing him as a founder of the PFLP. The Israelis identified one of the West Germans as Wilfried Bose, 26. They claimed he had links with "Carlos," the internationally sought terrorist whose real name was believed to be Ilich Ramirez Sanchez. The Israelis were not certain about the nationality or name of the other hijacker, a woman. They said she could be Gabriella Teidman Krieger, who had participated in the December 1975 kidnapping of Middle East oil ministers in Vienna [See 1975 [Middle East: Guerrillas Raid OPEC Conference](#)], or Turkish-born Barin Acturk, who had been arrested in Paris in 1973 on charges of gun-running, served 6 months in jail and went to Baghdad.

Israeli sources said an associate of Carlos, Antonio Degas Bouvier, had turned up at Entebbe as soon as the hijacked plane landed. Bouvier, who was said to carry an Ecuadorean passport, was identified by the hostages as a South American who mingled with the hijackers at the Ugandan airfield.

Amin Threatens Retaliation

Ugandan President Idi Amin July 5 threatened to take reprisals for the Israeli raid on Entebbe airport. He called on the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity to condemn Israel and charged that Kenya and "other neighboring states" had collaborated in the attack. In a letter to the U.N., Amin did not specifically call for a meeting of the Security Council.

Amin provided a more detailed account of the incident and denied that Uganda had collaborated with the hijackers. In urging U.N. and OAU condemnation of Israel, Amin said, "In the meantime, Uganda reserves her right to retaliate in whatever way she can to reduce the aggression on her." The Israeli assault "damaged a lot of property," Amin said, and Uganda would "claim compensation."

Amin said that he permitted the hijacked Air France passenger plane to land at Entebbe "on humanitarian considerations" because the aircraft had only 15 minutes of fuel left.

The president reviewed his successful efforts in obtaining the release of 147 hostages June 30 and July 1 and said he was in the process of trying to get the others freed when the Israelis launched their raid on the field. The strike, Amin claimed, had been planned July 1 and "the decision was communicated to the Kenyan authorities whose consent and assistance...was immediately obtained."

Kenyan officials July 4 had denied cooperating with the Israelis. Speaking at the OAU conference in Mauritius, Vice President Daniel Arap Moi declared that his government "did not collaborate with the Israelis. Kenya has not and will not be used as a place of aggression for neighboring states "

Mixed Reaction to Raid

The Israeli rescue of hostages in Uganda evoked mixed international reaction--largely praise in the West and condemnation in the Arab world and black Africa.

President Ford July 4 sent a message to Premier Yitzhak Rabin saying that "the American people join me in expressing our great satisfaction that the passengers of the Air France flight...have been saved and a senseless act of terrorism thwarted."

Danish Premier Anker Jorgensen said July 4, "We respect minorities but we don't respect terrorists who try to terrorize the rest of us."

Other West European governments, including Britain, France and West Germany, made no official comment July 4 but privately some of their diplomats lauded the Israeli raid on Uganda. Jean Herly, France's ambassador to Israel, said July 4 that "a moral victory has been won..., a victory over brute force."

The French Interior Ministry announced July 4 that it would enact tighter security measures at French airports, especially for flights to and from the Middle East. Air France had announced July 2 that future flights between Israel and France would be nonstop. Israeli Transport Minister Gad Yaacobi said July 5 that he had asked all airlines to discontinue intermediate stops to and from Israel except on transatlantic and Far East runs.

The West German and Swiss governments had said July 4, before the raid that they had no intention of meeting the hijackers' demands to release pro-Palestinian prisoners in their countries.

The British government issued a statement July 5 saying it was "very pleased that the hostages' lives have been saved."

The French Socialist Party July 5 said "the Israeli reaction will help stop the rise of terrorism conceived as a means of political action." The Communist Party newspaper L'Humanite assailed the raid as "unjustifiable under any pretext."

Many black African nations July 5 publicly condemned the raid on Uganda but private comment was in favor of Israel. Newspapers in Nairobi, Kenya praised the Israeli commando assault.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy July 4 assailed the Israeli action as "military aggression against Uganda reflecting the real terrorist face of the Zionist state." He declared that Israel had planned the "aggression" against Uganda while negotiations were

proceeding to free the hostages. The Israeli attack, he said, could in no way be compared with "these individual acts carried out by irresponsible individuals."

A statement issued by the Palestine leadership in Beirut July 4 denounced the Israeli operation. Noting that the Palestine Liberation Organization had condemned the hijacking, the statement said: "The Israeli action is equally deplorable. They are both acts of terrorism."

The Arab League July 1 had condemned the seizure of the Air France plane. PLO leader Yasir Arafat was said to have responded to a French request to intervene in the matter by sending a senior aide to Kampala, Uganda to try to secure the release of the hostages.

United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim July 5 condemned the Israeli raid. His office, however, quoted him as expressing "satisfaction over the fact that it proved possible to save" lives.

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Citation:

"Israeli Airborne Commandos Rescue 103 Hostages Held in Uganda by Hijackers of French Airliner; 31 Killed in Airport Clash." *Facts On File World News Digest*. n. pag. *World News Digest*. Facts On File News Services, 10 July 1976. Web. 8 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.2facts.com/article/1976131350>>.

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