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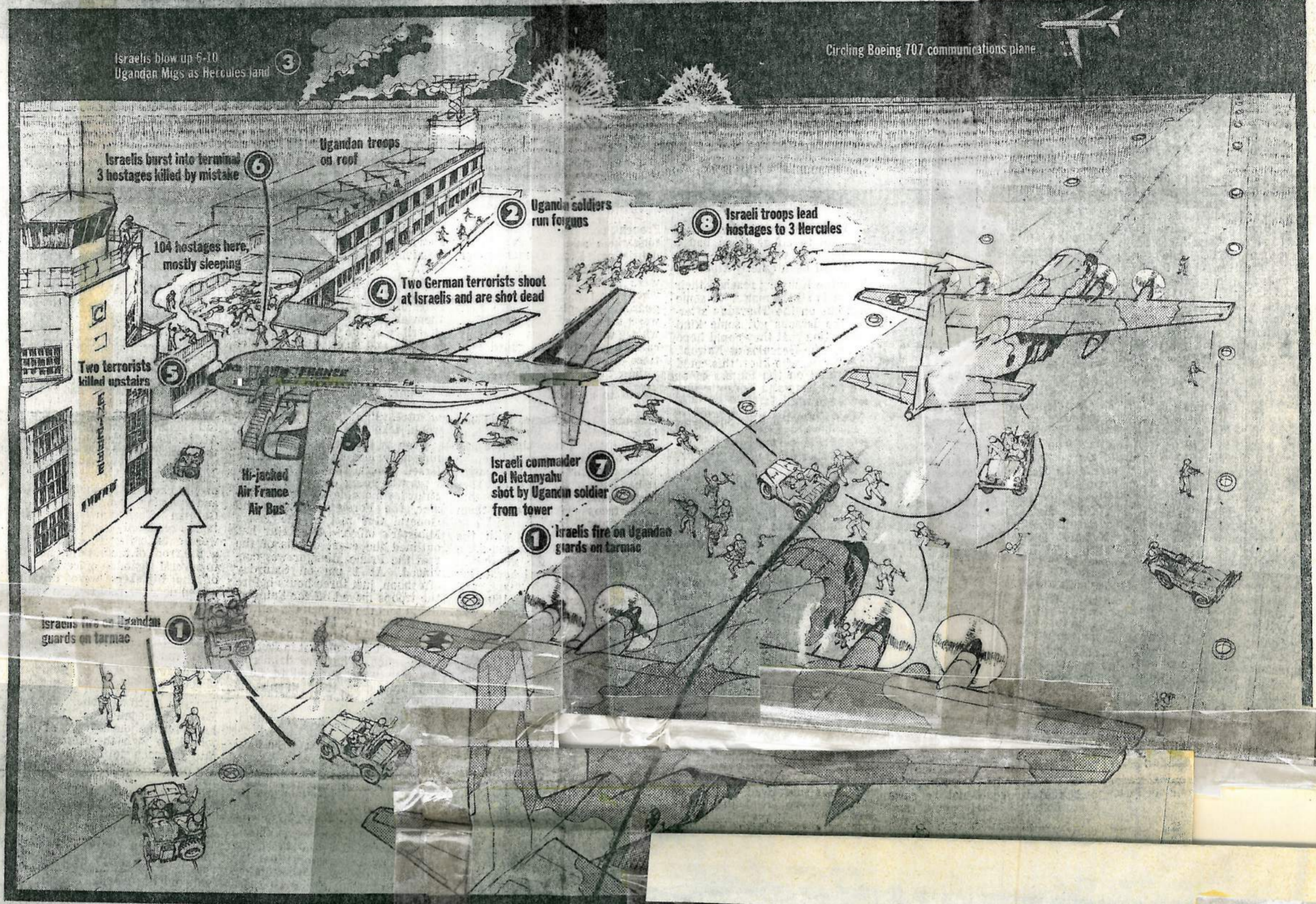
53 MINUTES AT ENTEBBE

TWENTY-SIX hours before Israel's "mission impossible," President Idi Amin Dada was in splendid spirits. Dressed in his light blue field marshal's uniform, his chest brimming with medals, he was attending, as outgoing chairman, an evening celebration at the 13th summit meeting of the Organisation of African Unity in Mauritius. Israel, it seemed, was about to release the Palestinian prisoners well before the Sunday morning deadline for the execution of the 105 Jewish hostages at Entebbe airport, and Amin was telling anyone who cared to listen how brilliantly he had handled everything. He had even taken care to disarm half the Ugandan troops at the airport: he had just appointed himself President for life and there was always, his sophisticated listeners would understand, the problem of armed insurrection.

Amin's recital of his achievements fell on more than normally attentive ears. Israel had an informant at the OAU and within minutes his self-indulgent revelations were passed on to Tel Aviv. All week, against the clock, Israel had been putting together bits and pieces of information, assessing the chances of a rescue. It had been like making a jigsaw in the dark, but Amin turned the light on to the last few pieces. At 7.30 am on Saturday, July 3rd, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made up his mind: the odds had shortened. The military knew enough to risk the raid.

ISRAEL had considered a military intervention from the beginning. Only hours after the Air France plane with its 253 hostages landed at Entebbe, General Mordechai Gur, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces and the Defence Minister, Shimon Peres, met in the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv to consider a commando raid. But on Monday evening when Peres and Gur attended a tense Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem Gur had a bleak response to Rabin's question "Do we have a military option?" The military was willing, troops were on alert, but they had too many questions, too few answers and too little time to get them before the Thursday noon deadline. The Cabinet had no alternative but to vote for negotiation—while urging the military to devise some less than wholly reckless plan which would not sacrifice the hostages (only half of them at this stage Israelis).

Gur's multi-dimensional riddle was this: How could a large Israeli force fly 2,200 miles to Entebbe and back when no aircraft could do it without refuelling, how could planes go all this way and then land without alerting the terrorists and trigger-happy Ugandan soldiers who could bring overwhelm-



Entebbe, midnight July 3. Four Israeli Hercules have landed—two of them off to the right. A Boeing 707 Communications plane circles the airport. Drawing: Peter Junner

ing force against both the invaders and the hostages in seconds? General Gur had learned from bitter experience that delay spells death. At 46, he is one of Israel's most distinguished generals—he commanded the brigade of paratroopers that spearheaded the capture of the old City of Jerusalem

in the Six-Day war—but in 1974 he had been criticised by an Israeli commission of inquiry into the massacre at Maalot where three guerrillas held children hostage. Twenty children were killed when Gur gave the order to storm the schoolhouse. The report did not criticise Gur for the attack, but for not doing it earlier.

Gur began with some plusses. After the surge of hijacks in the early 70's the Israelis had developed a special anti-hijack squad, strong men certainly but recruited more for their intelligence and ability to follow orders down to fine print. There were endless volunteers for the unit but many were rejected after psychological tests. They planned mock operations to rescue hostages at various airports and from the big jets. They collected manuals for every aircraft in operation, plotted the blind spots inside a plane, timed the door openings, studied the effect of gunshots inside a pressurised airliner. They practised storming out of a big Hercules C.130 freight aircraft with jeeps, guns blazing, even while it was taxiing to a halt.

And Israel's secret service, Mossad, anticipating operations in black Africa, had recruited and trained black African spies who were to prove crucial in the intelligence operation Israel began on Monday.

But Entebbe was not a text book case. They could lay on enough Hercules to carry a large force—92 men to a plane—and land the plane in a distance of 2,000ft. or 2,800ft if quietness was essential. But the standard Hercules had a range of only 2,420 miles. Extra fuel tanks could be fitted but there was no way a Hercules mission could get to Entebbe and back without refuelling, and as Entebbe was way beyond the range of Israeli fighters the Hercules would be easy prey for the air force of Amin and such hostile and well equipped nations as Egypt. But if the basic transport problems seemed to rule out any effective rescue, prospects on the ground were worse. If the planes did reach Entebbe, they could be shot to pieces by the Ugandans' Sagger anti-tank missiles.

Most reports of the Entebbe raid have tended to suggest that at least the Israelis had good intelli-

gence from the beginning about the Ugandan airport, Israeli engineers had after all helped to build the new runway and control tower before diplomatic relations between Israel and Uganda broke down in 1972. In fact the detailed intelligence information needed was too sparse. Gur and Peres needed to know exactly where the hostages were held, how many terrorists guarded them, exactly where they were situated, how they were armed and what was their guard duty rota. They needed to know how many Ugandan troops were active near the hostages, how many were based in the camp on the airport and where the Ugandan airport kept their MiG fighters. Apart from the anti-tank missiles the Ugandans also have Soviet T54 battle tanks and a variety of armoured vehicles including the Czech built OT 64. Gur and Peres had to know whether such heavy equipment was within sight of Entebbe. A pool of armour is in fact kept at Kampala, 20 miles away; how long would it take before a convoy of armoured cars could reach the airport? Could they cut communications?

The Israelis did not at this stage even have an accurate airport map. Peres and Gur ordered one from the Israeli construction company, Solel Boneh, that actually helped build Entebbe. But it was out of date. The Ugandans had developed part of the airport since the Israelis left in 1972.

Gur toyed with many plans involving a parachute drop on or near Entebbe. They were all rejected. He knew that the crucial factor was surprise and the terrorists needed only a brief warning to start opening up on the hostages. A parachute drop, particularly on the airport which was well lit all night, would easily be observed from the ground. It also takes valuable seconds for paratroopers to shed their parachutes and re-form on the ground. By that time the hostages would almost certainly be dead.

AS THE planners fretted for intelligence, and the soldiers assembled at a secret desert base, Israel on Monday to Thursday still hoped negotiation would be an answer. It was an agonising process. Israel deliberately kept out

of the front line of negotiation. Israel relayed its position to Paris, Paris sent it to Ambassador Pierre Renard in Kampala, Renard talked to Somali Ambassador Hashi Abdullah, who went to the airport 21 miles away and conferred with the guerrillas.

The intention was to avoid public "Israelisation" of the incident and Israel's foreign minister, Yigal Allon, was lavish in his praise for France's firm stand in refusing to release its one Palestinian prisoner.

But the Israelis also had another unofficial and more direct way of negotiating with Idi Amin in the unlikely form of the owner of a Tel Aviv hi-fi shop, a retired colonel, Barouch Bar Lev. Bar Lev had commanded the Israeli military mission in Uganda before Israel's departure in 1972 and he and his wife had struck up a surprising friendship with Amin.

"I gave him medical advice on his gout. I helped him with his air force. He was in a sense our friend," Bar Lev rang up Amin from the lounge of his house in the suburbs of Tel Aviv, sitting in dressing gown and slippers, his feet on a Ugandan lion skin rug.

These phone calls were listened into by officials and taped by the Post Office. Bar Lev was also given, he says, "power to negotiate." He used a psychological approach. "I told him he had a reputation as a cruel man and that his image in the world was bad and that now God had sent him an opportunity in the hostages to change all that. I reminded him of his dead mother and said she would ask him not to harm the people of the Bible. If he did something to them then God would do something to him."

The approach may have been unobvious, but Amin was apparently moved. "He kept saying he agreed with me," said Bar Lev, "but that the Palestinians were fanatics and threatened to blow up the terminal building. He said that if he stepped forward everything would be blown up."

On the Thursday morning after the hi-jacking Bar Lev felt he might be getting somewhere. He had been instructed by the Israeli Government to offer "a number" (probably only half a dozen) of Palestinians held in Israeli jails who had not been convicted for

murder in exchange for some of the hostages. That Thursday morning Amin invited Bar Lev to Uganda and the Israelis prepared to lay on a plane to take him. But then Amin changed his mind and the trip, which Bar Lev still feels could have brought results, was called off. "Amin was always changing his mind like

a child. I was not surprised." ON THE ground at Entebbe Amin's role was less ambiguous. The hostages, crowded into the ground floor terminal, felt that the

Continued on next page

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Ugandan troops were as much their jailers as the terrorists. About 100 Ugandan soldiers were constantly in the area, about 30 of them occupied the upper floor and the rest were in a cordon round the terminal and the hijacked plane. They had a motley collection of weapons. Some with Russian Kalashnikovs, some with rifles and pistols. Just one thing was in common: they kept their guns pointed inwards to the hostages.

Two Ugandan MiG fighters constantly "dive-bombed" the building, imprinting their numbers 903 and 905 vividly on the minds of everyone and terrifying the children and older passengers. One of the pilots came over and fraternised with the terrorists. That had been the pattern from the beginning when the four hijackers who flew in with the hostages were joined at Entebbe by six others. And they were all allowed to leave the airport for rest and recuperation in the first 24 hours. A Ugandan armed vehicle with a heavy machine gun was parked near the terminal.

The hijackers were adopting different standards towards the hostages. The German woman terrorist who had taken part in the hijack, Gabriele Krocher-Tiedemann (and had been involved in the Vienna OPEC raid) was violent and screamed at the hostages through a loud-hailer with a gun in her hand. Her German collaborator, Wilfried Boese, an associate of Carlos, the Jackal, was also constantly on duty inside the building with two other hijackers, but more friendly. He was, he told the hostages, in charge of the actual hijacking but was no longer in charge at Entebbe. His aim was to ensure that the operation was "elegant, clean, gentle and without bloodshed." He said he would not have agreed to take part if it were to end in slaughter. The terrorist, now in charge, was a short man with a moustache and dark glasses who had joined the hijackers at Entebbe. He was sarcastic and aggressive and the hostages nicknamed him Groucho Marx because of his curious slouching gait. He spoke Spanish with a Peruvian accent. All the terrorists carried guns except one who was elegantly dressed in a white suit and came and went in his own car, a French Peugeot 504.

Of the junior aides two hardly spoke but the third was going round screaming and slapping and beating hostages. He beat up one of the young male hostages after one of the hijackers had found a photograph on the man showing him in a tank wearing a helmet—though he was not a soldier. Idi Amin, too, of course made his appearances. On one occasion he drove up to the airport in his Mercedes and then transferred to a helicopter which whisked him over the roof to the front of the terminal.

THE POSITION of the hostages seemed hopeless. What they were not to know (nor anyone else) was that even as they dozed and played cards in the heat Israel's intelligence agents had already begun to penetrate the security at Entebbe. The black African agents recruited by Israel's Mossad entered Uganda as tourists. Some newly arrived agents from Israel hired boats in Kenya to see what they could observe from Lake Victoria, adjoining the airport. They flew



Gabriele Kroche-Tiedemann, 24, and Wilfried Boese, 27, associates of the international terrorist "Carlos," shot in the first minutes. Boese pointed his gun at the hostages, then seemed to relent

over in light aircraft. They collected information on the latest modifications to the airport, the routine of the staff at night, the disposition of Ugandan troops, and all this they transmitted back to Nairobi and thence to Israel. On Wednesday night El Al flight LY535 landed at Nairobi rather late and with an extra number of El Al staff to replace the local Nairobi staff due for a break. There were 50 of them. They were Israeli agents.

On Thursday morning one group of them arrived at the home of Eli Engle, an Israeli businessman, who lives in the fashionable Nairobi suburb of Lavington. Through Engle the Israelis made contact with Lionel "Bryn" Davies, the head of operations at Nairobi central police station.

Meanwhile, the editor of the Nairobi Daily Nation, George Githi, had arrived in Israel for a brief visit. Githi denies foreknowledge of Israel's plans but he is close to Kenyatta and the President's ruling circle. As well as gathering information, Israel was now trying to secure Kenyan approval for refuelling the Hercules in Nairobi.

This was perhaps the most hazardous part of the whole diplomatic-intelligence operation. The man who held the decision, the cantankerous 85-year-old President Jomo Kenyatta, was no friend of Amin, but Amin was chairman of the OAU, Kenya had no diplomatic relations with Israel, and Kenyatta could not be sure that helping Israel would not unleash criticism he could not control.

Kenyatta had, however, a secret reason for being willing to help Israel. In January the Israeli

Secret Service tipped off Kenya that the Israelis were planning attacks on El Al airliners at Nairobi airport, using Uganda for the base and infiltrating across the border with their armaments. Five Palestinian infiltrators were seized by Kenyatta's "General Service Unit" (GSU), which guards Kenyatta and does other less savoury tasks, and they were among the five prisoners the Entebbe hijackers issued in their list of prisoners they wanted freed.

But Kenyatta would never have been able to oblige them had a deal been done: the five men caught had been quietly killed.

How the Kenyans reached their decision is still a matter of some doubt but on the Thursday afternoon the Israelis got some kind of indication that they could hope to refuel the Hercules at Nairobi. The Kenyans who knew this could be counted on the fingers of one hand and Kenyatta had no formal knowledge until Saturday evening.

Apart from Bryn Davies, one of the men who knew was Geoffrey Kariithi, the permanent secretary in Kenyatta's office who commands the GSU.

Two of the others in the inner circle were Bruce McKenzie, a former British Special Air Services officer and ex-Minister of Agriculture in Kenya; and Charles Njonjo, the current Kenyan Attorney General.

ALL AT ONCE on Thursday all this frantic intelligence and military activity by Israel looked as if it might not be needed. One hour before the noon deadline laid down by the terrorists an Israeli radio broadcast said that the Cabinet was willing to negotiate with a "preparedness" to release some of the prisoners in Israeli hands. The hijackers responded by extending the deadline for three days to mid-day on Sunday, July 4, and saying they would release the hostages. But the relief was short-lived. When the hostages were freed they were seen to be all non-Jewish. It was a device to put pressure on Israel which held the bulk of the prisoners the PFLP wanted but it backfired.

Israel was now alone without the complications of dissimulating its intentions. It had been given an ominous reminder of its isolation, and it was also now to be given a few more pieces of the jigsaw that had to be completed within 48 hours. The hostages were to arrive in Paris on Thursday night and Israel dispatched General Rehavam Zeevi, the Prime Minister's adviser on counter-terrorism.

As soon as the hostages landed

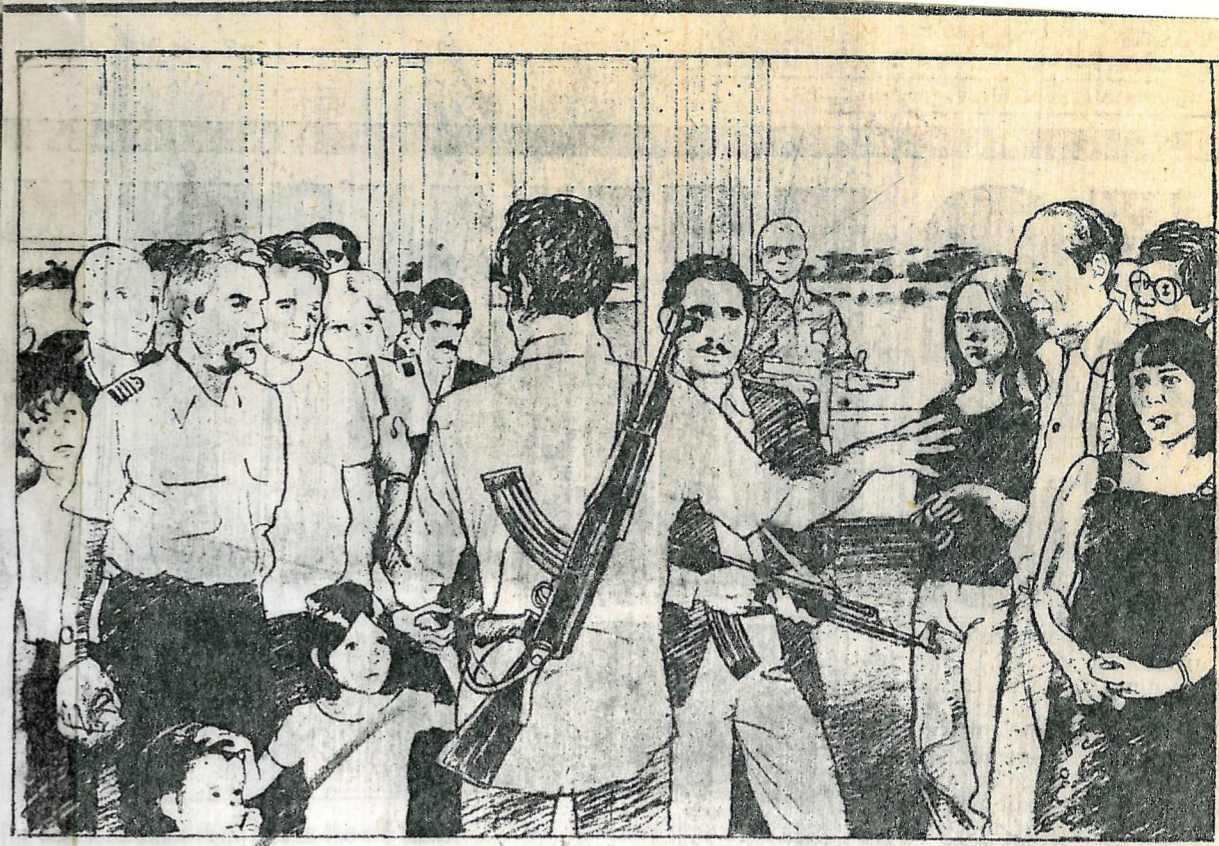
French and Israeli intelligence took them aside and arranged a debriefing. Even the most minor details of the set up at Entebbe were recorded, including exactly where the terrorists and Ugandan guards were placed, where they were usually standing or sitting, what weapons they normally carried, whether the guard routines varied between day and night and exactly where the hostages were held. The Israelis began to appreciate the observation of the Somali Ambassador to Entebbe, Hashi Farah, who had observed to a western diplomat in Kampala, not realising the portent of his remark: "The hijackers are circulating very easily. It has been a week now and they have relaxed to the point that good troops could storm them with minimal loss."

On Friday morning with the information from Paris and from Israeli agents on the ground in Kenya and Uganda, General Gur chose his mode of attack and selected a team of about 150 commandos, picked from the crack paratroop and Golani regiments.

Two key men were now assigned precise duties—Lt Gen Dan Shomron and Lt Col Jonathan Netanyahu. Shomron, a thirty-nine-year-old chief paratroop and infantry officer, is a born raider. He had cut his teeth on daring forays across the Egyptian border during the war of attrition and during the Six Day War he commanded a battalion which was the first to reach the North End of the Suez canal. Shomron was put in command of the entire raid.

Netanyahu, a 30-year-old veteran of the Six-day war and the Yom Kippur war, was assigned to lead the commandos into the terminal itself. In the Yom Kippur war Netanyahu had won a bravery medal for carrying a wounded officer back to safety under heavy fire and under full view of the Syrian lines. He had been born in New York and after his parents brought him to Israel in 1948 he had gone back for a year at Harvard University taking physics and philosophy.

On Saturday morning Gur ordered a massive review of all the available information and his



The hostages await their fate in the old terminal building at Entebbe. An Israeli doctor, third from the right, is vividly reminded of his time in Auschwitz camp

two leaders Shomron and Netanyahu led an actual raid on "Entebbe" in a remote area of Israel.

Israeli troops acted the roles of Ugandan soldiers and Palestinian terrorists and stationed themselves in the positions described by the released hostages in Paris and spies. Hercules aircraft landed and stationed themselves in different areas exactly as they would after landing in Entebbe. From landing to take-off with the hostages took 55 minutes. In reality at Entebbe it would take 52 minutes.

Even at this stage in the planning many leading members of the Israeli general staff did not know what was going on. At 7 am on Saturday morning the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and General Gur met at the Prime Minister's office. After Gur had outlined the exact details of the raid the Prime Minister was convinced. At 1 pm on Saturday afternoon, just three hours before the troops moved off for Entebbe, Rabin told the ten-man Committee for Security of his decision. At 2 pm he told the rest of the 20 man cabinet. He did not in fact tell them much. The bare details of the plan were outlined to them and they gave their unanimous approval. A single whisper now would wreck the whole operation.

TWO HOURS later, at 4 pm local time, Israel's task force of six aircraft started setting off for the 77-hour hazardous run to Entebbe. They flew down the Red Sea between Egyptian and Saudi Arabia to Saudi side. There was no chance that they could avoid being detected—but every hope that the Saudis would pay no attention. Saudi Arabia has advanced radar installations, but pays little heed to the Israelis, afraid of starting an incident.

The aircraft flew as high as possible, so that any radar stations in Ethiopia or Kenya which did detect them would pass them off as unscheduled commercial flights. But some of the Hercules, it is thought, flew further west, over Sudan. The day before there had been a failed coup attempt against

President Numeiri, and all but one Sudanese radar station, in the south, had been temporarily closed down.

IN THE TRANSIT LOUNGE at Entebbe the 104 hostages bedded down for the night. A few sat up playing cards and talking, arguing endlessly about attitudes to hi-jackers.

They had been in low spirits with sickness but two of the hostages in particular had tried to raise morale—19-year-old Jean Jacques Maimoni, who emigrated to Israel five years ago from North Africa. He and Pascoe Cohen, 52, the branch manager of a sick fund in Israel, and a concentration camp survivor, tried to keep people cheerful by making coffee and passing round food. The German "Nazi-bitch" as the hostages regarded her, and Boese were outside the french windows at the front of the building talking to several Ugandan officers. Three of the hijackers were upstairs asleep near the roof terrace where there was a bunch of Ugandan soldiers, some the worse for drink. One gamble the Israelis had taken was still working: the airport lights were on.

The four Hercules, flying at 25,000ft and 300 mph took seven hours to reach Entebbe. The two Boeings needed less than five hours for the journey; one of them joined up with the Hercules for the approach to Entebbe, while the other—acting as a hospital plane—flew direct to Nairobi, where it landed at 11.26 local time (10.26 Israeli time).

The weather on the approach to Entebbe was bad: there had been thunderstorms in the vicinity in the morning and the sky remained almost totally overcast, with thunder clouds remaining in the air, with a base at 1,000ft. The moon had set shortly before the aircraft reached Entebbe. But the radio direction aids were on. Some early reports that Israeli ground commandos had knocked out the airport lights and radar controls, and that the Hercules landed by clear moonlight are manifestly wrong.

As the Hercules began their descent there was still no sign of a storm on the ground. The Hercules made no advance contact with Entebbe. An alert radar operator would have seen them coming, but the next flight was not due until a British Airways VC10, en route for Mauritius to London, was scheduled to touch down at 1.30 am, and one of the important facts Israel's spies had discovered during the week was that the vigilance of the Entebbe control tower is not impressive. Amin seems to share the conviction: Entebbe's three air traffic controllers were subsequently shot for their dereliction of duty. (The prevalent theory that the captain of the first Hercules radioed ahead to announce that the prisoners the hijackers wanted were on board is not credible for such a message would undoubtedly have placed the whole airport on the alert and Amin would have been called to celebrate when in fact he was undisturbed until half-an-hour after the rescue mission was over).

As the rescue squad took off their safety catches and waited by the exit door, there was still a chance that the Hercules, undetected by radar, would have

been spotted by the older devices of the human eye and ear. But nobody heard anything. The first Hercules landed on the international runway, away from the old terminal where the hostages were being held, some minutes before the other plane. At its nearest point this is three-quarters of a mile from the old terminal and a 200ft rise lies between them. Nobody could see this Hercules from the old terminal and if the staff in the new control tower did see it they were not sharing their knowledge with anyone outside.

One minute after midnight, local time, the ramp at the back of this first Hercules opened, while the plane was still coming to a halt, the first batch of Israeli troops in jeeps raced onto the airfield and headed for the new control tower. The need to secure the control tower was urgent, for if it had heard more planes arriving and switched off the runway lights, the remaining Hercules would have found it virtually impossible to land.

As the troops raced for the control tower, the crew of the landed Hercules placed portable reserve lights on the international runway.

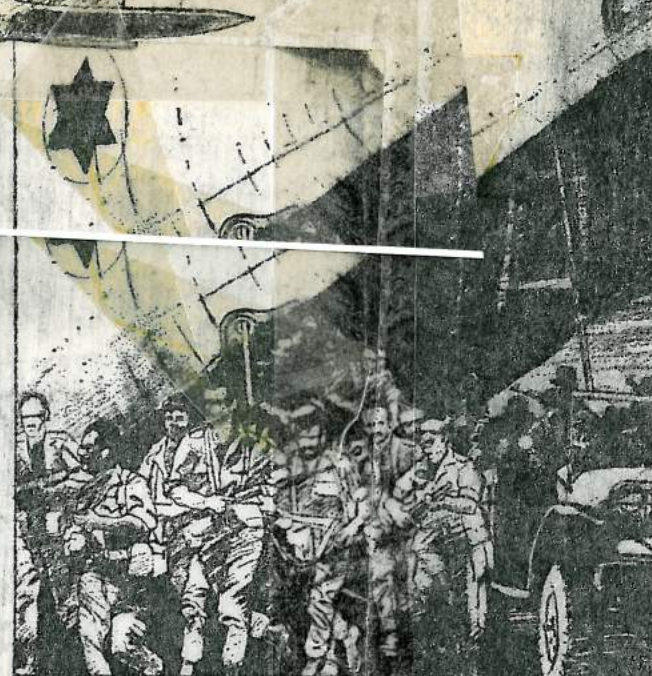
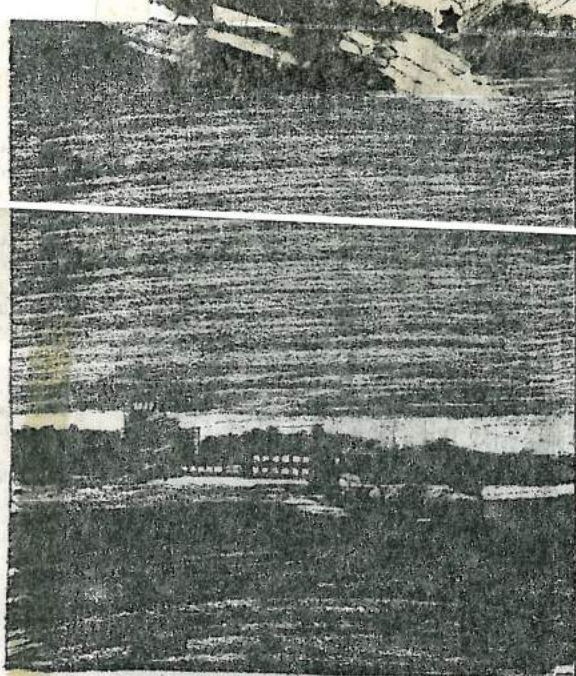
The control-tower was gained with only a few shots. Half a mile away the Ugandans on the other side of the rise and the hostages heard the shooting but there was no way of telling what was going on and no reason to believe that more than 100 Israeli troops were about to descend on them. In this confusion, just two or three minutes after the first Hercules landed, two Hercules taxied quietly near the old terminal and the fourth joined the original Hercules on the international runway. Troops in jeeps were on the tarmac before the planes had stopped moving.

The troops from every plane had a specific assignment. One group went to the old terminal and made directly for the hostages, firing at the loose cordon of Ugandan troops. With firing taking place in various parts of the airport, the Ugandans literally did not know which way to turn. Twenty died in the first few minutes. There was an extra "diversion" with a double purpose. Another group of troops headed for the Ugandan MiG fighters near the far end of the old runway. Gunfire and grenades destroyed at least six of the aircraft, adding to the chaos.

The third batch of troops headed for the airport perimeter to fight off Ugandan reinforcements as long as possible. Theirs might have been a hazardous operation, holding back troops so that the planes could take off but it turned out to be the most peaceful assignment of the night. No extra troops arrived. The armour never moved from Kampala.

The whole time the 33 Israeli doctors with the troops provided covering fire from the four aircraft. They had been specially trained to carry out the dual role of doctor and soldier for this operation.

Exactly as planned, then, the Israeli troops had achieved the first set of objectives: They had landed all four Hercules, achieved complete surprise, overcome most



Saturday: Lt. Gen. Shomron gives the final briefing after a trial run in Israel

The second Hercules lands; the airport lights burn as usual; the command plane circles

Israeli troops storm out of the Hercules, which has taxied quietly to the old terminal. The Ugandan guards are shot

Directed by Israeli officers with loud hailer, half-dressed hostages are helped into jeeps or run to the waiting planes. Drawn by Julian Allen in Israel for New York Magazine

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of the Ugandan troops and secured their force from counter attack by other Ugandan troops or pursuit by MiGs. But they had still to free the hostages and get them on to the plane.

WHILE SHOMRON'S squad took over the control tower, Netanyahu's men, on foot and in jeeps, dashed out of their Hercules and headed for the terminal building praying that the terrorists had not already opened fire on the hostages. Netanyahu stopped his jeep short of the building and his squad burst out firing their Uzi submachine guns from the hip.

The German Boese ran from the front of the old terminal into the hall, seized a magazine for his gun, and stormed into the transit lounge. He aimed it at the scores of hostages now flat and on the floor. For some reason he changed his mind, either relenting at the mass execution or realising that the enemy was outside. He rushed out of the building and started firing into the darkness. Then he seemed to change his mind again and turned his gun back towards the building. But by now he had been lined up in the sights of one of Netanyahu's men who shot Boese dead. In the same volley of fire Gabriele Tiedemann was killed and the Israeli soldiers burst into the lounge.

"Israel! Israel!" the soldiers shouted. And then again "Tiskavu!", an instruction in Hebrew to lie down. Many, like Claud Rosenkowitz, an architect, and his wife Emma, threw themselves on their children. Mrs Sarah Davidson and others crawled to the bathroom in the hope of greater safety. The room was

filled with smoke and dust from hand grenades exploding outside. A few of the blankets started to burn and smoke. The hostages shouted to the Israeli rescuers that other terrorists were upstairs and soldiers rushed through, killing these within seconds, but in the chaos casualties among the hostages were inevitable. Arye Brodsky shielded his two daughters aged 6 and 10 and held his wife's head to the floor. He tried to hold down another woman's head but she struggled free, tried to get up and was wounded.

Some passengers crawled under mattresses. Three hostages made the fatal mistake of standing up as the soldiers came into the room. The hero of the long hi-jack ordeal, Jean Jacques Maimoni, who was of Moroccan origin, either did not heed or did not hear the instruction to lie down. Ilan Hartuv, Dora Block's son, shouted to him "crawl!" but he stood up and perhaps because he looked like an Arab one of the soldiers shot him. Pascoe Cohen, who had survived the concentration camp, was fatally wounded. Mrs Ida Borowicz, aged 58, who was one of the pioneers of the Russian Jews' struggle for the right to emigrate to Israel, also fell, struck by a chance bullet.

It was all over so quickly. Most of the terrorists had not even had a chance to shoot. (Israel believes that three terrorists escaped but Amin has since said there were only seven and they were all killed).

Israeli officers with loud hailer now directed the hostages to run for the aircraft. They were not to worry about the shooting. Undressed and half dressed the hostages broke out of the terminal, some clambering on board jeeps, some running with Israeli escort to the waiting Her-

cules. A soldier gave his shirt to a girl in bra and panties. One soldier held his Uzi gun in one arm and a three-year old boy in the other. It had so far been an astonishing success for the Israelis with only four troops wounded, but now they had their most saddening casualty. Natanyahu came back on to the tarmac to organise the hostages on to the Hercules. As he stood on the tarmac, a Ugandan soldier fired from the old control tower and shot him in the back.

The Israelis had planned to refuel at least one of the Hercules at Entebbe and fly it directly back to Israel. But the fuel pumps they had brought with them were working slowly, and only 10,000 litres—slightly over a quarter of the capacity of one Hercules—had been pumped into its fuel tanks when the hostages had reached the aircraft. Shomron decided to abandon the attempt to refuel, and left the pumps on the apron.

The raid was only minutes from a successful conclusion. Just 44 minutes after the Israelis had landed the first Hercules was ready to leave with hostages.

The first Hercules took off for Nairobi at 00.45 am and joined the Boeing 707 communications aircraft which had throughout circled maintaining a link between the medical team in Nairobi and Tel Aviv. Shortly after 0.50 am, the second and third Hercules took off—with the runway lights still shining. Then the lights went out. The last Hercules almost crashed when the pilot briefly lost sight of the runway path, but it took off successfully.

On board, the mood was subdued rather than celebratory; the soldiers were saddened by Netanyahu's death, and the hostages were still suffering shock and bewilderment. Mrs Davidson

(whose son Ron had been playing cards less than an hour earlier when the first shots were heard), could still not grasp what had happened. She broke down and sobbed.

There was no hugging and kissing, and little expression of joy. Only one soldier attempted a joke: the hostages may have been surprised that night, but there were more shocks to come. "While you were away in Safari they introduced VAT."

NAIROBI airport is one of Africa's busiest, and is used to unscheduled flights. Shortly after a new shift came on duty at the control tower, at 11.26 pm on the evening of Saturday, July 3, it was informed of a flight plan for an unscheduled El Al Boeing 707, flight number LY 167, planning to arrive at Nairobi shortly before 11.30.

This was Israel's hospital plane, which flew direct to Kenya. At this stage—during the hours before the four Hercules and supporting communications aircraft reached Entebbe—it was vital that as few people at Nairobi airport knew what was really going on. And as there seemed nothing ex-

cessively unusual about the request of LY 167, it was given permission to land. It touched down at 11.26, and taxied to bay 4, near the main airport building.

Immediately it was surrounded by "El Al staff"—many of them in fact Israeli agents—and GSU officers. Even so, the airport staff remained unperturbed: ever since the PFLP had attempted to blow up an El Al plane at Nairobi airport in January, each El Al flight had been accorded special security protection on the ground.

Only one thing seemed odd to the control tower. The plane that landed—registration number 4XBY8, with a Star of David on the tail—was undoubtedly the one to which landing permission had been given. But when it landed, it announced itself not as LY 167, but as LY 169. Still, it was late Saturday night: perhaps someone had made an unimportant slip?

In reality it was the first instance of Israeli numbers-juggling with Nairobi airport that night. The more confusion they could sew among the regular control tower staff, the easier it would be for the "El Al staff" and GSU men in the know to tell the control tower that they understood the

situation, and everything was all right.

For almost an hour and a half, Nairobi airport continued to function normally, and apparently calmly. Thirty-five minutes after the hospital plane landed, the raid on Entebbe began: but Nairobi's airport staff still knew nothing.

The control tower started becoming suspicious—and confused—shortly before 1 am, when another Boeing 707 made sudden contact with Nairobi airport. The captain explained that his plane was really LY 167 from Tel Aviv, and that he was late because he was having trouble with engine No. 4. He was slowing down to 300 knots, and descending from 37,000 to 23,000 feet.

The control tower staff advised the El Al station manager what was happening, hoping he could make more sense out of it all than they could.

He could indeed. This second 707, he knew, was the communications plane which had been circling near Entebbe while the rescue mission was under way: the captain's story about the bad engine was false, to conceal the fact that it had slowed down to fly in formation with the first Hercules to take off from Entebbe.

But the El Al man wanted confirmation that the first Hercules was airborne again—to indicate that the mission had been at least partially successful. "What about a C-130?" he asked the control tower. "There should be one with the 707." He suggested searching along the Entebbe track with the radar.

The Nairobi control tower was now intensely suspicious. It asked "LY 167" for its position. The captain replied that he did not know: his navigation equipment, like his fourth engine, he claimed, had broken down.

Not until the communications plane and the first Hercules were within minutes of landing did Nairobi radar pick out two distinct aircraft flying from Entebbe. Even at this late moment, the 707 captain played for time and confusion. Asked if another aircraft was with him, he replied: "negative negative."

Then, at 2.06, the 707 and the Hercules landed together. The Boeing was unmarked. Only now did the Nairobi control tower, frightened and baffled, sound the emergency. Police and airport security guards were alerted. But telephone calls to senior officials from the ministries of aviation and defence received no answer: they were evidently enjoying a late Saturday night. Eventually the airport raised "Bryn" Davies's office at Nairobi police headquarters. Either he personally, or one of his aides, reassured the control tower: "Yes, it's all right, we know about it."

By 2.39 all four Hercules had landed at Nairobi. The ten wounded soldiers and civilians were carried in stretchers from the Hercules to the hospital plane. One of them, Pascoe Cohen, later died in hospital.

It had not been generally realised how detailed and complex the planning for the Nairobi end of the rescue mission was: the combination of diplomacy between Thursday and Saturday, and the handling of the Nairobi airport staff on the night itself, involved the same careful, minute organisation as the actual rescue of the hostages.

As it was, the Nairobi operation worked perfectly. The six aircraft—four Hercules and two Boeing 707s—were all refuelled. Shortly after 4 am the last of them, the hospital plane, took off for Israel.



How Israel's rescue and refuel plan worked out (local times)