

Israeli raid on Entebbe sparks freedom's glow

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Two years ago, July Fourth was a different kind of independence day than anyone could have imagined it to be.

For about a week preceding that day in 1976, a more world had evoked a crisis which in a way mirrored Africa — but quite much stage drama, so one knew how the scenario would turn out.

For nearly a week, almost a hundred Jewish hostages were being held by militant hijackers in the Entebbe in Uganda. The hijackers — two West Germans and two Palestinian gunmen, suspected by the troops of late President Idi Amin — demanded a \$5 million ransom and freedom for 53 jailed terrorists in Israel.

I was in Germany at the time, for the filming of "21 Hours at Munich," a film about the hijacking of the Israeli athletes by PLO terrorists at the 1972 Olympic Games.

The dramatic recapture of that sad piece of history was being done in the Olympic Village apartments where the attack event had occurred, and starred William Holden as Munich police chief Manfred Beckendorfer, Franco Nero as the head terrorist boss, and Shirley Knight as the German police woman who tried to get the head terrorist to come to his senses.

For weeks, I and other members of the crew of "21 Hours" had lived and breathed the horror of terrorism. Through the

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hours of horrific captivity, we watched PLO terrorists streak into the Olympic apartment compound, round up the Israeli athletes at gunpoint, and then proceed the release of fellow Palestinians who were being held in Israeli jails.

We filmed endless negotiations of government and Olympic Games officials, who sat around conference tables and argued like madmen. We filmed Golda Meir on the telephone, saying no, Israel would not give in to terrorist demands.

And then we filmed the tragic finale — the hijacker explosion and the death of the Israeli athletes.

I had watched make-believe Israeli and make-believe terrorist fights and die, and I had sung the Jewish "Makavah" with other actors and actresses of the lines surrounding the Olympic apartments while the cameras rolled.

As we watched the completion of "21 Hours," I think all of us were being slightly relieved to be done with the business of terrorism and death.

Then — Entebbe.

On June 21, an Air France flight left Tel Aviv for Paris, stopping in Athens along the way. In Athens, the plane was boarded by the terrorists, who commandeered the plane to Uganda, where they separated the Jewish passengers and held

them hostage in the Entebbe Airport.

As the drama unfolded, everyone involved in the filming of "21 Hours" became increasingly horrified. The Entebbe situation was almost identical to the Munich ordeal we had been filming: the terrorists were demanding Palestinian prisoners be released from Israeli jails in return for the Jewish hostages.

Once again, the demand was being put to the Israeli Parliament, and once again, the world was helplessly watching as diplomatic discussions dragged on between countries.

Would Israel change its mind? Golda Meir had stated before that if her country gave in to terrorist demands, no Israeli would be safe in the world. Was it any different now?

The Entebbe predicament seemed even more sinister, because the notorious Idi Amin was doing nothing to help the hostages, and in fact was an accomplice to the terrorists.

I began to have nightmares about terrorism. Others on the crew said sudden head noises made them jump, and we all talked about how terrorism was the most wicked of the world's evils.

On July 2, 1978, "21 Hours at Munich" was, as they say in the language, in the can. The Entebbe situation, however, appeared to remain unresolved and it was with mixed feelings

that the cast and crew went for the customary wrap party the next day, July Fourth.

The party was held in a Munich pub, and everyone drank beer in honor of both the film completion and Independence Day in America. The Germans brought in American flags, red, white and blue streamers, and the band played the "Star Spangled Banner."

In 1977, each of us felt the terrible irony. We celebrated independence and completion, while a group of people elsewhere in the world was being held under the threat of death, their fates unknown.

Everyone got drunk. Suddenly, the bartender burst into the pub with an armful of the evening Munich newspaper, shouting:

Across the top of the front page in large, black letters two to three inches high was the headline:

ISRAELI RESCUE!

There was a dramatic half-page photograph of one of the freed hostages embracing a friend as the crowd with screams and heart-wrenching relief.

An enormous cheer erupted in the pub. Beer glasses went up in the air and Germans and Americans hugged each other and clapped each other on the back.

As the incredible story of the Israeli raid on Entebbe unfolded, we learned that in the pre-

vious day, July 3, a 19-year-old Israeli had died at Ugandan airport, as thoughtless, thoughtless; around their people's turn out before some what was happening.

It was such an odd sense of good-bye, every human heart in the probably on the planet is something of a hope for the world.

I think it was because all worked so hard to the awful tragedy of that we had felt as if frustration of slow as resolution and resolve negotiations. We had and relieved the head of Israeli athletes of been smothered up.

Each Entebbe survivor was congratulated, and I don't know if there was another person in earth who felt as and grateful as we did.

In that German pub July Fourth, the best the "Makavah," we of and how we truly value independence.

And somewhere in it of it all, I slipped in myself, looked up at the, and cried.

