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## 1976: Israelis rescue Entebbe hostages

Israeli commandos have rescued 100 hostages, mostly Israelis or Jews, held by pro-Palestinian hijackers at Entebbe airport in Uganda.

At about 0100 local time (2200GMT), Ugandan soldiers and the hijackers were taken completely by surprise when three Hercules transport planes landed after a 2,500-mile trip from Israel.

About 200 elite troops ran out and stormed the airport building.

During a 35-minute battle, 20 Ugandan soldiers and all seven hijackers died along with three hostages.

“ This operation will certainly be inscribed in the annals of military history, in legend and in national tradition. ”  
**Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister**

The leader of the assault force, Lieutenant Colonel Yonatan Netanyahu, was also shot dead by a Ugandan sentry.

The Israelis destroyed 11 Russian-built MiG fighters, which amounted to a quarter of Uganda's air force.

The surviving hostages were then flown to Israel with a stopover in Nairobi, Kenya, where some of the injured were treated by Israeli doctors and at least two transferred to hospital there.

Speaking at the Israeli Knesset (parliament) this afternoon, Prime

### Watch/Listen



More than 100 hostages spent several anxious days at Entebbe airport

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The BBC's Keith Graves: "Mr Rabin said Israel would continue to fight international terrorism"

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Former hostage Tony Russell: "We have been travelling for a very long time and we want to go to bed"

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Lieutenant Colonel Yonathan Netanyahu is buried with full military honours

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Minister Yitzhak Rabin who ordered the raid said: "This operation will certainly be inscribed in the annals of military history, in legend and in national tradition."

### **Air France plane seized**

The crisis began on 27 June, when four militants seized an Air France flight, flying from Israel to Paris via Athens, with 250 people on board.

The hijackers - two from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and two from Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang - diverted the plane to Entebbe, where it arrived on 28 June.

The hijackers - who were joined by three more colleagues - demanded the release of 53 militants held in jails in Israel and four other countries.

Uganda's President and dictator Idi Amin arrived at the airport to give a speech in support of the PFLP and supplied the hijackers with extra troops and weapons.

On 1 July, the hijackers released a large number of hostages but continued to hold captive the remaining 100 passengers who were Israelis or Jews.

Those who were freed were flown to Paris and London.

Among them were British citizens George Good, a retired accountant and Tony Russell, a senior GLC official, who arrived in London on Friday.

The crew were offered the chance to go but chose to stay with the plane. The remaining hostages were transferred to the airport building.

The hijackers then set a deadline for 1100GMT for their demands to be met or they would blow up the airliner and its passengers. But their plan was foiled by the dramatic Israeli raid.

### **In Context**

The mission, originally dubbed Operation Thunderbolt by the Israeli military, was renamed Operation Yonatan in honour of Netanyahu - elder brother of Binyamin Netanyahu, who was Israel's Prime Minister from 1996 to 1999.

The raid continues to be source of pride for the Israeli public, and many of the participants went on to high office in Israel's military and political establishment.

Among them was Dan Shomron, who was in overall command of the rescue operation. He became Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Force.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated during his second term in office in 1995.

Idi Amin was humiliated by the surprise raid. He believed Kenya had colluded with Israel in planning the raid and hundreds of Kenyans living in Uganda were massacred soon afterwards.

But from this time, Amin's regime began to break down.

Two years later Idi Amin was forced into exile in Saudi Arabia.

He died in Jeddah in August 2003.

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