



Quest for Freedom: Life story of an Entebbe raider

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Entebbe, Uganda, July 3, 1976, 11 PM local time.

It was the proverbial “Dark and Stormy Night.”

My heart was racing as I was on final approach to runway 31 at Entebbe airport, preparing to land my Israeli Air Force Lockheed C-130 Hercules. The runway lights had just been turned off while I was on a short final approach. Seconds ago it was there, in full view. Suddenly, I was facing a black hole, flying by memory, feel, and by Braille.

Keeping the mental image of the last view I had of the runway lights, supplemented by guidance from my co-pilot, while maintaining my approach speed and rate of descent, I waited for the ground contact, hopefully with the runway!

We were lucky: As I had calculated the time, distance and altitude, I flared ready for a blind landing, and the C-130 touched down on a hard surface – the runway. A quick application of the brakes and reverse thrust, and we were stopped, ready to disembark our passengers – the team that was now getting into action to secure the perimeter of the airport for the rescue the 102 hostages.

This was the end of the first leg of a three-leg trip that brought us all the way from Sharm el Sheik on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula to Entebbe. The mission was to rescue the hostages taken from Air France flight 139 a week earlier. I was the aircraft commander of the third of four C-130s. The first two managed to land on the remote runway just before the lights were turned off. Due to the mission’s secrecy, we had turned off all of our aircraft lights, inside and outside, and maintained strict radio silence for the last eight hours.

It was a long day and a long, difficult flight: Over 2500 miles: Overweight takeoff, low altitude flying, first over the Red Sea, then over hostile countries, all the while trying to avoid detection. We flew through sandstorms and lightning storms. Our mission was top secret and any detection would have jeopardized the entire rescue, and would no doubt have cost many lives. Not just ours, but also the hostages.

And the mission wasn’t even close to being over yet. We still had to load up the 102 now released hostages and their rescuers, and return to Israel with our precious cargo. We still had to make a refueling stop along the way. And all that had to be done in secrecy to avoid any attacks from hostile forces on our return trip. But my personal trip of secrecy, escape and evasion, hiding and survival started long before, some thirty years earlier, as a Jewish child in Hitler’s Nazi Germany.

During those horrible years, while hiding in the attic of a Dutch farmhouse, I watched the Allied bombers fly overhead to bomb Nazi Germany, and vowed to become a pilot, if and when, I ever survived.

This was when my personal quest for freedom, life and aviation began.

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