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LIBYAN PLANE PILOT APPARENTLY TRIED TO HEAD BACK TO EGYPTIAN TERRITORY WHEN HE IGNORED SIGNALS TO LAND

By Yitzhak Shargil, JTA Tel Aviv Correspondent

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--The pilot of the Libyan airliner that strayed over Sinai yesterday was apparently trying to head back to Egyptian territory when he ignored signals to land and was shot down by Israel Air Force jets, it was learned today. The death toll meanwhile climbed to 92, including six of 13 survivors who died in or on their way to hospitals. Israeli rescue teams have cordoned off the area of the crash and were still searching for more bodies this morning.

It is still uncertain how many persons were aboard the Libyan Boeing 727 but the original estimate of 83, based on incomplete information, was obviously incorrect. Seven survivors are still alive.

The Cabinet, at a special meeting last night, said "It has been established beyond all doubt that the pilot of the Libyan plane noted the repeated warnings.... The pilot even acknowledged that he noticed the warnings but nevertheless refused to heed those warnings," the statement said.

Unconfirmed reports said that this was confirmed by the Libyan co-pilot, one of the survivors. He reportedly told his rescuers that both he and the pilot saw and understood the signals from the Israeli fighters to follow them to an airstrip for landing but decided instead to make for Egyptian territory because of the hostile relations between Israel and Libya. The co-pilot is in Beersheba Hospital where he is suffering from shock and injuries. His condition was reported as serious but not dangerous.

Flew Over Sensitive Military Areas

The Cabinet statement said that the plane had flown over a highly sensitive military area and "behaved in a way which aroused suspicion and concern regarding its intentions." When it failed to respond to the warning signals, Israeli planes "were forced as a last resort to intercept the plane." The statement reiterated Israel's sorrow over the loss of lives. Transport Minister Shimon Peres said last night that Israel had acted in accordance with international rules governing the intrusion of a civilian aircraft into its air space.

(A spokesman for the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) said in London today, "When you are requested to land in such a situation, you land quickly and ask questions afterwards.")

A source identified as a personality connected with aviation said here today that the Libyan airliner's pilot behaved in a reckless and irresponsible manner. The source noted that an airliner pilot yields to anyone holding a mock pistol or even a toothbrush pressed to his back and takes a plane anywhere he is told to. In this case, the pilot of the Libyan plane was facing interceptors which gave him clear signals to land but he ignored them and tried to escape from a region often described as one of the most dangerous in the world, the source said.

According to Israeli sources, the Libyan plane was hit on the edges of its wings. The pilot tried to make a belly landing on the sand dunes about 20 kilometers east of the Suez Canal but the plane crashed. Its three rear engines were torn off and

smashed into the fuselage causing an explosion which may have been responsible for the high death toll. Of the 13 original survivors, five died at an Army field hospital in Sinai and on the way to Beersheba Hospital last night and a sixth succumbed at Beersheba Hospital this morning. Two of the survivors who died were women.

DAYAN: ACTION WAS DECIDED BY MILITARY, NOT CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES; DOWNING OF PLANE HAS NO POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Defense Minister Moshe Dayan tonight expressed regret over the airline disaster. "Needless to say I wish it had not happened," he told a press conference. Dayan expressed hope that this would be taken as an incident of military character with no political implications. He stressed this was a military action and was decided upon within the military network according to standing orders and that the civil authorities--including Dayan himself--were not involved in it.

Dayan said further that the Libyan authorities' attitude in connection with the Israeli-Arab conflict had no bearing on the incident whatsoever. The only puzzle is the behavior of the captain of the Libyan plane, Dayan stated. He said he hoped that when the co-pilot recovers he may offer an explanation as to why the captain, noticing and understanding the orders, behaved as he did and thus brought upon his passengers the tragic end.

Dayan stated there will be no military investigation into the incident as he was convinced that the Israeli pilots acted as they did in accordance with the circumstances. But all details will be handed over to Premier Golda Meir who will decide on further steps. He said further that Israel would cooperate with any international body--civil aviation, Red Cross or pilots' association--and will supply them with every detail of the incident so they may take any action to prevent a recurrence.

Asked if Israel would offer compensations he said the question was not raised but his private opinion is against it as Israel has nothing to be blamed for and the sole responsibility rests with the captain who disobeyed orders to land as directed.

EL AL TAKING MAXIMUM PRECAUTIONS

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Grave anxiety for the safety of Israel's international civil aviation was expressed here today by a senior official connected with Israel's aviation program. He said that "what Israel has invested to secure its flights and safeguard passengers of Israeli planes is next to nothing compared to what Israel will have to invest for similar security for planes and passengers after the Libyan plane downing." El Al, which resumed normal flights after mechanical supervisors ended a four-day strike, is taking maximum precautionary steps to assure the safety of all flights, it was disclosed.

U.S. SAYS PLANE INCIDENT WILL NOT BLOCK EFFORTS TO GET TALKS UNDER WAY

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (JTA)--The Libyan airliner incident is not clouding the meetings with President Nixon tomorrow by top level Egyptian emissary Hafez Ismail and a week from today by Israeli Premier Golda Meir, the State Department

emphasized today. Ismail, internal security advisor to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, is arriving here from London this afternoon as scheduled, Department spokesman Charles Bray announced.

Asked by a newsman if the incident will cloud the forthcoming talks, Bray replied: "No. This (question) will take us both in the realm of speculation that has not been broached on any official level. What is important to say in this regard is on what will get under way, and that is, views will be exchanged" for a discussion of negotiations between the parties in the Middle East. "We were prepared and remain quite prepared to get the talks off the ground," Bray said.

Bray was asked whether President Nixon's message of condolence yesterday constituted a "rebuke to Israel" as some newsmen had interpreted it. "I would not put that construction on it," Bray responded, reiterating his earlier comment that it was based on "humanitarian" considerations. Bray said that the messages by the President and Secretary of State William P. Rogers expressing condolence to the Cairo government were sent "because the majority of the passengers were Egyptian and it simply seemed the human thing to extend condolences to those most affected."

Earlier, at the White House, during his news conference centered on his visits to Hanoi, Peking and Tokyo, Dr. Henry Kissinger said in response to questions what while in Peking the Middle East was included in general discussion on world affairs. But the Presidential advisor refused to be drawn into the Libyan plane affair, saying that he had been concentrating on Asian matters for the past two weeks and wished to confine his remarks to his trip.

FRANCE WANTS OBSERVERS IN PLANE PROBE

PARIS, Feb. 22 (JTA)--The French government today asked Israel to permit French aeronautical observers to participate in the investigation on the shooting down of the Libyan airplane. French Minister for Foreign Affairs Maurice Schumann told Israel Charge d'Affaire Yosef Hadass that France made this demand because the plane's crew was French. Four of the five French crew members and a young Parisian air hostess died in the crash.

Hadass, in the absence of Ambassador Ben Natan who is currently in the United States, was summoned to the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs where he met with Schumann. After the meeting, the Ministry issued a statement reiterating its condemnation of "all forms of terrorism and the act of force which consisted in the shooting down of a civilian plane." The communiqué, attributed to the Minister himself, said that "such acts could only increase tension in the Middle East, further complicate the possibility of finding a solution to the crisis and endanger innocent lives."

An additional official communiqué said that the Minister had summoned Hadass "in order to express the emotion of the French government and of unanimous French opinion" over the downing of the Libyan plane. The Quai d'Orsay statement said that the French crew members were participating "in an international operation of technical cooperation."

An Air France spokesman told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the Libyan airliner's French crew members belonged to the French national air company "Air France." According to the Air France spokesman, some 12-15 French air crews serve with the Libyan airline. Each crew

consists of a captain, 2-3 technical crew members such as engineer and navigator, and 3-4 cabin crew, namely purser, stewards and air hostess.

ISRAELI ENVOY CALLED TO FOREIGN OFFICE

BONN, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Israeli Ambassador Eliashiv Ben Horin was called to the Foreign Office today to hear of the Western German government's "deep shock" at the shooting down of the Libyan airliner. The head of the political department of the Foreign Office, Guenther Van Well, said the government was "horrified at the extent of the consequences of this action." He told Ben Horin the West German government was also "seriously concerned at the danger of the fronts in the Middle East hardening again and that present peace efforts could be jeopardized."

Ben Horin was asked to provide the Bonn government as quickly as possible with full information on the fate of the passengers of the Libyan aircraft and on the details of the incident. The Libyan Ambassador in Bonn, Jalal Mohamed Dhagely, was also called to the Foreign Office. A spokesman said the government had expressed its sympathies to the Libyan envoy.

NEWSPAPERS MOURN VICTIMS, BLAME PILOT

JERUSALEM, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Israel's newspapers published statements of mourning over the many victims in the Libyan plane tragedy but they blamed the pilot for the disaster, arguing that the accident could have been prevented if the pilot had obeyed radioed signals from both the ground and from Israeli interceptors to land after it strayed into Israeli airspace over the Sinai Peninsula.

Maariv called on the government to set up immediately an inquiry commission, declaring that Israel had "nothing to hide and no interest in hiding anything." Maariv cited as background for the tragedy the threats emanating from Arab terrorists to execute kamikaze-type raids on Israeli cities.

"We feel great sorrow for the civilians who were killed as a result of the forced landing of the plane which apparently penetrated Israeli air space without hostile intentions," Haaretz declared. "With this we must blame the pilot who refused to react to the warnings which followed accepted international procedures. Fifteen minutes should have been enough time for a response," the daily added. "Only after the pilot tried to evade the Israelis who had fired warning shots did the decision come to attack the Libyan aircraft."

Davar wrote that "Israel must be concerned with protecting its skies," particularly in view of recent reports that a possible suicide attack by air was being planned against Israel. Reporting that Israeli authorities had ordered an alert for such a possible attack, Davar added that, in the light of the airliner pilot's refusal to heed Israeli radio warnings, "it is apparent that political considerations were considered as more important than the safety of the passengers."

The Jerusalem Post declared that "for the Arab propaganda mills; the circumstances which led to the tragedy will be of little moment, and they will, as is already apparent, charge Israel with deliberate intent. Yesterday's catastrophe should embrace all nations involved in a shroud of mourning."

SCENE OF THE DISASTER

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Observers returning here from the site of the Libyan plane crash said today that from above it looked like a black spot in the white sand dunes of the Sinai. At lower levels, parts of metal and passengers' belongings

were seen scattered over an area about a quarter of a mile wide. The major metal pieces were off the western side, indicating the direction of the airliner's movement when it hit the ground. Part of wings, charred motors and scattered suitcases and other belongings were the only sign of the disaster. A heavy sand storm already gave the impression that the disaster took place long ago, not yesterday.

Israeli soldiers who reached the site in specially balloon-tired jeeps found they had been preceded by helicopter crews which started to help the victims. The soldiers helped evacuate the 13 injured, six of whom died since then, and assembled the 92 dead. The area is still guarded.

The coffins of the victims will be returned to Egypt tomorrow at the Kantara point on the Suez Canal under the auspices of the Red Cross. At the same time, the belongings of the passengers and the equipment of the plane will also be handed over at Kantara, it was reported tonight.

EYEWITNESSES TO DISASTER

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Survivors of the downed Libyan airliner and eyewitnesses on the ground described today what happened moments before the Boeing 727 jet was shot down by Israeli fighter planes over the Sinai peninsula yesterday.

The survivors were visited at Beersheba Hospital today by Gen. Israel Tal, chief of the operations branch of Israel's General Headquarters and by French Ambassador Francois Hure who came to see one of the surviving French crew members of the Libyan plane. The crew member, a steward who was suffering from shock but otherwise not seriously injured, was also interviewed by reporters.

He said he noticed the Israeli planes approach and then pull away. He said there were two shots and then the crash. The steward said he was in the passenger cabin at the time and was not aware of whether or not the pilot had responded to signals from the Israeli fighters. He said the flight had been perfectly normal up to that time. An Egyptian passenger who survived reported seeing Israeli interceptors but remembered nothing of the crash. Another surviving passenger, believed to be Saleh Bousier, a former Minister of Information of Libya, refused to identify himself or to reply to questions.

Hure told reporters he came to the hospital to see the injured French national and not to conduct an inquiry. He said he had no immediate instructions to make representations to the Israeli Foreign Ministry but expected to receive such instructions later. French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann made representations this morning to the Israeli Embassy in Paris.

Israeli Soldiers' Version

Israeli soldiers in the Sinai said today that they saw the Libyan plane approach from the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal near the town of Suez. They said the plane seemed to be flying in the general direction of Beersheba when Israeli fighters went up to intercept it.

The Israeli interceptors reportedly made the standard international signals for the Libyan aircraft to follow them--dipping their wings and lowering their wheels. The pilot of the Libyan plane gave signs that he was yielding to the instructions by lowering his flaps, the witnesses said. But suddenly he nosed his plane upward and tried to escape toward Egypt.

Israeli sources said the pilot's suspicious moves and the fact that the plane came from

Egyptian territory raised the fear that it might have been seized by hijackers who were planning a suicide attack on Israeli territory in retaliation for Tuesday night's Israeli commando raids on terrorist bases in Lebanon.

TIGHTER SECURITY FOR ISRAELI PROPERTY

BONN, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Following the Libyan airliner incident, police in West Germany tightened security on Jewish and Israeli installations, property and persons here to safeguard against possible attack. Tight security has been maintained since the Munich massacre, police say. Observers here do not exclude Libyan or Palestinian reprisals for the airliner incident. West German security services met today in Hamburg to discuss and coordinate fresh security measures. Special watch is being kept on El Al offices in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich and also on synagogues throughout the country.

WALDHEIM URGES THOROUGH PROBE

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Secretary General Kurt Waldheim issued a statement today expressing "profound sympathy" to the families of those who died in the crash of the Libyan airliner and urged "the most thorough investigation of the circumstances in which this appalling disaster took place." He also expressed shock and distress that "innocent and defenseless people have lost their lives in one of the most shocking incidents in the history of civil aviation." Waldheim also sent messages of sympathy and condolences to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and to Libyan Prime Minister Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

The British Mission to the UN also expressed shock at the "loss of innocent life." The Mission called for "full and impartial investigation" of the tragedy. Letters of condolence were sent to the Egyptian and Libyan UN Missions.

Waldheim met last night with the Egyptian UN Ambassador Abdel Meguid who reportedly demanded an investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Following the meeting, the Secretary General telephoned Israeli UN Ambassador Yosef Tekoah to express his shock over the incident. Tekoah met with Waldheim at noon today, but no information was available regarding the context of the discussion. It was learned that Waldheim will meet Saturday with Hafez Ismail, President Anwar Sadat's security advisor. Sources said the Waldheim meeting with Ismail was arranged before the Libyan plane incident.

HOD: PILOT ACTED CONSISTENTLY IN A MOST SUSPICIOUS MANNER

TEL AVIV, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Gen. Mordechai Hod, commander of Israel's Air Force, said today that the pilot of the Libyan airliner had acted consistently "in a most suspicious manner" from the time of initial Israeli efforts to make contact by radio. If the pilot had been misrouted, Hod added, it would have been the "simplest thing" for him to heed the radioed instructions to land the airliner for interrogation and clarification.

Hod said the liner was flying over "a most sensitive and delicate area," one of the most restricted sections under strict Israeli controls. He reported that when the Libyan Boeing 727 was sighted on Israeli radar and then seen over the Sinai, Israeli interceptor pilots were sent up to signal the pilot to land at Bir Gafgafa airfield nearby.

"We thought at first it was a navigational mistake but the stubbornness the pilot displayed in refusing to heed all of our signals led to suspicions that grew by the minute," Hod said. He added that

the pilot had lowered the undercarriage of the airliner and then tried to make a dash for the western side of the Suez Canal. He also said that the curtains on the windows of the plane were down and no passengers could be seen by the Israeli interceptor pilots. All these developments added to the growing suspicion and "we had to know what was going on," the General added.

Pilot Understood Signals

"A responsible captain, knowing he had more than 100 passengers for whom he was responsible, would not have acted as irresponsibly as this one did," Hod asserted. He said it had been determined that the airliner captain understood the Israeli signals to land. He added that the debriefing of the Libyan co-pilot indicated that the pilots saw and understood the signals from the interceptors but apparently decided to try to get away.

Hod said that after 16 minutes of efforts to persuade the captain to land and with a minute to go before the airliner would have reached the Suez Canal, "we had no alternative but to do whatever we could to bring the airliner down and learn the circumstances of its penetration." He emphasized that "we wanted to force him down, not to shoot him down."

TEKOA: LEBANON'S REACTION TO RAID IS ONE OF DISTORTIONS, LIES

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Israeli Ambassador Yosef Tekoa yesterday accused Lebanon of "distortions and lies" in its reaction to Tuesday night's Israeli attack on terrorist bases. Tekoa was referring to a letter written by Lebanon's Ambassador to the United Nations Edouard Ghorra charging that "17 persons were killed and 10 injured in the refugee camp of Nahr Al Bared and 13 killed and 10 injured in the camp of Al Badawi."

In a letter to Security Council President Joseph Odero-Jowi, Tekoa charged that Ghorra's letter, also to the Security Council President, "is the usual concoction of distortions and falsehoods by means of which the Lebanese government has repeatedly tried to shirk its grave responsibility for allowing Lebanon to become the center of the campaign of Arab terrorist atrocities that have plagued the Middle East and spread to other regions. These tactics cannot deceive anyone, nor, can they relieve the Lebanese government of its culpability."

Tekoa stated that at Nahr Al Bared, approximately 11 kilometers north of Tripoli, one of the targets was a base of El Fafah used for the training of foreign terrorists for terror operations in their own countries or against Israel. "Another base at Nahr Al Bared is operated by an organization known as the 'Popular Front,' where 'suicide squads' are being trained for 'spectacular' terror atrocities."

In his letter, Tekoa listed a series of atrocities from Aug. 1972 through Jan. 1973 which he said were committed from Lebanese territory against Israel and against Israelis abroad, including the Lod Airport and Munich massacres.

Tekoa noted also that following action by Israel against the terrorist bases, "the radio station, Voice of Palestine, operated by the terrorist organizations in Syria announced that their camps in the north of Lebanon had been attacked by Israeli forces. The same broadcast added: 'Our enemies know that we have opened a front

called Munich and that we have turned Lod airport into a sea of blood. The Wafa news agency, organ of the terrorist organizations, reported today that units of these organizations had intercepted the attacking enemy forces and clashed with them.' Tekoa added "These incontrovertible facts completely dispose of the hypocritical protestations and hollow charges contained in the Lebanese letter."

HELENA KHATSKES DEAD AT 90

NEW YORK, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Helena Khatskes, the distinguished Yiddish writer from the Soviet Lithuanian Republic, died in Kovno at the age of 90 according to reports in "Tiesha," the official organ of the Lithuanian Communist Party, the Lithuanian Writers Union and the Lithuanian Ministry of Education. "Ms. Khatskes was born in Kovno on July 25, 1882. She was the author of a large number of widely acclaimed children's stories in Yiddish and a pioneer in this field among Yiddish writers. She was also the author of several books dealing with problems of education. During World War II she was evacuated to the Soviet Union but returned to her native Kovno after the war where she lived in retirement."

COAST GUARD TO LEASE ISRAEL-MADE PLANE

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (JTA)--The United States Coast Guard will lease two high-speed executive-type planes, one made in Israel, for evaluation on medium-range search and rescue mission assignments, the Coast Guard announced here today. The leases are for six months. Tests will begin in April of an Israel Aircraft Industries I123 Westwind and a Cessna Citation plane. Leases to the Israeli and American firms were awarded after competitive procurement procedures, the Coast Guard said, adding that if the tests are successful, modern commercial jets may be purchased to replace the Coast Guard's aging fleet of medium-range amphibious planes.

Coast Guard officials said that both planes can reach the scene quickly and then can slow down in a search area for better coverage on such missions. The amphibious Grumman Albatross now in service has a top speed of about 230 mph, a cruise speed of 180 mph and a range of 2000 miles. Israel's Westwind has a top speed exceeding 530 mph, a range of more than 2000 miles and "very good" low-speed flying capability, the officials said.

18 SENATORS SEEK JACKSON BILL SPONSORS

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 (JTA)--Eighteen Senators, evenly divided between the Republican and Democratic Parties and representing most of the leadership in the Senate, are circulating letters to their Senatorial colleagues asking for their sponsorship of the Jackson Amendment to the East-West Trade Act. Announcement of the move to obtain sponsors for this legislation is scheduled to be made tonight in Palm Beach, Fla. by Sen. Henry Jackson (D. Wash.) at a dinner for the United Jewish Appeal.

The Jewish Defense League continued for the second consecutive day to sit-in at the offices of the World Council of Churches in New York. A JDL spokesman said they issued four demands including that the WCC sell all its stocks in companies dealing with the USSR, Syria and Iraq as they had done recently in regard to companies dealing with South African firms. The JDL also demanded \$25,000 from the WCC to carry on work on behalf of Soviet and Arab Jewry.