

Three Israeli Heroes
Temple B'nai Shalom
Braintree, Massachusetts
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Monday is Yom Hazikaron. Tuesday is Yom Ha'atzma'ut.

The Day of Remembrance. The Day of Independence.

On Monday we pay our respects to the heroes who died so that Israel could live. On Tuesday we dance in celebration because Israel came into existence as an independent nation in 1948 and because Israel not only exists but thrives.

I have stories of three Israeli heroes. I know the names of two of them, though I never met them. The third one is no less a hero, and I did meet him, but I do not know his name.

Our first hero is David Daniel Marcus, known as Mickey Marcus.

I count Mickey Marcus as an Israeli hero, though he was not an Israeli.

Marcus was born in 1901 on Hester Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side. His parents were immigrants to America from Romania.

Marcus graduated from West Point in 1924. After completing his active duty requirement, he became a lawyer. He served as an Assistant United States Attorney in New York and then Commissioner of the Department of Correction for the City of New York. He continued his army service as a reserve officer in the Judge Advocate General's Corps.

After Pearl Harbor, Marcus returned to active duty. Despite having no paratrooper training, Marcus volunteered for the D-Day invasion and parachuted into Normandy. He helped draw up the surrender terms for Italy and Germany. He was subsequently the chief of the War Crimes Division, planning legal and security procedures for the Nuremberg trials.

In 1947, David Ben-Gurion asked Marcus to recruit an American officer to serve as military advisor to the Jewish army just then being formed, the Haganah. Marcus could not find anyone suitable. So he volunteered himself.

Marcus arrived in Palestine in January, 1948. This was just two months after the U N had approved the partition plan for the creation of two states, Jewish Israel and Arab Palestine. The Arab countries all voted against partition, refused to take the steps necessary to establish an Arab state, and vowed to

destroy Israel if the Jews established a state. Marcus arrived at a time of desperate need for his military expertise.

Marcus promptly designed a command and control structure for Israel. The Arab armies all attacked the day after independence was declared on May 14, 1948. Two weeks later Ben-Gurion appointed Marcus Commander of the Jerusalem front. He was given the rank of Aluf, the equivalent of Brigadier General. He thus became the first general in the new nation's army

The Arab armies immediately placed Jerusalem under siege, preventing all supplies from reaching the city. There was only one road leading up to Jerusalem. The Transjordan Legion held the Latrun Fort at the base of that road and controlled the length of the road.

In response, Marcus helped plan and execute the construction of a second road: a makeshift winding road through the difficult mountains surrounding Jerusalem. It seemed an impossible task. But Marcus and his engineers completed that road, allowing men and equipment to enter Jerusalem and break the Arab siege.

The U N arranged a cease fire to take effect on June 11, 1948. A few hours before the cease fire was to take effect, Marcus returned after dark to his headquarters in an abandoned monastery about six miles west of Jerusalem. As Marcus approached the building, a young sentry, Eliezer Linski, eighteen years old, following standard practice, called out to him, demanding the password. Linski did not know Marcus and could not see whether he was friend or foe.

Marcus did not respond with the password. Linski fired in the air. Marcus ran toward the monastery. Linski then fired at Marcus, as did one or more fighters in a nearby sentry post. They killed him.

As an American Jew, Marcus knew almost no Hebrew. He had not understood the sentry's Hebrew challenge.

Linski did not know English. Linski did not understand Marcus, who had responded in English.

The body of Mickey Marcus was returned to the United States for burial, accompanied by Moshe Dayan.

Marcus was buried in the West Point Cemetery at the United States Military Academy. His grave is the only one there for an American killed fighting under the flag of another country. His gravestone at West Point reads: "Colonel David Marcus — a Soldier for All Humanity."

Ben-Gurion wrote a note of condolence to Marcus's widow, Emma, in Brooklyn. The note included this sentence: "Marcus was the best man we had."

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Our second hero is Yonatan Netanyahu.

Yes, Netanyahu. His younger brother is Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel.

Everyone called Yonatan "Yoni."

He was born in 1946 in New York City, two years before the founding of Israel.

His parents were both born in what was then Palestine. Yoni's maternal and paternal grandparents had settled in Palestine in 1911 and 1920, respectively. When Yoni was born, his parents were living in New York while working for the creation of a Jewish state. They returned to Israel soon after it became a state in May, 1948.

In June, 1964, after graduating from high school, Yoni was drafted into the IDF. He volunteered for the paratroopers. He proved to be a superb soldier. He graduated first in his class from Officers' Training School. He became a platoon commander. Three years later he fought with great bravery in the Six Day War of 1967.

In the early 1970s he joined a unit of the IDF called Sayeret Matkal, known simply as "The Unit." The mission of The Unit included secret reconnaissance missions far behind enemy lines and counter-terrorism and rescue operations.

By 1976 Yoni had been promoted to serve as the Commander of The Unit.

On June 27, 1976, four terrorists, two from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and two from a German group called the Revolutionary Cells, hijacked an Air France plane shortly after it took off from the Athens airport on its way to Paris. There were 248 passengers aboard.

The hijackers forced the pilot to fly the plane to Entebbe in Uganda. They separated the Israelis and Jews from the larger group. They forced these hostages to move into another room at the airport, away from the other passengers.

That afternoon and the next day, the hijackers released the 148 hostages who were not Israelis and not Jews. The 100 Israeli and Jewish passengers remained as hostages and were threatened with death. The Air France pilot, Captain Michel Bacos, who was not Jewish, refused to abandon these hostages, even after the hijackers offered him his freedom. The rest of the crew followed his lead and remained.

At Entebbe, the four hijackers were joined by at least four others, supported by the pro-Palestinian forces of Uganda's President, Idi Amin. They demanded the release of 40 Palestinians held in Israel and 13 other detainees

imprisoned in Kenya, France, Switzerland, and West Germany. They threatened that if these demands were not met, they would begin to kill hostages on July 1.

On the deadline date, July 1, the Israeli government offered to negotiate with the hijackers to extend the deadline to July 4. They agreed.

The Israelis were proceeding with two plans at the same time. They were trying to enlist the help of other nations and to negotiate a resolution of the crisis. At the same time, Yoni was ordered to begin investigating whether a rescue operation would be possible.

They saw immediately that any rescue mission would need help from at least one East African government. The Israelis needed a place to refuel and permission to fly over another country's airspace. With urging from the Jewish owner of the Block hotels chain in Kenya and other Jews and Israelis in Nairobi, Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta gave permission for the IDF task force to cross Kenyan airspace and to refuel at the Kenyatta International Airport.

In the 48 hours remaining before the rescue raid, Israel's spy agency, Mossad, determined the exact whereabouts of the hostages in the terminal, the number of terrorists, and the involvement of Ugandan troops. They did this by interviewing the released hostages in Paris.

Meanwhile, in Israel, Yoni's group built out of canvas and wood a partial replica of the Entebbe terminal where the hostages were being held. They relied on plans still held by the Israeli construction company that had actually provided assistance to Uganda by building that very same terminal some years earlier as part of Israeli assistance to nations in East Africa.

The Unit practiced the raid over and over in order to be able to get in and get the hostages out fast enough, before the terrorists could murder the hostages.

After two days of nonstop planning, on July 3, one day before the new deadline, the Israeli cabinet approved the rescue mission presented by Yoni. He and The Unit had planned the mission to the last detail. Now they were given the green light to carry it out, with less than 24 hours remaining before the terrorists would begin killing hostages.

The raid began with four Israeli Air Force cargo planes secretly flying to Entebbe Airport in the middle of the night without being detected by Entebbe air traffic control. They flew down the international flight path over the Red Sea, mostly flying at a height of no more than 100 feet to avoid radar detection by Egyptian, Sudanese, and Saudi Arabian forces.

Two Boeing 707 jets followed the cargo planes. The first Boeing contained medical facilities and personnel. It landed at Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. They would wait there and be ready to provide medical care

to any wounded commandos or hostages. The second Boeing circled over Entebbe Airport during the raid.

The Israeli forces landed at Entebbe at one a.m., with their cargo bay doors already open. A black Mercedes that was identical to President Idi Amin's Mercedes, together with two Land Rovers that usually accompanied Amin's vehicle, rolled out of the plane as soon as it came to a stop. The Israeli assault team members were inside those cars. They drove them to the terminal building in the same fashion as Amin, hoping to fool the Ugandan guards and take them by surprise before any hostages were killed.

The Israelis sprang from their vehicles and burst towards the terminal. The hostages were in the main hall of the airport building directly adjacent to the runway. Entering the terminal, the commandos shouted through a megaphone in both Hebrew and English, "Stay down! Stay down! We are Israeli soldiers."

In just a few minutes, the Israelis killed all the terrorists along with more than 30 Ugandan soldiers. They shouted to the hostages to run, and all of them ran out to the waiting planes.

Meanwhile, a sniper in the control tower fired at one of the Israeli commandos who was leading the charge on the terminal building and hit him in the chest. That was Yoni, the sole casualty among the commandos.

Yoni died on the flight back to Israel.

Before the raid on Entebbe, Yoni was hardly known in Israel, partly because The Unit had to operate in secret. When the public learned of the successful raid, Yoni became a national hero. He received a full military funeral at Mount Herzl Military Cemetery.

The name of the operation to rescue the hostages had been Operation Entebbe. The name was changed to Operation Yonatan.

Yoni had a lasting impact in another way. When his younger brother, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is asked to what he attributes his hard line against all terrorists, he says it's because of Yoni's death in the raid on Entebbe.

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The story I have to tell you about our third hero is much shorter.

Right after the nine eleven attack there was a huge decline in travel to Israel. CJP organized a mission to fly to Israel in November, 2001, so that Jews from Boston could stand in solidarity with Israel. Alice and I were on that mission.

Most of our time in Israel was devoted to meeting Israelis in Haifa, which is Boston's sister city. One day our group visited a high school. We met with a dozen or so high school students. We knew that in a year or two they would all be engaged in their compulsory military service in the IDF.

One of the members of our group asked the following question. She said, "We have just suffered a huge terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. We have no experience of such attacks, but sadly they happen often here. What advice can you give us?"

Without hesitating, and in a clear and confident voice, one of the kids responded. I don't know his name, and I don't know what he went on to do with his life in the dozen years since that meeting. But he is our third hero because of what he said.

He said just this: "Don't be afraid."

That's it. Here was a young man, a child, really, just 16 or 17 years old, telling this group of Americans, "Don't be afraid."

He didn't need to elaborate. We understood. If the terrorists could not instill terror, if they could not make us afraid, then we would prevail.

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Three heroes.

Mickey Marcus, American soldier helping Israel defeat its first enemies.

Yonatan Netanyahu, Israeli IDF officer rescuing Jews from murder by terrorists.

And our youngest hero, showing us the Israeli spirit that will prevail because it must.

Kayn y'hi ratzon. May it be true.

Let us say, amen.