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## THE 1972 MUNICH OLYMPICS MASSACRE

The worst tragedy in Olympics history took place on September 5 1972, when Palestinian terrorists attacked the Israeli team in the Munich Games village. The Israeli government retaliated with a top secret mission to kill everyone associated with the raid so that many more Palestinians were eventually killed than Israelis.

In 1972 the Olympics returned to Germany for the first time since 1936. The 1936 Games were dominated by Hitler's attempt to use the Games to show off the "superiority" of the Aryan race.

West Germans hoped that the 1972 Games would heal some of the racial wounds caused by Hitler. The 1972 Games were the largest then held.

On September 5 1972, with six days left in the Games, eight Arab terrorists slipped into the Olympic Village. They killed two Israeli athletes and took nine others as hostages. The terrorists demanded the release of 232 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, along with the release of two German terrorists, as well as their own safe passage out of West Germany.

The Israeli Government, headed by Prime minister Golda Meir, refused to give in to their demands. The West German government asked Egypt to mediate but it refused.

After a day of unsuccessful negotiations, the terrorists took their hostages to the military airport in Munich for a flight back to the Middle East. Poorly trained and poorly equipped West German sharpshooters opened fire. The terrorists fired back, as well as using a grenade to blow up the helicopter containing some of the athletes. In all, the nine hostages were killed, as were one West German police officer and five terrorists.

Three terrorists were captured. On October 29 a Lufthansa jet was hi-jacked by terrorists demanding that they be released. The Germans gave in and the terrorists were released.

But the immediate problem was what should be done about the rest of the Games? Over 80,000 people attended a memorial service the following morning in the Olympic Stadium.

Israel argued that the rest of the Games should be cancelled. However Avery Brundage, the American president of the International Olympics Committee, ordered that they go on. This

was highly controversial. One sporting journalist said that it was like having a dance at a German concentration camp.

The public Israeli military response was swift. Three days later an air strike was launched involving 75 aircraft, the largest such attack since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The fighter-bombers attacked guerrilla targets in Lebanon, killing 66 and leaving hundreds wounded.

But the Israeli Government decided that even more should be done to show that terrorism would not be tolerated.

The Munich Massacre gave rise to one of the most aggressive counter-terrorist campaigns ever devised. A top secret counter-terrorist committee was formed by the Israeli Cabinet: "Committee X".

Its intention was to ensure that every Palestinian involved in the Munich Massacre, either directly or indirectly, should be assassinated. No one would be taken alive; there would no trials.

The work was handled by the efficient Mossad intelligence agency. They would kill all they could find and terrorize the rest. Much of the work remains top secret.

Mossad created specific assassination teams. All the members had to resign from Mossad. They were organized and financed by Mossad but administratively separate from it, so that if anyone were caught there would no link embarrassing link back to the Israeli Government.

The teams were able to move effortlessly across the world on false passports, without the usual bureaucratic obstacles of authorizations to travel, paperwork, advice to local Israeli diplomatic stations of their arrival, and having to account for their use of funds. They did not leave a paper trail.

About 35 targets were selected, including the three terrorists released by West Germany. The targets were divided up among the assassination teams, who operated separately from each other.

The first person to be killed was Wael Zwaiter, a cousin of Yassir Arafat and organizer of PLO terrorism in Europe. He was shot in the lobby of his Rome apartment on October 16 1972. He died instantly having been hit by 18 bullets.

The next target died in a more colourful way. Mahmoud Mahshari, the co-ordinator of the Munich operation, was asked by a person posing as an Italian journalist for an interview. The interview was scheduled for December 8 1972. The previous day members of the assassination gained entry into his apartment and booby-trapped his telephone.

When the telephone rang for the appointed interview, Hamshiri answered it and identified himself. A silent signal was then sent down the line and the telephone blew up killing him instantly.

The same team in the next few months then killed four more terrorists. Of the three terrorists directly involved in the Munich Massacre, one died of natural causes and two were assassinated.

But not every assassination went well. In one incident, an assassination team, having killed their target, found their exit was blocked by a Russian KGB agent. They also killed him.

A still unexplained death took place in London in May 1974. An attractive woman, who was herself a freelance assassin, seduced one of the Israeli assassins to spend the night with her. She shot him during the night and escaped. The team had to dispose of his body secretly to avoid publicity.

The team then went looking for her and located her near Amsterdam on August 21 1974. They shot her. It is still not known who paid her to kill the Israeli assassin.

The biggest failure took place on July 21 1973. An assassination team thought they had located Ali Hassan Salameh (the primary architect of the Munich operation and the commander of Arafat's personal security squad) in Lillehammer, Norway.

They shot him. But it was the wrong person. The dead man was a person who looked like him: a Moroccan-born waiter named Ahmed Bouchiki who was not involved in Middle East politics.

Unaware of their fatal error, the team drove away to escape the country. But the Norwegian police captured six of them. They went on trial in a blaze of publicity (which alerted the other assassination teams to the work being done by their colleagues). They all received lenient treatment and all were released within two years.

Salameh was eventually killed in Beirut, Lebanon in 1979. He was blown up by a team using a booby-trapped car. He was the last one left on the original list.

Each assassination had cost an average of US\$350,000. This was one of the most cost effective – and least publicized – operations ever conducted by Israel.

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