1. Skyjack

*Interview with Leila Khaled*

In June 1970 U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers announced his “peace plan” for the Middle East, and it was quickly accepted by both Jordan and Egypt. The Marxist parties (PFLP and DPFLP) concluded that the two Arab states would take prompt action to crush the resistance movement. The Popular Front responded with multiple hijackings, beginning Sunday September 6. A $24 million Pan American jet was hijacked, flown to Cairo, and blown up to protest both the U.S. role in the Middle East and UAR acceptance of the Rogers plan. Two more jets were successfully hijacked that same day and flown to an impromptu “Revolution Airport” in the desert northeast of Amman; three days later a BOAC jet was forced to land in the same area, where PFLP commandos had dug trenches to defend themselves against Jordanian government intervention. More than four hundred airline passengers were held for varying durations, as the PFLP demanded release of imprisoned comrades held in various parts of Western Europe. Among those imprisoned was Leila Khaled, who was captured in an unsuccessful attempt to hijack an El Al jet on September 6. The following interview, released by Liberation News Service at that time, describes her previous successful hijacking and gives a vivid personal account of the motivations and politics of the hijackers.
Isn’t it something awful that I could see my home town again only when I hijacked a plane? But there it was—Haifa—away on the left just past the pilot’s head as I sat behind him looking out of the cockpit windows. As we came down to twelve thousand feet for the approach to Lydda airport the whole lovely coast of my country, occupied Palestine, which some people call “Israel,” came into sight.

It was a fine, clear day, but I had little time to enjoy the view because we were approaching the most exciting and dangerous point of our adventure. Although the pilot had so far done everything I told him, would he, somehow, land the plane at Lydda? Or would the Israelis be able to force us to land?

It had all begun two days earlier in Rome. This was my first visit to Europe and Rome is a wonderful city. I was very tired when I arrived, and I slept for ten hours solid.

Then the evening before the flight I walked through the city from the Borghese Gardens to the Fountain of Trevi. Of course, I threw the traditional coins in the fountain, which means, I hope, that I’ll see Rome again: but will the Italians let me in next time?

There was a woman singer in a cafe near the fountain and I just sat and listened for two hours. The only other things I did were to buy myself a bottle of French perfume and to confirm my booking for the flight next day to Athens at the TWA office.

I couldn’t eat dinner that night and it was three in the morning before I could get to sleep and when I awoke I had no appetite for breakfast either. I was hungry, but I’m accustomed to hunger because of my commando training and also because, when I was young, there were times when there wasn’t very much food at home.

In the morning—this was August 29—I had to do some shopping at a very chic shop on the Via Veneto. I bought some very big sunglasses, a leather shoulder bag and a large-brimmed hat which alone cost fifteen thousand lire. Wickedly expensive, I know, but this was all part of the uniform—I had to look like someone who usually traveled first class.

Back at the hotel I got dressed. I’m not very interested in clothes but it seemed a waste of money to have things burnt when we blew up the plane after landing so I put as little as possible into my suitcase. I put two dresses in my handbag and wore two trouser suits, one on top of the other. The lower one, with psychedelic flowers, was borrowed and I wanted to return it; the top one was in very smart white cotton, sleeveless, and I wore sandals.

Because flight 840 was late we had to wait an extra half hour in the lounge. I spotted the young man who was the other member of the “Che Guevara” commando unit. I didn’t know him and had only seen his picture. Apart from a secret sign of recognition we took no notice of each other.

This extra wait was an anxious time and two other things upset me before we got on the plane. I noticed an American lady with four young children who seemed very happy and excited about their trip. I then realized, with a shock, that something dreadful could happen to them if anything went wrong. I love children and I wanted to tell the lady not to travel on this flight. But when I thought of some of our Palestinian children, who had nothing in life, I felt a bit stronger and braver.

The second incident was in the bus going out to the plane. A man sat next to me and asked me where I was from, and I let him believe I was from Bolivia. Then he told me that he was a Greek returning to Athens after spending fifteen years in Chicago and that his widowed mother would be waiting at the airport.

This was another shock. I felt it particularly because we Palestinians know what it is to be away from one’s country and I too had a widowed mother waiting for me at home. He went on talking but I didn’t hear the rest of what he said.
My friend and I were in first class because that section is nearer the cockpit. But there were only five first-class passengers in all, so that the three cabin crew fussed over us a great deal, which was exactly what we did not want. Not long after take-off, the two of us seated ourselves in the front row nearest the cabin door. We both refused drinks before lunch—I don’t drink anyway—and then we both refused lunch, because we didn’t want to have trays on our laps hemming us in. But when the stewardess exclaimed at this, and so as not to be conspicuous, I ordered coffee and my friend a beer. He also asked for a pill, to suggest that he was feeling ill.

We didn’t get rid of the cabin crew that easily. Instead of lunch they brought us a huge trolley laden with fruits and cakes and, to our dismay, parked it in front of us to help ourselves, completely blocking the way to the cabin door. We had been ordered to take over the plane thirty minutes to an hour after take-off since the Rome-Athens flight takes only ninety minutes, and we were approaching the deadline. We didn’t want to ask the hostess to remove the trolley because that could have appeared suspicious. Finally, after what seemed an age, she took it away and another passenger, who had been using the lounge seat right next to the cabin door, also moved away.

The way was clear and we could get into the cabin without having to frighten anyone—that’s the one thing we wanted to avoid: frightened people can do foolish things.

I asked for a blanket and the hostess tucked it in around me. My friend gave me a strange look, wondering whether I was becoming afraid. To reassure him I took out my toilet case and combed my hair. Then I looked at my watch and showed him five fingers, signaling that in five minutes we would go into action—I was in charge of the operation. Underneath the blanket—this was why I wanted it—I took a pistol out of my shoulder bag and tucked it into the top of my pants. And then a grenade. I took out the safety pin.

Just as everything was ready, one of the hostesses carrying a tray came out of the cabin door; it opened outwards and she held it open with her elbow. We took this chance. My friend, holding his pistol and grenade, brushed across the front of the hostess and through the door. When the hostess saw the weapons she screamed, “Oh no,” and threw her tray down—that was the only violence we had in the plane during the whole journey.

As we went towards the cockpit my friend called out, “Don’t move. Now you have to listen to the orders of the new captain.” While he was speaking he heard the captain saying into his radio: “Two armed men have come into the cabin. This is a hijacking.”

My part in the actual takeover was to stand facing down the plane to control the passengers with my pistol and grenade. But when I stood up with the grenade in my hand and reached for my pistol, I felt the pistol slipping down my leg inside my trousers. I hadn’t eaten for a day and the waistband was loose.

It was such an anti-climax that I laughed. Instead of brandishing a pistol, there I was, bending over with my back to the passengers and fumbling for my weapon up the leg of my trousers, of two trousers actually. The captain swiveled round in his seat to see the new captain but all he could see of “him” was the top of a large, white, lady’s hat.

Having retrieved the wretched pistol I put it into my pocket, never to take it out again—too scaring and too much like Hollywood.

You can’t imagine the look of total astonishment on the face of the captain when I went into the cockpit and announced, “I’m the new captain.” Poor man, what did he see?—me, in my sleeveless suit, floppy hat and sandals. “I’m the new captain,” I said; “take this as a souvenir—it is the safety pin from this grenade,” and held it under his nose.
“It’s a free hand grenade now. If you don’t listen to my orders, I’ll use it, and the plane and everyone in it will be blown up.”

“What do you want?” the pilot asked.
“Proceed directly to Lydda airport.”
“Lydda?” the co-pilot asked. “Aren’t we going to Athens?”
“You understand English,” I replied.

We sat down in the two seats just behind the pilot. The grenade was in my left hand and it stayed there until we landed. My friend put his away but he kept his pistol out.

I asked the captain to give me his wireless headset and he was so flustered that he tried to put it on over my hat.

“Excuse my hat,” I said, and pushed it back. I had had a ribbon specially sewn on so that I could hang it round my neck: I very much wanted to save that hat.

I tried to raise Rome airport but there was no answer. I then turned to the flight engineer and asked, “How many fuel hours of flight do you have?” I knew the answer because I had read this off the fuel gauge. I was sure he would tell me a lie and he did: “Two hours,” he said.

“Liar. I know you have three and a half hours. It’s there on the fuel gauge. Why did you lie to me? The next time I ask you anything and you lie to me, I’ll break your neck.”

“Why are you so angry?” the captain asked.

“Because I don’t like liars,” I replied. I wasn’t really angry. I wanted to scare them a little so they would take orders. The engineer didn’t say a word for the rest of the flight.

The time was now about 15:20 hours.

The dials and switches and lights in a plane’s cockpit may seem bewildering but we had been thoroughly trained and I knew what the dials meant. I had a thorough knowledge of the Boeing 707.

Having put the crew in its place the next thing was to speak to the passengers on the intercom. Our message was:

Ladies and Gentlemen:
Your attention, please. Kindly fasten your seat belts.
This is your new captain speaking.

The Che Guevara Commando Unit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which has taken over command of this TWA flight, demands that all passengers on board adhere to the following instructions:
1. Remain seated and keep calm.
2. For your own safety, place your hands behind your head.
3. Make no move which would endanger the lives of other passengers on the plane.
4. We will consider all your demands, within the safe limits of our plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen, among you is a passenger responsible for the death and misery of a number of Palestinian men, women and children, on behalf of whom we are carrying out this operation to bring this assassin before a revolutionary Palestinian court.

The rest of you will be honorable guests of the heroic Palestinian Arab people in a hospitable, friendly country. Every one of you regardless of religion or nationality is guaranteed the freedom to go wherever he pleases as soon as the plane is safely landed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our destination is a friendly country, and friendly people will receive you.

Thank you for your cooperation. We wish you a happy journey.

The person we were after was General Rabin (the former Israeli chief of staff), who we knew had been booked on that flight. But he seemed to have changed plans at the last minute. I suppose prominent Israelis find it safer to travel on airlines other than El Al nowadays. Then I broadcast our message to the world:
The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine informs you that its Che Guevara Commando Unit is now in complete control of the Boeing plane belonging to Trans World Airlines, flight 840, on its way from Rome to Lydda airport in the Occupied Palestinian Arab territory.

Captain Shadia Abu-Ghazali, who has taken over command of this plane, and her colleagues request all those concerned to use the following call sign in their communication with the aircraft: POPULAR FRONT—FREE ARAB PALESTINE. And let it be clear that unless the above-mentioned call sign is used in communicating with the plane, we will not care to respond.

Thank you.

Shadia Abu-Ghazali was my code name. The original Shadia was a resistance fighter in PFLP. She was killed in October 1968 at the age of twenty-one.

After this I handed over our new route map to the captain. We did not follow the usual air traffic lane over Athens and Nicosia. Instead we went straight down the Greek coast, then southeast over Heraklion in Crete and eastward to Lydda. Not a very interesting flight because it was almost all over the sea at thirty-three thousand feet.

When the captain went on to the new course I noticed that he kept turning to port so as to go southwestward. He may have been trying to take it up to the American Wheelus airbase near Tripoli in Libya. But I was watching the compass and ordered him back on course. After that I told him exactly when to turn and on to what bearing number on the compass.

After fifteen minutes my friend reminded me that the passengers still had their hands above their heads. I looked into the cabin and so they did. I apologized for inconveniencing them and asked the hostess to serve them with whatever they wanted to eat and drink, champagne if they wanted it. Otherwise, throughout the flight we had no contact with the passengers or cabin crew.

We tried hard to get on to friendly terms with the three crew members but had no luck. We asked them if they wanted anything to eat or drink but they refused. We offered them our cigarettes but they refused those too. They didn’t ask a single question about us. From time to time the captain would turn round, look at me and shake his head unbelievingly. The only human contact was when the co-pilot, like a child in school, asked if he could go to the toilet.

The pilot kept glancing at the grenade in my left hand, so finally, to reassure him, I put my arm across his back and tapped him on the left shoulder with the grenade: “Listen—I’m accustomed to this thing. Don’t be afraid.” A little later I scratched my head with the grenade to show him just how familiar with it I was, but I doubt whether he was reassured.

15:55 hours. Compass bearing 140 degrees.

There were long, uneventful periods during this eventful flight that were punctuated only by the messages I broadcast to the countries we flew past or over—Italy, Greece, the UAR, Lebanon and Syria. These messages explained what we had done and appealed for support “for the just struggle of the Palestinian people,” and ended with the words, “Down with U.S. imperialism and Zionism. We will win.” The co-pilot looked at me angrily every time I mentioned America.

I also spoke, spontaneously, to the passengers over the intercom to explain our struggle. “We have hijacked this plane because we want to cut the roots that feed Israel. Don’t go to Israel because there is resistance on land and en route: tell this to your friends. We want to go back to our country and we can live with the Jews because we lived with them before.” We tried to explain things to the crew but they were an unreceptive audience.

16:10 hours. Compass bearing 112 degrees.
The exchange of messages I had with Cairo Airport, in Arabic, was amusing. They were flabbergasted when a woman's voice told them what had happened and where we were going. I first had to tell them that I wouldn't respond till they used our own call sign. Then, the breathless response came from Cairo something like this: "You Popular you Front you Free you Arab you Palestine! Why-are-you-going-to-Israel?" And I replied, "Yes, we are going to Israel—to liberate it!"

Soon after this, things became serious as we began our descent to Lydda. Of course, we had no intention of landing there—that possibility was the one thing that worried us. But we wanted to fly over our enemy's city just to show him we could do it.

"Descend to one-two-zero," I told the pilot, and the copilot chipped in, "You mean twelve thousand feet?" "You know what I mean."

So we began the long descent and out of the haze the coast of Palestine gradually grew clearer.

"What shall we do when we get to twelve thousand?" the pilot asked. "Let's have a round twice," I replied, and made a swinging gesture with my left hand—the pilot's eyes, as always, following the grenade; "we want to have a picnic over our land."

Needless to say, my exchanges with Lydda airport were not friendly. The controller was very excited and shouted at me angrily the whole time. Having switched to the Lydda wavelength, I first read a message in Arabic for our people in Occupied Palestine. I tried to speak to the airport tower in Arabic but they wouldn't reply. "TWA 840?" they kept calling, so I responded, "Shut up! This is Popular Front Free Arab Palestine. We will not respond unless you use this call sign. We are coming down. We are landing. Give us space."

I said this just to frighten them, because I don't think the Israelis wanted us to land any more than we wanted to land there. My words seemed to have had the desired effect because Lydda tower shouted back, "Don't come down, don't come down, or else we'll send Mirages to shoot you down."

And I told them: "Here is Free Arab Palestine. What can you do about it? I don't care for my life. This is our land. We want to die over our land. But you will be responsible for the lives of the crew and passengers." (While all this was going on at about twenty thousand feet, my friend held the intercom microphone near my mouth so that the passengers could hear the exchange, which couldn't have been very comforting for them.)

There were more threats of Mirages from the ground and when I glanced ahead there they were, two of them, just in front of us. We were still descending, but the captain said to me, "We can't descend any more. It's too dangerous with these Mirages in front." This, evidently, was how the Israelis were trying to prevent us from landing. The co-pilot then asked to speak to Lydda. He explained to them:

"We have to follow her orders and descend or else the aircraft will be blown up. Clear the air. And, don't keep calling TWA 840. This is Popular Front." Perhaps because of his words, the Mirages moved out a little, though they still stayed with us and we descended to twelve thousand. We then did three big turns over Lydda and Tel Aviv. We were seven minutes in all over Tel Aviv: enough to make our point. My final message to Lydda, just to keep them worrying, was, "Bye-bye for now, but we are coming back!"

17:12 hours. Compass bearing 350 degrees.
I gave the pilot a compass reading for a course due north and he suggested that we climb because we were using up too much fuel at twelve thousand feet. I told him to go up to twenty five thousand.

In a very few minutes Haifa was before us—the hump of Mount Carmel, the harbor below it and over to the right the
oil tanks and the cement factory with its long plume of white smoke. "This is my city," I told the crew. "Take a good look at it. This is where I was born."

From maps I had a rough idea of the area in which our house stood and I think I identified this area but the city slipped away beneath us much too quickly. I felt like asking the pilot to make a turn over my home town so that I could have a better look at it but we were really running low on fuel and every minute counted now.

Just that fleeting glimpse, and a few dim childhood memories are all that link me directly, personally, with my home in Palestine. I was born in April 1944, so I was just under four when my mother, with us eight children, left Haifa some time in March 1948.

That was how my family became "refugees." But no Palestinian is really a "refugee." We are displaced persons or evictees. For if we were refugees and had found refuge, we would not want to go back to what we had left. Because we didn't leave of our own free will, but were pushed out according to a deliberate Zionist plan, we want to go back, but haven't been allowed to. This determination to return makes us Palestinians unique among all the "refugees" of the world.

As the plane crossed the frontier between Israel and Lebanon, the co-pilot, looking rather worried, asked, "Are we going to Beirut?" "That is none of your business," I told him. "We don't have much fuel left, you know," he replied. "I know that, and I also know how to swim, should anything happen."

I, too, was worried about our fuel situation but I also was tremendously excited as we flew over the beautiful blue bay that lies beyond Ras Nakura. On the point opposite the Ras is Tyre, which is where we have lived since leaving Palestine. Our apartment is almost on the beach and I thought I could just about pick it out. Little did my mother know that one of her daughters was flying high above her head. I visited her on my last evening in Lebanon and even told her I would be home for dinner. I knew she would be anxious but I had to keep things secret. I had also left the usual farewell letter in case something happened.

I could see the waves breaking on the beach where I had learned to swim. That is how we passed our time. Tyre had no cinemas then and we had no money to go to them even if there had been any. Away to the right, at the head of this splendid bay is what looks like a town but is really a camp for Palestinian refugees, nine thousand in all. For twenty years such camps have been the new homeland of our people.

Crowded wasn't the word for it. But still, we were luckier than the others living in tents. During the winter storms my friends wouldn't come to school because their tents had been blown down. The small brother of one of my friends was washed away by a flood which tore through the camp.

The only regular cash coming in was a monthly payment of £100 Lebanese [$31.20] by my mother's uncle—which doesn't go far with fourteen people.

Also we had to register as refugees with the UN. We received rations from the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). But UNRWA itself says that it can't afford anything more than a bare subsistence diet of fifteen hundred calories a day.

But hunger one can learn to bear; what was unbearable was the humiliation of having to stand in line with our cans and sacks to collect our rations as "bakhshish." We had become beggars, just beggars, with our begging bowls in our hands, except that the alms came from the UN and not from individuals. In the photos UNRWA has of ration distribution you will see few adults in the queues. They can't bear to go, so they send the children, as was the case with us. When my sisters began working as school teachers in 1957, UNRWA cut our rations, which was a blow, but we felt happier for being less dependent.
The best thing UNRWA has done for the Palestinians is to provide them with education. I liked school very much, I think we all did, because it was the only place where we could show that we were still human beings and not just a number on a ration roll. I first went to an Anglican school in Tyre and then to an American missionary school in the neighboring town of Sidon on an UNRWA scholarship.

I won another scholarship to the American University of Beirut where I planned to become a pharmacist, which is a good progression for a girl in this part of the world. The scholarship was not sufficient to cover all the costs of living in Beirut and my family couldn’t help. So I could only stay a year at the University, and having to leave was the biggest disappointment I’ve faced so far.

I took a job as a teacher of English in Kuwait and did this for six years. I don’t particularly like teaching but I had to start earning in order to help the family. One of my brothers got his degree in engineering and is working in Abu Dhabi in the Arabian Gulf, and another brother, who graduated in business administration, is working in a bank, also in Abu Dhabi.

With all our contributions the family is comfortable once again. We can now afford to send one of my younger sisters to the university but—how ironical this is!—she’s more interested in becoming a fedayee (a Palestinian resistance fighter). One of my brothers and I are full-time fedayeen.

Many of our Lebanese friends ask my mother, “Do you really want to go back to Haifa after all these years?” And my mother answers, “Yes, I’d go tomorrow. It’s true we have had a hard time and now things have become easy: we have a pleasant apartment, enough to eat, funds for the children’s education and extras like TV. What is more, I’m a Lebanese from Tyre. So I’m not a stranger, but I’m at home. Lebanon is my country but it is not my place; my place is Haifa.”

And my friends ask me whether I want to return to a country I barely know, since I left Palestine as a small child. And my answer is, “Yes,” because I too have learned that while I am never a stranger in any Arab country, I can never feel at home.

I learned that I was something called a “refugee” when I was six or seven years old; I was quarreling with a neighbor’s child and she said to me, “You are a refugee so you shouldn’t shout at me.” How could I escape being aware of the Palestinian problem? My parents talked of their former life in Haifa, my friends lived in the unnatural conditions of the camp and we learned about Palestine in school.

By the time I was sixteen I was secretly a member of the Arab Nationalist Movement, believing in a liberated Palestine within a unified, socialist Arab world. My elder brothers and sisters had joined this party before me. We planned, we dreamed, we argued. I visited the West Bank, what was left of Palestine, and traveled all over it to get to know my country.

(17:25 hours. Compass bearing 070 degrees.)

It took June 1967, and the loss of all Palestine and the expulsion of another quarter million Palestinians to make me decide that I had to do something positive for the cause of liberation. This is the biggest defeat that the Israelis have brought on themselves by their military victories. They brought a whole new generation of Palestinians into the battle who believe only in the armed struggle against Israel.

And so I joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Last summer I did full commando training with the PFLP, after which I was selected and trained for this mission.

(17:28 hours. Compass bearing 118 degrees.)

The Israeli Mirages stayed with us until we crossed the Lebanese-Syrian frontier. I spoke to the new Damascus airport tower in Arabic and told them we were going to land there—I didn’t ask permission. He replied that we could land on the right runway but I told him we were going to land on
the nearer left runway because we were very short of fuel.

On the intercom I told the cabin crew to evacuate the passengers by the emergency exits as soon as the plane landed because it was going to be blown up. I asked the captain to switch off the engines as soon as we touched down, otherwise we would taxi too near the airport building. “I can’t do it,” he said. “Then I can do it,” I replied. I also told him to apply the brakes slowly, otherwise I might fall and the hand grenade would go off. In fact, he made a very good landing.

17:35 hours. Touchdown at Damascus.

As soon as we stopped rolling, I looked into the passenger cabin and called out, “Evacuate immediately.” At this moment the crew seemed alarmed and dashed past us into the plane. They were in their shirt sleeves and my friend shouted to them, “Take your jackets.” But they didn’t stop. I also called, “Thank you for your cooperation.”

“You’re most welcome,” came from the co-pilot.

In two minutes the plane was empty. I only saw the last four or five persons diving through the emergency exits and I told them, “Slowly, go slowly.” But they didn’t know who I was and didn’t listen.

I went down the length of the plane to make sure it was empty. My friend then placed his bombs in the cockpit. He dashed out and stood with me near an emergency exit and I threw two grenades into the first-class compartment. As soon as we threw them, we slid down the emergency chute. My friend landed on my head with a terrific bump and I felt as if my legs were broken. We picked ourselves up and ran for twenty meters and waited for the explosion. Nothing. It was agony to think that the job would only be half done.

Then my friend rushed back to the plane to reset the explosions. Because he is very tall he was able to pull himself up through another chute. I ran after him towards the plane. After a long minute in the plane, he slid out again and we ran back once more.

Still no explosion. Only two minutes later was there a big bang and the nose of the plane crumpled. My friend fired many shots into the wing of the plane to set the fuel tanks on fire but there was so little in them that they didn’t ignite.

So it was all over. “Thank God,” I said to myself. I felt very relaxed and very relieved and glad that no one had been hurt.

We started walking towards the airport building when a bus came along and picked up the passengers and us. We remained in the bus for half an hour while the Syrians cleared the airport building. I noticed my Greek friend and told him, “My friend and I did this.” He burst into tears, and to comfort him I told him I would ask the Syrian authorities to cable his mother so that she needn’t worry unnecessarily. We offered the passengers cigarettes and my friend gave the children sweets which they took cheerfully.

Since we had to wait, I said a few more things to the passengers to explain why we had hijacked the plane: “You may think we are criminals, but we are not. We are freedom fighters. The United States has supported Israel with Phantom planes and napalm and we have to make our protest felt by the American government. We were driven out twenty years ago and in 1967 Israel took the rest of our country and our homes. Tell others not to come to Israel as tourists. We are not against Jews, but only against Zionists.”

After I had finished speaking, a lady, who said she was from California, asked me whether I had learned my English “in America or in England.” “In my country,” I said. “We are not as ignorant as the Zionists say we are.”

I would have liked to have seen the pilot again to ask him whether we had done a good job on the flight, to talk to him about Palestine and to invite him to visit us in Jordan. But this wasn’t allowed. I only saw one of the pursers, who told me that one lady had been injured getting out. I asked him to give her our apologies.
I got engaged four months ago to another resistance fighter, but who knows when we will be able to get married. One question remains: will I have to hijack another plane to see my home town again . . . ?

Interviewer: G. H. Jansen

2. Diary of a Resistance Fighter

This unusual document is the battlefield diary of a PFLP resistance fighter, covering roughly the period from King Hussein’s declaration of martial law (September 17) to the cease-fire negotiated between the government and the guerrillas on September 25. It describes the battle in the area of Hussein refugee camp, on the northern edge of Amman, where sixty thousand people live in a tangle of alleyways and small tin-roofed shacks. The worst casualties in the fighting were in the camps, where thirst and starvation exacted an equal toll to napalm. The identity and fate of the diarist (known only by his code-name, “Bassem”) are unknown. The journal was first published in al-Hadaf, the Popular Front newspaper, then released on November 12 by Liberation News Service through its Amman correspondents, George Cavalletto and Sheila Ryan, who provided the notes.

Wednesday, September 16

Everybody is expecting the onslaught of the storm.
I heard most of the Arab radio stations saying that the silence in Amman is the tense quiet before the storm. But I have been telling my friends all day that I am not expecting anything.