

# TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

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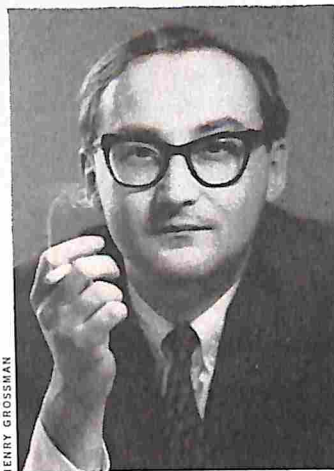
## A letter from the PUBLISHER

*Henry Luce III*

IN the issue of Feb. 28, 1969, TIME's Essay observed that the growing incidence of terrorist attacks on airliners, ships, and individuals and institutions of all kinds suggested nothing so much as the Dark Ages, "when the only safe haven was the castle, with its great moat, drawbridge and armed men glaring from the turrets." That age of world disorder never seemed closer than last week during the Middle East hijackings, when a small band of fanatics terrorized hundreds of people, blew up four planes and held the world at bay.

For its cover story on the incredible week of piracy and peril, TIME mobilized dozens of staffers in the U.S. and abroad. In New York, the main story was written by William Doerner, researched by Sara Medina and edited by David Tinnin. They drew on reports from Washington, Bonn, Geneva, Jerusalem and other cities, where TIME correspondents detailed the incidents as well as the frustrating inability of modern power and diplomacy to cope with the hijackers.

The great drama, of course, was played out on the dusty plain northeast of Amman, and that was where Beirut Bureau Chief Gavin Scott spent much of the week. Scott made several visits to Dawson's Field, the desert flat that the hijackers were using as their "revolution airstrip." "It was a fantastic sight to see the three jets shimmering against a backdrop of endless sand," he reported. The Palestinian commandos themselves were in a state of near hysteria. "There was chaos on our arrival. Our photographer was relieved of his film by a Jeep-load of grisly characters bristling with Soviet weapons. Everybody was ordered out of



HENRY GROSSMAN

GAVIN SCOTT

the cars, then everybody back in. A young guerrilla who was acting as the information officer shrieked at us: 'No pictures! No photographs! You will be disciplined!'"

The situation was hardly more stable in Amman, where Palestinian commandos and Jordanian troops were battling in the streets. Stray mortar, small-arms and machine-gun fire pummeled the Jordan Intercontinental Hotel, which functioned as a journalists' headquarters in the capital. Scott, an old hand in Amman, knew all the survival rules. "The bathtub is the safest place to bed down for the night," he says. "But when the mortars start, the corridor is recommended." Visitors, he adds, are invariably "amazed at the hotel's capacity to absorb fire during the night and pick up next morning as if nothing had happened. They just sweep up the plaster and glass, and break out the cheese sandwiches."

At times it seemed as if the hotel might go the way of the jets on Dawson's Field. But it was still standing at week's end, when the last hostages to be released arrived in Amman and began telling Scott and other newsmen the tales of their long confinement under commando guns and the searing sun.

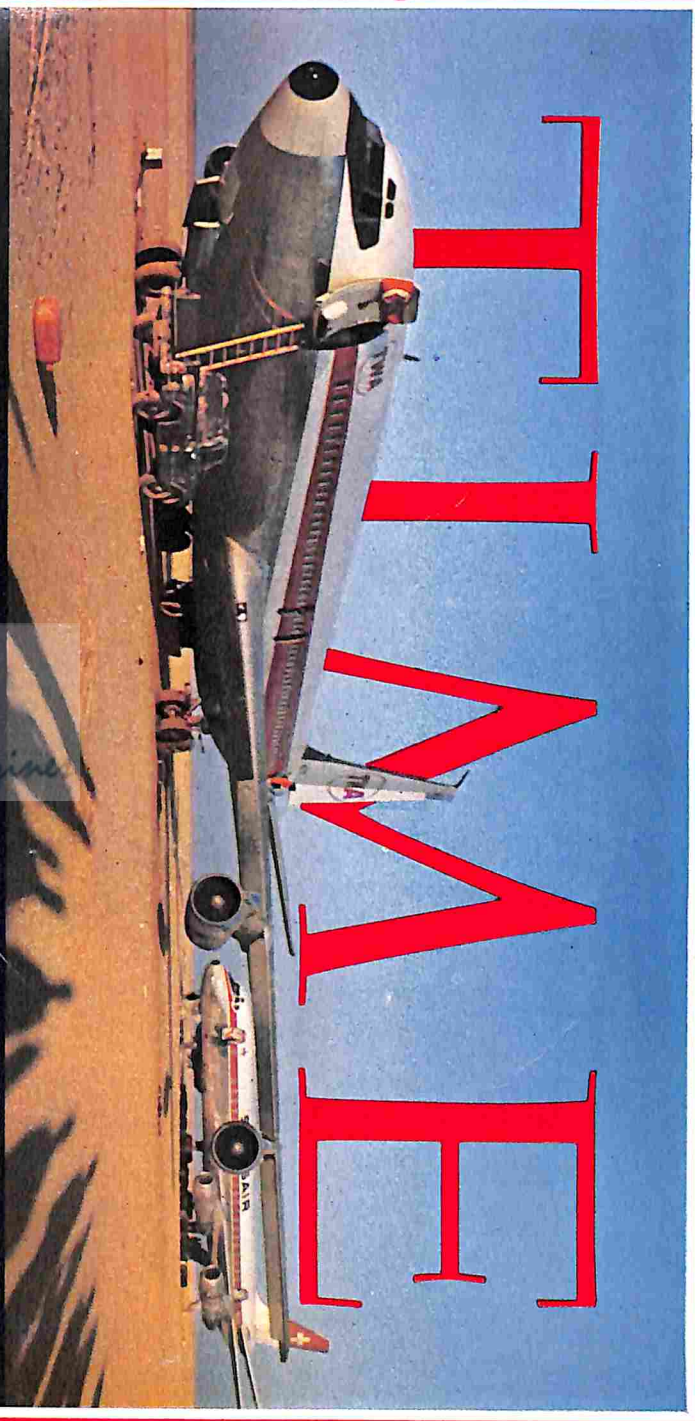
**The Cover:** Photo montage. From the top: jetliners at desert airstrip (by Nik Wheeler); commando press conference (Wheeler); burning 747 at Cairo (Rachad el Koussy for NBC News).

## INDEX

Cover Story . . . . . 18    Essay . . . . . 66

Art . . . . . 76	Letters . . . . . 4	People . . . . . 41
Behavior . . . . . 51	Medicine . . . . . 57	Press . . . . . 89
Books . . . . . 101	Milestones . . . . . 98	Religion . . . . . 61
Business . . . . . 91	Modern Living . . . . . 84	Sport . . . . . 75
Cinema . . . . . 100	Music . . . . . 68	Television . . . . . 43
Education . . . . . 65	Nation . . . . . 12	World . . . . . 18





# Pirates in the Sky



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