The Lufthansa Operation 1972 | Black September Frees the Three Munich Fedayeen from German Prison



On 29 October 1972, less than two months after the Munich operation, the **“Black September”** organisation, linked to Fatah, hijacked a **Lufthansa** plane (Flight 615) after it took off from Beirut for West Germany, to force the German government to release the three fedayeen captured wounded in Munich. The operation succeeded without anyone being killed: Germany released the three, and they were flown to Libya. [1][2]

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At a glance

Item	Details
Date	29 October 1972
Plane	Lufthansa (West Germany), Flight 615
Route	Beirut to West Germany
Group	The “Black September” organisation, linked to Fatah
Aim	The release of the three Munich fedayeen held in Germany
Prisoners freed	Jamal Khalil al-Jeshi, Muhammad al-Safadi and Adnan Abd al-Ghani al-Jeshi
Outcome	Germany released the three, and the plane headed for Libya
Casualties	None

[1][2]

Background: Munich and the Fürstenfeldbruck ambush

Before dawn on 5 September 1972 a group of eight Black September fedayeen entered the Olympic Village in Munich and seized members of the Israeli sports delegation, in an operation they named “Iqrit and Kafr Bir’im,” after two Galilee villages whose people were expelled in 1948. They demanded the release of some 236 prisoners from the occupation’s jails, as well as the Germans Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader and the Japanese Kozo Okamoto. [1][2][3]

After negotiations failed the fedayeen agreed to move with the hostages to an airport, on the understanding that they would be flown to Cairo, but the two helicopters landed at the NATO military base of Fürstenfeldbruck, where German police had laid an ambush with snipers. A battle of more than an hour followed in which all the Israeli athletes held hostage were killed, along with a German policeman and five fedayeen. The German authorities later officially admitted responsibility for laying the ambush and firing on the hostages and fedayeen, after first trying to blame the fedayeen. [1][2]

Three fedayeen were captured wounded: **Jamal Khalil al-Jeshi** and **Muhammad al-Safadi**, both 22 and from Shatila camp, and **Adnan Abd al-Ghani al-Jeshi**, aged 20. [1][2]

The hijacking and the release of the prisoners

On 29 October 1972 Black September fedayeen hijacked Lufthansa Flight 615 from Beirut to West Germany and demanded the release of their three comrades in exchange for the plane and its crew. The German government gave in and handed over the three fedayeen; the plane's crew were freed, and the plane headed for Libya. [1][3][2]

So the three fedayeen left the German prison only weeks after their capture, in one of the most successful prisoner-release operations in the history of fedayeen action, without a single death. [3]

The fate of the three

The release was not the end. After Munich the occupation launched a campaign of assassinations in Europe and around the world that reached Palestinian leaders and intellectuals, among them Wael Zuaiter and Mahmoud Hamshari. After his release **Adnan al-Jeshi** settled in the UAE, working for an oil company in Sharjah, and died there on 4 April 1984; his family says he was poisoned by Mossad, that they received threats and that an autopsy was refused, and he was buried in Sharjah. [3][2]

Between the accounts

Munich death toll: Al-Awda gives 9 athletes killed at the airfield, while Arabi Post gives 11 Israelis killed in all, including those killed in the first phase inside the Olympic Village. [2][3]

Prisoners demanded at Munich: about 236 according to Abu Daoud, and 327 in a list attached to a later English-language statement. [1]

Details of the hijacking: the available Arab sources do not give the hijackers' names or number, the number of passengers, or the plane's stops before it reached Libya. Western accounts speak of German "collusion" in the operation to rid itself of the burden of the three prisoners, for which we found no Arab source.

Timeline

Date	Event
5 September 1972	The "Iqrit and Kafr Bir'im" operation in the Munich Olympic Village [1]
5–6 September 1972	The Fürstenfeldbruck ambush; three fedayeen captured [1]
29 October 1972	Lufthansa plane hijacked and the three released [1]
4 April 1984	Adnan al-Jeshi dies in Sharjah [2]

Frequently asked questions about the Lufthansa operation

What was the 1972 Lufthansa operation?

Black September's hijacking of a Lufthansa plane on 29 October 1972 to force Germany to release the three Munich fedayeen. [1]

Who were the fedayeen freed?

Jamal Khalil al-Jeshi, Muhammad al-Safadi and Adnan Abd al-Ghani al-Jeshi. [1][2]

Was anyone killed in the operation?

No: Germany released the three and the plane's crew were freed. [3]

Where were the freed men taken?

To Libya. [1]

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Sources and references

1. Mona Awadallah, "The Munich operation (September 1972)," Arabica Encyclopedia, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, updated 29 January 2026 (in Arabic).
2. Mahmoud Kallam, "The Munich operation 1972: the facts, the people and the details of the deception," Al-Awda News Network (in Arabic).
3. Arabi Post, "'The Munich operation 1972': when Palestinian fedayeen seized an Israeli sports delegation at the Olympics," 10 November 2022 (in Arabic).