

One Day in September, by Simon Reeve. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), pp. 304. Reviewed by Bill Mallon.

The downtown Holiday Inn in Durham no longer exists, but I stayed there on Monday night, 4 September 1972. The next morning I would move into my dormitory at Duke University, and register for classes in preparation for my senior year in college. But that Tuesday morning I turned on the television to see Jim McKay, announcing in one of those hideous yellow ABC blazers, as he told how a group of Israeli Olympians were taken hostage at the Munich Olympics. We all know the end result.



Most likely all of us with an interest in the Olympic Games and Movement, which probably includes all of the readers of this journal, will remember where they were on that fateful September morning. Now Simon Reeve has provided us with a story of that one day in September, but also with much more than that. His new book, ***One Day in September***, has been the basis for a made-for-television documentary for HBO Television (Home Box Office) in the United States. I have not seen the movie but I doubt it could be more interesting than the book.

Reeve begins the book with the events surrounding the Black September group entering the Israeli apartments in the Olympic Village. He goes on to describe the events of 5 September, both within the Olympic Village and at Fürstenfeldbruck airport, where the Israelis athletes and coaches, and several terrorists, met their end. In this regard, the book is solid, and the descriptions of the events seem complete. But where have I seen this before?

The cover answers the question. The cover of this book shows the well-known picture of the lone Arab terrorist on the balcony of the apartments at 31 Connollystraße. It is also on the cover of another book on the same subject, ***The Blood of Israel***, by Serge Groussard, Published in 1975, I had first read Groussard's book almost 20 years ago, but after reading ***One Day in September***, I knew I had to take another look at his work, and compare the two efforts. It is puzzling why Reeve chose precisely the same cover photo, although it is so well-known that perhaps he considered it the only possible choice.

The books are both very good, but also very different. Reeve's book is shorter

(304 vs. 464 pages), but actually covers more ground and more time. I learned a lot from Reeve's work concerning the genesis of the Israeli-Palestine conflicts. I knew that the two groups of people "did not like each other" (the words do not seem strong enough), but I never really knew why. Reeve's second chapter "Black September," answered the question for me. He examines in detail how the problem began, reaching back as far as King David in 1000 B.C.E. He brings it up to September 1970 and the Jordan-Palestinian battles in that month, labeled by the Palestinians as Black September. Within the next year, Palestine organized a new group to launch terrorist attacks and perform assassinations. In memory of their fallen comrades, they called themselves Black September.

Though one would think Reeve has written a book about the Olympics, it is only peripherally so. His book is more one of political science. In fact, his descriptions of the events of 5 September are brief, and not nearly as good as Groussard's earlier work. If what you are seeking is detail of what actually happened at 31 Connollystraße and Fürstenfeldbruck, then Groussard's book is more complete, more detailed, and seems like a better investigation. Reeve seems to skim over many of the facts and events of the day. Most of the faults he finds with the German authorities - not knowing the number of hostages, not having enough sharpshooters, not having infrared sights on the guns at the airport - these issues were raised and discussed more thoroughly by Groussard. And Groussard gives much better biographies of the fallen Israeli athletes. Twenty years later, I still remember the chilling way he began each description, "There was Zeev Friedman ..."

But if these are the weaknesses in Reeve's book, it has many strengths. In addition to the description of the origins of the political conflicts that affect the Middle East, he goes into far more detail about what happened after Munich. I have not heard of 'Operation Wrath of God,' but after reading Reeve's book, will never forget it. It was the policy instituted by the Israeli government after the Munich massacres in which they authorized Israeli Mossad agents to seek out those responsible and administer justice using whatever means necessary.

Reeve spends several chapters on 'Operation Wrath of God' and describes the revenge taken in great detail, but none more so than that on one of the leaders of the Black September movement, Ali Hassan Salameh, the Red Prince. Eventually all but one Palestinian involved with the Munich massacres was sanctioned by the Israeli death squad. And it did not end there.

The Red Prince did not go easily, and it was necessary to form another policy, 'Operation Spring of Youth,' in an effort to find him. This apparently succeeded in July 1973 when the man thought to be Salameh was gunned down in Lillehammer, 21 years before that small Norwegian city would host a sublime Winter Olympics. The only problem was that the Israelis had actually killed Ahmed Bouchiki, a Moroccan waiter who was returning from the movies with his pregnant wife, Turil. It blew the cover of the Israeli agents. And the Israeli government did not apologize to Bouchiki's widow. And so it went on. Death after death, revenge after revenge, and to what end?

Reeve's book finishes with several chapters on the efforts of the families of the Israeli victims attempting to find out what actually happened by examining the files of the German government. For years, they were given the run-around, told that there were no files, or that they had been given everything there was, until finally, a lawsuit

was brought, and it was necessary to open the files. And there were 400. Not 400 files, but 400 boxes of files. Surely the German government did not want these examined.

Unfortunately, at this point, Reeve's book leaves us hanging a bit. The files are only now beginning to be examined, and he does not include any significant detail of what is contained therein. Ideally, the contents of these files will someday shed light on what happened that day in September. It will likely be left to a graduate student or some other dedicated researcher to plow through these boxes and tell the whole story.

Reeve has not done this, but neither has he told a poor story. It has weaknesses, and specifically it pales in comparison to Groussurd in describing the minute-by-minute events of 5 September 1972. But it has great strengths, and one will certainly learn a lot by reading it. But after reading it, I could only ponder why the Israelis and the Palestinians, and people in general, cannot get along better. Why do so many good people have to die and for what reason? And I thought of the words of Lord Killanin when he closed the Lake Placid Olympic Winter Games in 1980, "Ladies and gentlemen. I feel these Games have proved that we do something to contribute to the mutual understanding of the world, what we have in common and not what our differences are. If we can all come together it will be for a better world and we shall avoid the holocaust which may well be upon us if we are not careful."