



KATI MARTON

A DEATH IN

JERUSALEM

YITZHAK RABIN WAS ASSASSINATED IN 1995...
JEWISH TERRORISM BEGAN MORE THAN 50 YEARS EARLIER

A Death in Jerusalem

ALSO BY KATI MARTON

*An American Woman
Wallenberg
The Polk Conspiracy*

**A
DEATH
IN
JERUSALEM**

KATI MARTON



ARCADE PUBLISHING • NEW YORK

For my daughter Elizabeth Jennings

For my son Christopher Jennings

And for my mother and father,

Ilona and Endre Marton

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Introduction to the Arcade Edition

WHEN *A Death in Jerusalem* WAS PUBLISHED IN A HARDCOVER EDITION a year ago, I had no way to predict how tragically prophetic this story of the origins of Jewish extremism would become. But on Saturday, November 4, 1995, forty-seven years after the assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, Jewish zealot's gunfire again ripped through the body of a man of peace. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had just finished addressing a rally in Tel Aviv. The seventy-three-year-old Rabin had exhorted his countrymen to follow him down the path of peace. "There are enemies of the peace process, and they try to hurt us," Rabin told his rapt audience. "But violence undermines democracy and must be denounced and isolated."

Moments later, a slight, dark figure closed in on the prime minister. Again the gunshots rang out. Again a man lay bleeding on a public square, and the flow could not be stanchied. Again God's name was invoked by the killer. "I did this to stop the peace process," the assassin proclaimed. "We need to be coldhearted.... When you kill in war, it is an act that is allowed." Count Bernadotte's assassin might have chosen the same phrases to justify their crime forty-seven years ago. It would soon be apparent that Rabin's killer, like Bernadotte's, had more than divine inspiration supporting him. In the days to come the circle of conspirators widened to include more than half a dozen other members of the militant cell.

Like Count Folke Bernadotte's assassination, Rabin's murder was an impersonal crime, meant not so much to snuff out a life as to stop the peace process in its tracks. As in 1948, a struggle for the soul of Israel was at stake. Would the country be the province of absolutists, prepared for any act, no matter how violent, to preserve biblical Israel? Or would Israel's future be as a secular, pragmatic, democratic member of the family of nations? Now, as then, the gunman was part of an underground movement of zealots for whom Eretz Israel is God-given land, nonnegotiable.

For Amir and his fellow conspirators, Yitzhak Rabin was a traitor to Zion's cause. Rabin was prepared to trade land for peace. Amir, like Baruch Goldstein, who in 1994 gunned down Arab worshipers in the Hebron mosque, was a proponent of a messianic Judaism. Goldstein and Amir's spiritual roots converge with those who ambushed Bernadotte, the first United Nations Middle East peacemaker. Theirs is a righteous militancy that abides no debate. Amir, like Bernadotte's assassin, claims the Bible and the Torah as his manuals for nation building. Peace treaties hammered out by shuttle diplomats around internationally sponsored negotiating tables are the work of a *moser*, a betrayer of Jews. "A Jew who hands over Jewish land or wealth to an alien people," Rabbi Abraham Hecht, an Orthodox rabbi from New York, intoned during the last summer of Rabin's life, "is guilty of a sin worthy of the death penalty."

Yitzhak Rabin's willingness to make pragmatic choices for Israel's future—ceding ever more autonomy to the Palestinians, for the sake of peace—was betrayal in the zealots' eyes. Like Bernadotte's assassins, Amir and his conspirators were fanatics with a good aim. All had been trained in the military and then practiced their deadly craft in small, clandestine cells, blessed by rabbis who fueled their zeal.

In 1948, unlike today, Israel was a frail and very young state. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was reluctant to tear at its fabric by energetically pursuing the mediator's killers. Within days of the

crime, Ben Gurion knew who had hatched the conspiracy to kill Bernadotte. Putting the survival of his country ahead of punishing the killers, he struck a deal with them. Rejoin Israeli society, lead productive lives, and you may live as free men among us. The unwritten contract was respected by both sides. The killers kept their end, the prime minister his.

It is different today. Israel, though grief-stricken, is strong. The state today has the self-confidence to exact a fitting punishment for this crime. What is more, and in striking contrast to Bernadotte's assassination, Amir's bullets seem not to have shattered a peace process now too solidly entrenched. On the contrary, the assassination may have accelerated the process. On the first day following the end of the country's official mourning, acting prime minister Shimon Peres presided over the disengagement of Israeli troops from the town of Jenin, the northernmost Palestinian city in the West Bank. By day's end, Palestinian police were in full control of the city. But the deep wounds that the assassin inflicted on Israel's collective psyche—a Jew capable of killing a fellow Jew in cold blood—will take far longer to heal.

A Death in Jerusalem traces the trajectory from the fiery rhetoric of early Zionist extremists Vladimir Jabotinsky and Abraham Stern (and by extension their spiritual heirs, Rabbi Meir Kahane and the militant rabbis who fueled Amir's rage) to the gunfire that felled both Folke Bernadotte and Yitzhak Rabin. The distance between rhetoric and gunfire is much shorter in a land soaked in the blood of the martyrs and villains of the world's three great religions than it is elsewhere. Yigal Amir, like Bernadotte's assassins in *A Death in Jerusalem*, acted with the calm of those convinced they are saving their people and land from the enemy. With the knowledge that God stands directly behind them, the assassins kill with impunity. In common with his deadly predecessors, Yigal Amir was ready to give his life for the cause of Eretz Israel. It is this willingness that makes fanatics on both sides of the Middle East divide the most dangerous barrier to peace in the most dangerous region of the world.

Kati Marton

November 15, 1995

New York City

Introduction to the Original Edition

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1994, A BEARDED, UNIFORMED JEWISH SETTLER named Baruch Goldstein armed with an automatic rifle, mowed down twenty-nine Muslim worshipers as they knelt in prayer at a Hebron mosque, the ancient Cave of the Patriarchs. The site of the massacre struck many with its bitter irony, for this cave is the one place on earth where both Jews and Muslims pray in the same building. Few places are so freighted with biblical and Koranic associations as the Cave of the Patriarchs, the burial site of Abraham and members of his family, sacred to both faiths.

By this mass killing on such holy ground, Baruch Goldstein intended to derail the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, begun on September 13, 1993, over a handshake on the White House lawn. That handshake between Yitzhak Rabin of Israel and Yasir Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization had offered remarkable hope that perhaps a way might be found to break the habits of hate that have paralyzed the Middle East for half a century.

Even as Rabin and Arafat took their tentative steps toward peace, powerful forces on both sides of the conflict fanned the flames of fanaticism in an effort to prevent progress. The fears held by many observers, that passion would once again overcome reason, and that another vicious cycle of terror and retribution would begin, were well founded.

The gunman, Baruch Goldstein, originally from Brooklyn, was only the most recent advocate of a brand of Jewish radicalism that opposes any compromise with the Palestinians. He was a follower of Rabbi Meir Kahane, a fiery zealot assassinated in Manhattan in 1991. But Kahane and Goldstein's ideological roots reach even farther back, to the charismatic and controversial figure of Vladimir Jabotinsky. A Russian-born writer and philosopher, Jabotinsky advocated a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River: Israel restored to its biblical proportions. Rabbi Kahane was first exposed to Jabotinsky's muscular Zionism as a member of his youth movement, Betar. But Kahane and his disciple Goldstein carried Jabotinsky's cry for Jewish rebirth to violent extremes that would have repelled their spiritual mentor.

Heavily armed settlers like Goldstein, clinging to settlements in the parched hills above Hebron, are not a new phenomenon in the life of the young state. Violence-prone zealots with the Bible and, on occasion, Jabotinsky's admonitions as their justification, have resorted to gunfire to block efforts at peace before. This is the story of the first attempt at reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, nearly fifty years ago. That effort also ended in bloodshed and the death of the mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte. Then, too, the gunmen were former disciples of Vladimir Jabotinsky. Their crime paid off: the 1948 mediation was derailed. Count Bernadotte's failed mediation and violent death is a prophetic tale.

* * *

Like Baruch Goldstein, zealots on both sides of the struggle can take a large measure of credit for the fact that peace in the Middle East has eluded half a century of effort by mediators ranging from Count Folke Bernadotte to Ralph Bunche, Henry Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, James Baker, and Warren Christopher. The peacemakers keep colliding with those for whom land is not negotiable. *Realpolitik* does not enter into the thinking of people whose point of reference is Abraham's biblical promise to the Hebrews that their land, Eretz Israel, shall stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates. For them, the

Golan Heights and the West Bank are not just so many settlements, but part of their divinely fixed patrimony. And Palestinian extremists possessed of an equally fierce attachment to the same sliver of land have vowed to destroy any agreement that denies them any part of Palestine.

The first formal attempt to mediate the dispute began in the late spring of 1948 and was resolved in blood four months later. Jewish zealots gunned down a Swedish nobleman sent to the region by the United Nations to impose a peace neither side wanted. The assassins' motives were pure: to save Jerusalem, to save their vision of Israel. The four terrorists who ambushed Count Bernadotte—and those who dispatched them to do the deed—hated what the mediator stood for: the outside world encroaching on their bitterly earned independence. In their eyes Bernadotte threatened Israel's survival. Nor did they trust their own nation's leaders to remain true to the Zionist vision.

Bernadotte's assassins trusted no one but themselves. The Holocaust had taught them the lesson of self-reliance in a ruthless world. They believed they alone were fit to determine their country's future. Israel's leaders, the fabled pioneers revered by so many other Jews, were dismissed by Count Bernadotte's killers as cowards and compromisers, because of their apparent willingness to negotiate.

Thus, Bernadotte's assassination is also the story of the near destruction of a fragile new state, not only by the Arab armies massed on its borders, but also from a fratricidal conflict within her own borders. Jews struggled against Jews in a bitter contest for control of the future of their own country. Zionist maximalists insisted on an Israel of biblical proportions no matter what the cost. They saw their enemies such as internationally respected leaders as David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, who were willing to trim their dreams for their country to accommodate reality.

In 1994, as in 1948, Israel was threatened by clashing visions of the state being forged. Political and religious wounds were reopened as Israel turned over authority to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank—which many Israelis still call Judea and Samaria, their biblical names. Still engaged in the ongoing strife was the man who dispatched the death squad to ambush Bernadotte—Yitzhak Shamir. In April of 1994, Shamir urged Israeli soldiers to “disobey any command to remove Jews ‘from the homeland’ [the West Bank] because that would be equivalent to an order to kill his parents.”

Bernadotte's assassins and Shamir were members of Lehi, the Hebrew acronym for Fighters for the Freedom of Israel. More commonly known as the Stern Gang, after Avraham Stern, who founded the movement during the dark, wartime year of 1940, the underground army never numbered more than a few hundred. An independent Israel, free of any foreign presence, with Jerusalem as its sacred capital was Stern and Lehi's goal. Lehi's method for achieving this dream was the traditional weapon of the powerless: individual terrorism, later to become, ironically, the hallmark of Israel's greatest enemy, the PLO. Obsessed by strength and independence, and trying to escape the Holocaust's shadow, Bernadotte's killers hoped to assert the victory of the Warrior Jew over the Victim Jew.

For the fledgling United Nations, Bernadotte's mediation between Arabs and Jews was its first crucible. The world body had been set up for the explicit purpose of peacefully resolving such conflicts among nations. A member of the Swedish royal family with a background as a humanitarian activist, Count Bernadotte had been chosen by the Security Council to mediate the world's most dangerously inflamed dispute. Bernadotte's mediation was stymied by more than just the extremist refusal to negotiate the ownership of land they deemed nonnegotiable. His mission was seriously handicapped by a lack of real support from the United Nations' member states. In the 1990s the world body falters under the weight of a similar burden as its peacemakers and peacekeepers thread the

way among ancient tribal enmities from the Middle East to Bosnia.

Recently, United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali offered an insight into why Folke Bernadotte failed. Though not referring specifically to the Bernadotte Mission, the United Nations' first attempt at mediation and peacemaking, Boutros-Ghali might have been doing so. "Peacekeeping by itself cannot provide a permanent solution to a conflict. Only political negotiation can do that. . . . Peacekeeping success requires the cooperation of the parties, a clear and practicable mandate, the continuing support of the Security Council and adequate financial arrangements." Of the Secretary General's four minimum requirements for peacekeeping, Bernadotte could not count on a single one. What he had was a mandate from the General Assembly that stated, among other things, that he was "to take such measures as were necessary for the security and welfare of the population and promote a peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine."

Drawn to the little-known and in many ways baffling story of Folke Bernadotte through my earlier work on his countryman Raoul Wallenberg, I found a vastly more complex tale than I had anticipated. In contrast to the morality tale pitting Adolf Eichmann's supreme evil against Wallenberg's luminous humanity, the story of Folke Bernadotte's ill-fated mediation and assassination defies the categories of absolutes. The lines between good and evil are often blurred in this chapter of Israel's history.

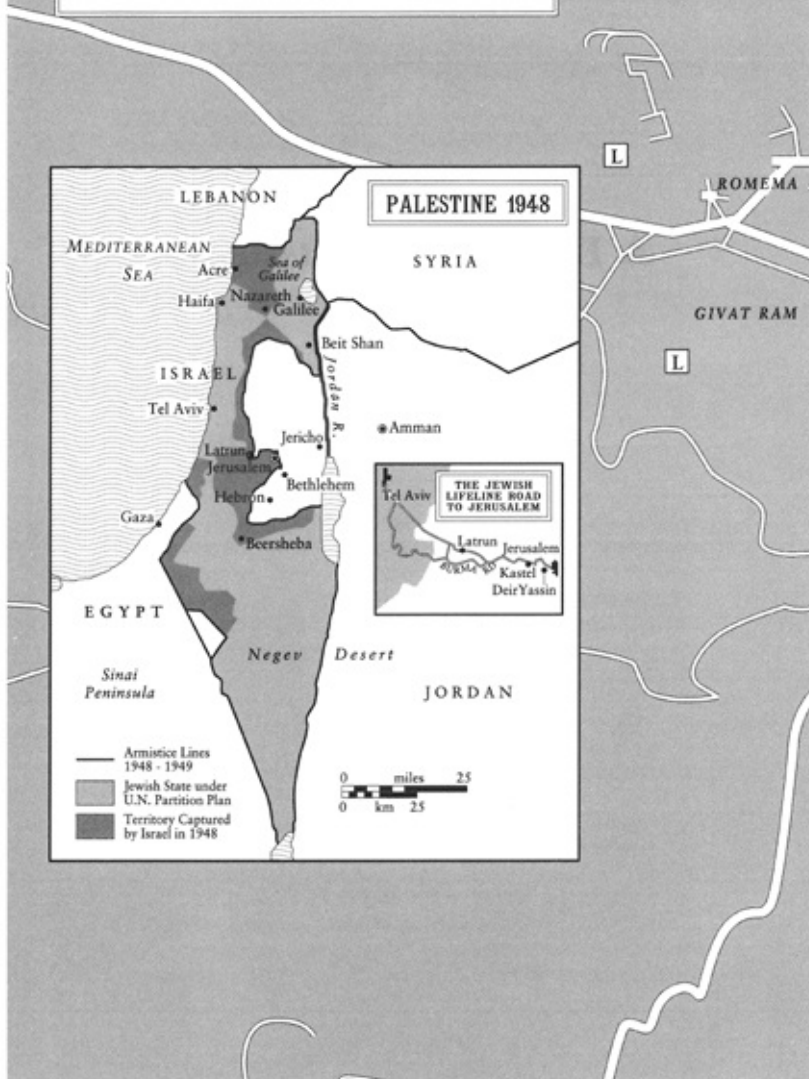
Reconstructing a decades-old murder at the intersection of diverse cultures and languages was made even more difficult because of the elusiveness of the man behind the crime. Until the recent publication of his memoirs, which obscure more than they illuminate about him, there was not a single English or Hebrew biography of the man who served as Israeli prime minister for longer than the country's revered patriarch, David Ben-Gurion. Yitzhak Shamir has good reason to shun the historian's scrutiny.

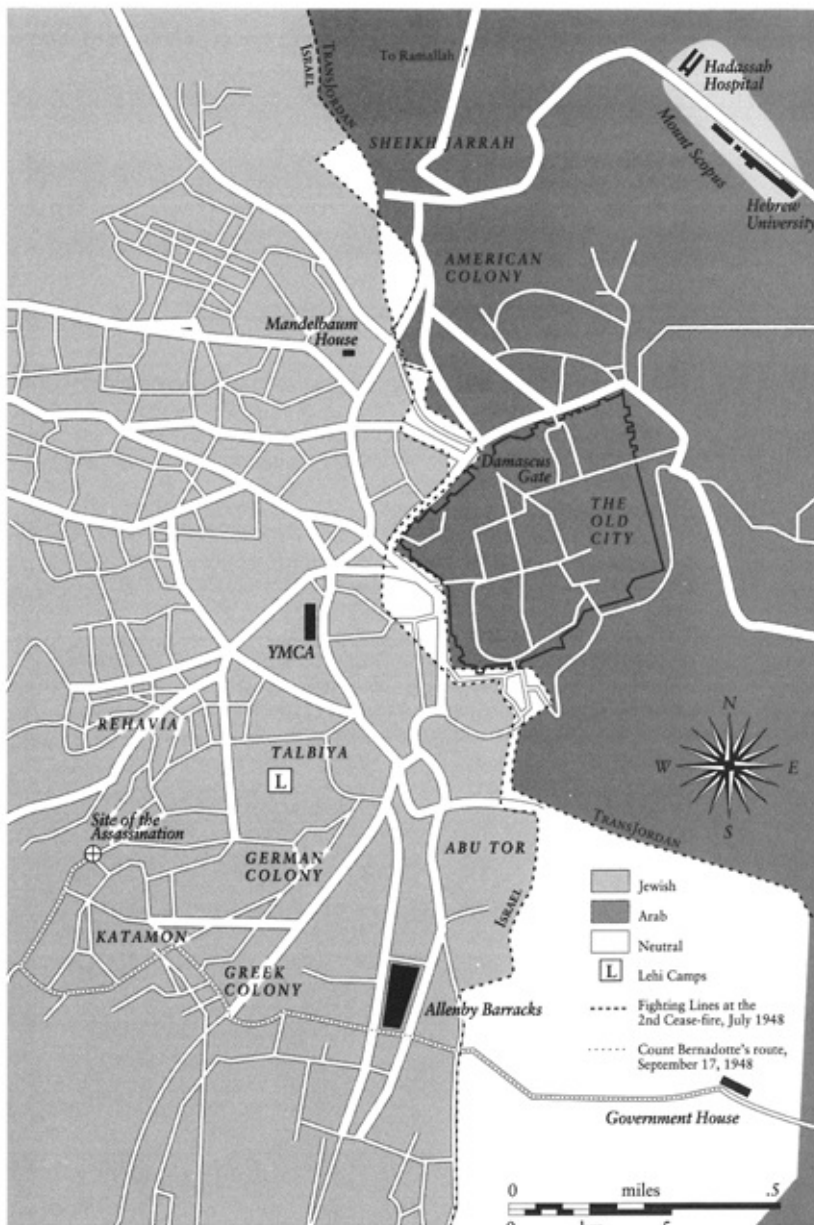
Fortunately, Shamir's former comrades from the underground were much less reticent than he himself. During the course of months of exhaustive conversations, one of these men, Baruch Nadel, provided me an illuminating journey into the mind of the zealot. Beginning with his remarkably vivid recollections of his youth spent under British rule in Palestine, the veteran Lehi fighter recounted the events leading up to Bernadotte's assassination with a passion the years have not cooled. Through Nadel and a handful of other surviving Lehi members, I began to fathom how otherwise decent men and women could kill in cold blood.

The line connecting the ambush of Count Bernadotte to Baruch Goldstein's mass killing in Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs is all too tragically obvious. Both acts of violence had the same purpose: to thwart Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. This book is in no way an apologia for atrocities committed in the name of some higher purpose. I hope, however, that it can help put in perspective the mad dance of violence in which Arabs and Jews have been locked for over half a century.

A Death in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM 1948





A DEATH IN JERUSALEM

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1948, AT TEN-FIFTEEN ON ONE OF THOSE PERFECTLY polished mornings the region offers up in early fall, Count Folke Bernadotte's white DC-3 began its descent into the State of Israel. The United Nations aircraft landed smoothly on the tiny airstrip at Kalandia, north of Jerusalem. Folke Bernadotte, the first United Nations mediator between Arabs and Jews, bounded out of the plane.

Abdullah el-Tel, an Arab Legion colonel, strode forward to escort the Swedish count to his armored car. Colonel el-Tel was commander of the Transjordanian forces dispatched by King Abdullah to defend Jerusalem against Israeli incursions in the Arab-Israeli conflict, now six months old.

Speed being the chief defense against snipers, the party raced along the dusty road to Ramallah where the Arab Legion's local commander, Brigadier General Norman Lash, awaited them. Deemed the most formidable fighting force in the Middle East, the British-trained Arab Legion was charged with defending London's regional satellite, the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan.

Sandbags and barbed wire disfigured the facade of Ramallah's Grand Hotel. Once the lure of Jerusalem's well-heeled residents, it had been transformed into one more makeshift army headquarters during this summer of Israel's birth. Standing in the formal gardens, Bernadotte listened with a detached expression to General Lash's lengthy litany of Jewish violations of the UN-imposed truce.

Great Britain, awarded the Palestine Mandate by the League of Nations in 1922, had been worn down by the Arabs' obstinate opposition to London's promise of a Jewish home, and exhausted by terrorism from both sides. In March 1947, Prime Minister Clement Atlee had turned to the United Nations to do what London could not: restore a semblance of order to the region. The fledgling world body was thus presented with both the greatest challenge of its three-year-old existence and the chance to define its mission. For the UN was already proving impotent to stop Great Power confrontation. Solving, or at least defusing, smaller conflicts such as this one seemed to offer an opportunity for the UN to succeed—somewhere. Following a May 27, 1948, Security Council resolution ordering a truce between Israel and the Arabs, Bernadotte had cajoled both sides into agreeing to lay down their weapons. But the artillery fire that rumbled over the Judean Hills mocked both the truce and the mediator.

General Lash, finished with his tirade, now urged Bernadotte to take an armed Arab Legion escort to his next stop, Jerusalem. But the count shook his head. "Eighty UN observers in Jerusalem have no such protection," he said. "Why should I?" Nevertheless, as Bernadotte chatted with other members of the group, General Aage Lundström, a tall, rangy fellow Swede who was UN chief of staff in the region, took Lash aside and said, yes, we would gratefully accept an armored car to escort Bernadotte's convoy to the Mandelbaum Gate, which divided the Arab and Jewish zones of Jerusalem. Hearing what Lundström had done, Bernadotte shrugged and smiled resignedly.

The count's squared shoulders and frequent smiles belied his fatigue. In his well-pressed khaki shirt and Bermuda shorts, his Middle East uniform, the fifty-four-year-old Swede still looked strikingly fit. As a young cavalry officer, he had learned the trick of catching a five-minute nap between appointments, helpful these days when he rose regularly in the predawn hours and shuttled among half a dozen Middle Eastern capitals.

The optimism he had exuded in May, when he was appointed to mediate the world's most rancorous dispute, had been eroded by hours of empty negotiations with men who talked eloquently of peace but put their faith in guns. Quitting had occurred to Bernadotte only once, earlier that summer, when his frustration reached a boiling point over UN delays in meeting his request for a military unit to enforce the truce. His request had still not been met, but Bernadotte had stayed on. In any case, abandoning his post would have been next to impossible for a man described by Swedes close to him with the singular word *rakryggad*—upright.

The convoy was finally on its way, bumping along the rutted dirt road just past the airstrip, when an Arab sniper's bullet hit the left rear fender of Bernadotte's Chrysler. Sitting in the front seat, Bernadotte's personal secretary, Barbro Wessel, a spirited twenty-eight-year-old the mediator called "Weasel," glanced at Lundström. Strange, she thought, for a general to look so anxious. But Folk Bernadotte, bred not to show fear, looked calm and his calm spread to Barbro. "Perhaps it would be safer to detour around Jerusalem through Latrun," General Lundström ventured.

"No, Aage," the count said, "I have to take the same risks as my observers. Besides, I must show them that no one has the right to prevent me from crossing the lines." Bernadotte deemed his presence in Jerusalem to be even more crucial since UN Secretary General Trygve Lie had declined to make the perilous journey himself.

Less than an hour later, his convoy reached the Holy City without further incident. "Good luck to you!" an American reporter called to Bernadotte as his car rolled across the line separating the Arab and the Jewish zones. "Thanks," the mediator waved back, flashing one of his wide smiles, "I shall need it."

When the convoy stopped on the Jewish side, a burly man saluted the mediator and introduced himself. "Captain Moshe Hillman, Israeli Army liaison." Noticing Hillman's service revolver tucked in its holster, Bernadotte said, "I'm afraid you'll have to leave that behind, Captain. None of our men are armed." Bernadotte pointed to the bullet hole in his car's fender. What was the use of one revolver against that? "The UN flag is our only protection."

At the dividing line, other UN officers waited to greet the count: Lt. Colonel William Cox, an American Marine in charge of UN peacekeeping operations in the city's Jewish sector; French Colonel André Sérot, the chief UN observer in Jerusalem; and Belgian Major Massart, head of observers in the Arab sector. Frank Begley, a former FBI officer now serving as UN security officer and Bernadotte's Jerusalem driver, joined the group, sliding in behind the Chrysler's wheel. Begley, a daredevil driver who knew his way around the mine field that the Holy City had become in the summer of 1948. He whisked the count, his newly expanded party in tow, to the YMCA on King David Street for lunch. There was no military escort, no offer of an armored car, nor anyone from whom General Lundström could request safe passage for the mediator's convoy.

A gaudy structure, the Y was America's contribution to Jerusalem's fantastic array of architectural landmarks. With its tall tower and its ornate, multicolored ceilings, it had more in common with

pharaoh's tomb than with Jerusalem's ramparts. As a result of a series of Byzantine negotiations involving the International Red Cross, the UN, and Arab and Israeli authorities, the Y and the equally famed King David Hotel across the street were deemed to be a demilitarized "zone of sanctuary" under the unarmed "protection," first of the Red Cross, then later of the United Nations, and still later of the United States consulate. This little enclave was meant to be off-limits to the belligerents. Women and children were to be admitted at all times and temporary asylum was to be given to refugees while fighting was taking place. Those entering the "zone" had to surrender their arms. The count and his party planned to spend the night at the YMCA.

Also at the YMCA lunch table was a young Swede, Jan de Geer, who had recently joined Bernadotte's personal staff and traveled with the mediator from his headquarters on the Greek island of Rhodes. The count's presence was always a remarkable event in the besieged city, which had been abandoned by much of the world since it had become a war zone in May. With Bernadotte in the midst, the gathering took on the charged quality of a conversation between men in the field and the commanding officer.

They knew by now never to call him "count." Even Barbro called him "Folke." When someone in the group politely inquired after the health of "the countess," Bernadotte pointedly asked, "Are you speaking of my wife?" Not that he was an easy-going man. The military bearing, the arctic blue eyes, the impression he projected that wherever he was he was meant to be, precluded bonhomie. This self-assurance could perhaps be attributed to his heritage. Bernadotte was the king of Sweden's nephew. His godson was heir to the throne. His great-great-grandfather, the first Bernadotte to occupy the Swedish throne, had been a marshal in Napoleon's army.

But he was here now in this capital of fanaticism by choice. His personal courage could not be ignored. There had been other instances. He had faced Heinrich Himmler across a Berlin table while the Allied bombers unloaded their deadly cargo over-head. Folke Bernadotte had been among those who believed that bargaining for the lives of Hitler's hostages, even if only a handful at a time, was not a diversion from the war effort. Representing the Swedish Red Cross in 1945, he had started with a modest goal—to save Scandinavian captives of the Third Reich. In the end, he exceeded expectations and managed, with the help of his Red Cross trucks and buses, to ferry thousands, Jews as well as Christians, to safety. His accomplishments skewed the observers' rapport with the mediator. Yet danger is also a great equalizer, and on this day in Jerusalem they were all courting danger.*

Neither side paid much attention any longer to the truce the mediator had pieced together. Twice he had succeeded—initially in June and then, when the first four-week truce expired and the combatants resumed their deadly business, again in mid-July. In the background, the random pop-pop of sniper fire and the dull thud of Arab mortars punctuated the group's conversation.

Bernadotte had seen the Jewish papers that morning. He was stung by the transcript of Israel's Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok's news conference. Shertok charged the count with turning a blind eye to Arab truce violations, while overreacting to Israel's minor infractions. This seemed an astonishingly undiplomatic message from a foreign minister whom Bernadotte had recently called his friend. The count was unaccustomed to such blunt treatment.

Bernadotte thought he had one more chance to bring the two sides together. He would present them to the United Nations General Assembly, convened in a special session in Paris, with his latest proposal for peace. He had learned a few things since the uproar caused by his first, rather ill-thought-out peace

plan of late June. Surely, he thought, he could temper the Israeli rage at his suggestion that Jerusalem should go to the Arabs. After all, the Holy City lay well within the area allotted the Arabs by the UN partition plan. It seemed more logical to the Swede that King Abdullah should have Jerusalem.

But Count Bernadotte had refused to recognize that logic had little to do with Jewish feelings on the subject of Jerusalem. He seemed equally oblivious of the fact that there was another struggle being waged for Israel's future. The six Arab armies that had breached the new state's borders the moment Israel declared her statehood were not alone in battling for control of the biblical land. Israel itself, Jews against Jews, were locked in a bitter struggle over the future of their own country. Zionist maximalists, impatient and fervent supernationalistic successors of Vladimir Jabotinsky, insisted on an Israel of biblical proportions on both sides of the Jordan River with Jerusalem its eternal capital, no matter the cost. Jabotinsky's offspring, members of the reviled Stern Gang, were Bernadotte's most dangerous foes. They perceived their more moderate, pragmatic brethren, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's Labor Zionists, as traitors to the Zionist dream. For Ben-Gurion was willing to bide his time to achieve his vision of a strong, safe Israel. Labor Zionists rejected the ideology of the so-called Revisionist Zionist movement, whose motto was "Conquer or die." The two camps were locked in a struggle of biblical intensity that at times skirted full-blown civil war. Folke Bernadotte was only dimly aware of this mostly subterranean strife, and the danger it posed for him.

Midway through lunch, an aide whispered to Bernadotte that Dr. Ralph Bunche, his chief advisor, had finished drafting the new plan and had just dispatched a copy to Paris. But Bunche, who almost never left Bernadotte's side, would be delayed reaching him, the aide explained. Bunche's secretary, a British subject, had aroused the suspicion of an anti-English Israeli officer in the port of Haifa, and, fuming and frustrated, Bunche had stayed in Haifa to help his secretary gain entry to Israel.

"Well, then, let's push on to Government House," the mediator announced. As an added security measure, Bernadotte's aides had taken the unprecedented step of not setting a formal schedule for his trip to Jerusalem. Not even Bernadotte, the implacable optimist, could now ignore the violent feelings he aroused wherever he went in Israel—especially in Jerusalem. Avoid the Holy City, seasoned diplomats had cautioned him. But Bernadotte was intrigued by the possibility of moving his residence from the Greek island of Rhodes to Jerusalem's Government House, the former home of the British high commissioner to Palestine. Rhodes was too far removed from the war zone. Now Bernadotte was eager to see Government House before dark.

Bernadotte asked de Geer to call Dr. Dov Joseph, Jewish Jerusalem's military governor, to schedule a meeting following the count's tour of Government House. As the group piled into their cars, Colonel Begley, for security reasons, ordered the convoy to take a roundabout route to Government House. Coming through Talbiya and Katamon to escape the snipers, Begley told the drivers.

High on a bluff with the city spread beneath it, the former enclave of the highest British authority in Palestine held powerful symbolism for the citizens of the new State of Israel. In a supremely ironic move, which no doubt had eluded the architects, Government House had been constructed on the biblical Hill of Evil Counsel. Sir Winston Churchill had signed the documents creating the Kingdom of Transjordan in one of Government House's stately rooms in March 1921, thereby hoping to appease Arab nationalism east of the Jordan River. Some of the most passionately despised figures in the new Jewish state were the former occupants of this fortresslike building.

Folke Bernadotte was not a student of history. An eminently practical sort, he was looking for

place to live in Jerusalem. Government House, bequeathed by the departing British to the International Red Cross, seemed a good place from which he could keep an eye on both warring sides.

There was no denying the magic of the view. Bernadotte surveyed the landscape with a special eye. He still carried the Bible his uncle Prince Karl had given him during his negotiations with Himmler. For Bernadotte, a devout man, it was seductive simply to be able to contemplate the Old City of Jerusalem, with its spires, domes, and minarets backlit against the sky.

Like Rome, Jerusalem is a city of hilltops, clustered on a height of 750 meters, which plunges to the sea toward the west. The ancient, walled Old City contains many of the sacred places of three religions, enclosed by walls built in the sixteenth century. The mosque of Omar—on the site of Solomon's Temple—sits perilously close to the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Garden of Gethsemane. In 1948, most Jews lived in West Jerusalem, the so-called New City, built mainly since the late nineteenth century by Jewish immigrants, though a small, determined group of faithful had, until the recent siege by the Arabs, survived for millennia within the walled Old City. A few miles to the south and east of the city, the hills sloped down to the Dead Sea and the mountains where ancient Jewish and Christian zealots once sought refuge.

Bernadotte strolled through Government House's rose gardens, flanked by meticulously trimmed Aleppo pines. The last British high commissioner, Sir Alan Cunningham, had left four months before on May 14, the day Britain's Palestine Mandate expired and David Ben-Gurion announced the birth of a new state.

On either side of this deceptively serene place, Arab and Jewish troops were dug in, poised to renew fighting. Egyptian units were encamped to the south, close enough so that with binoculars one could make out the type of English rifles they cradled. The Jordanians were to the north. Wherever you looked, Bernadotte's Israeli liaison, Captain Hillman, noted, you could see Jordanians—on the wall of the Old City, on Mount Zion. Jewish forces were to the west.

In the lookout tower, Bernadotte suddenly pointed to a group of dark figures in Arab kaffiyehs deftly laying sticks of dynamite beneath the roadbed. As quickly as they had appeared, the Arab guerrillas melted into the shadows.

Before leaving Stockholm for the Middle East just two weeks earlier, Bernadotte had talked with his American-born wife Estelle about the danger. He had even left her precise instructions for his funeral. He refused, however, an offer from the Swedish police to fit him out with a flak jacket; he found it much too cumbersome, he said, for his high-energy style. Bernadotte was convinced his physical presence, as a man of peace, would dampen Jews' and Arabs' fervor to fight. He was willing to live at the very heart of the war zone while attempting to negotiate a peace he thought was within reach. But, then, hatred was not an emotion Folke Bernadotte could truly fathom.

Almost no one agreed with the Swede's choice of residence: not Israeli officials, who had no wish to take responsibility for the mediator's safety in the next round of serious fighting; not his own advisors, who saw the place as impossible to keep supplied through hostile lines.

As he toured the Hill of Evil Counsel, Bernadotte finally realized that his aides were right, and he abandoned his dream of living there. But the Israeli newspapers had already carried stories about the mediator's interest in the residence, and in a place where history and symbols matter enormously, another message—it was not the first—had linked Folke Bernadotte with the despised British.

Before leaving the mausoleumlike residence, the mediator invited Dr. Pierre Façel, the Swiss doctor who had improvised a Red Cross hospital within its walls, to accompany him back to the YMCA. The man who had worked within the battered city for months, Dr. Façel struck Bernadotte as having a clearer, less partisan grasp of the situation than most. Always hungry for fresh facts, Bernadotte wanted to elicit the doctor's views.

The mediator's next stop was a yellow stucco building, a short drive from Government House, that was officially an Israeli agricultural school. Though the school was well inside the official demilitarized zone that encompassed Government House, Bernadotte had heard that the Israelis had transformed it into an armed fort in direct violation of the truce. Under the fierce leadership of Rachael Yamait, a middle-aged Israeli woman, twenty armed Israeli "students" were housed here.

"Over my dead body will you take their guns away," Mrs. Yamait said to the mediator as they stood outside the agricultural school. Captain Hillman was startled and slightly embarrassed by her aggressive tone. The "schoolmistress" insisted that the armed youths were necessary in case the Arabs attacked the Red Cross zone, sought by both sides for its strategic location high above the city. Hillman bent down to pluck a few tomatoes from Mrs. Yamait's vines and noticed just in time that her tomato patch was mined.

Colonel André Sérot pulled Hillman aside. "When we get back in the cars, would you change places with me, Captain?" the French officer asked. "I need a few minutes privately with the mediator." Hillman had been sitting between Count Bernadotte and General Lundström in the convoy. Sérot explained to the puzzled Hillman that "My wife spent the war in Dachau. She owes her survival to Count Bernadotte. I want to thank him." Hillman ceded his place to the colonel when they climbed back into their cars.

With the blue and white United Nations flags and the Red Cross banner snapping off the cars' front fenders, the three-car convoy accelerated for the final, most treacherous strip of road back to Jewish-held Jerusalem, and the relative security of the YMCA, where they would spend the night. They followed, in reverse, the route they had taken after lunch, to Government House, along one of only two roads leading to the New City that were not blocked by fortified positions of one side or the other. The convoy passed through the so-called Greek and German colonies, bruised remnants of a more peaceful era when the Holy City had been a magnet for the faithful of every nationality, and through the Katamon quarter, full of stately but now largely deserted Arab and British villas, two-story homes with large terraces and balconies whose elaborate grillwork spoke of another life. Their former residents were now part of the mass exodus. At the moment, in the late afternoon of Friday, September 17, the exhausted city was quiet. Even the distant snipers seemed temporarily to honor the Sabbath eve.

In the first car, Lundström's DeSoto, Major Massart sat behind the wheel, with Barbro Wessman squeezed between him and Captain Hillman. Jan de Geer and Lundström's aide-de-camp, Jan Flac, sat in the back. De Geer and Barbro had made a secret pact. Alarmed at the hostility Bernadotte aroused wherever he went in Israel, the two young Swedes agreed to form a human shield between the count and potential danger by occupying the first car of every convoy in which he traveled. The Swiss Dr. Façel followed the DeSoto in his own car. The mediator's car, a shiny new Chrysler, was last. Colonel Frank Begley drove, with U.S. Marine Commander Cox next to him. The count sat in the back, on the right-hand side, with Sérot next to him. General Lundström folded his long frame into the left-hand corner.

As the convoy began to climb the steep, narrow road, Pal-mach Street, which leads to the affluent Talbiya section, the familiar sight of yet another Army roadblock forced them to slow down. An Israeli soldier dropped the barrier across the road as they approached. Captain Hillman shouted, “*Shalom Haverim!* It’s OK, it’s the UN mediator,” and the soldier lifted the barrier with a wave of his hand for them to pass. The convoy passed an Army truck full of Israeli soldiers and shifted down for the final climb toward the New City.

The road looked innocent. Open fields lay on either side, punctuated by a few scattered three- and four-story apartment houses of pale Jerusalem stone. Two children pushed bicycles up the steep hill. Slowly, the convoy’s passengers began to lose some of their tension. A small store where thirsty children bought drinks after school came into view. And from behind it emerged a large Israeli Army jeep, resembling, except for the fact that it looked new, every other jeep in the city. Four soldiers with their caps pulled low over their faces, appeared to be drowsing inside.

As the convoy slowly rose over the hill, the jeep and its passengers stirred. It nosed into the narrow road, forcing Bernadotte’s convoy to come to a full stop. Three men in the khaki shorts and visored military hats of the Israeli Army sprang, with military precision, from the jeep while the fourth man kept one hand on the steering wheel and the other on his revolver. Fingers on the triggers of the submachine guns, two men approached the left side of the convoy. Inside the DeSoto, the three young Swedes and the Belgian major groped for their papers. “It’s OK, boys,” Hillman’s jaunty voice boomed out. “Let us pass. It’s the UN mediator.” Ignoring the Israeli officer, the gunmen sprayed the DeSoto’s tires and radiator with gunfire. Then they moved rapidly on to the next car, which belonged to the Red Cross doctor. Meanwhile, the third man raced toward the Chrysler, and thrust the barrel of his Schmeisser into the open window of the back seat.

Folke Bernadotte saw the glint of metal. His companions heard him utter something “like an exclamation,” as the blast blew him back against the seat. He toppled forward; blood spattered across his face and soaked his shirt. Six bullets tore into his left arm, his throat, and his chest. The assassins kept firing, pumping eighteen bullets into the French officer who had wanted to thank Bernadotte for saving his wife from Dachau.

“Folke?” Lundström, sitting next to the Frenchman, cried out. The mediator did not answer. The gunmen fled. Hillman sprang from his car and groaned at the sight of the carnage. “My God,” he kept repeating. “Oh my God.” The man whose job it was to assure the UN mediator safe passage through Jewish Jerusalem felt a knot of panic. Jumping in next to Begley and Cox, he barked, “Drive to Hadassah—go straight, just go!”

Hadassah Hospital was only a few minutes’ drive, but the trip, with two silent, bleeding bodies in the back seat and the cars’ tires oozing air from their bullet holes, was the longest of Hillman’s life. At the hospital entrance, Barbro and Jan, the two young Swedes, rushed from their car to the Chrysler. With help from Hillman and Lundström, they carefully carried Bernadotte’s bleeding body into the hospital. But for one of Europe’s most privileged sons, it was already too late. Count Folke Bernadotte, the first United Nations mediator between Arabs and Jews, had died instantly on a narrow dirt road in Jerusalem.

* Eighty UN observers were stationed in Jerusalem, which was sliced three ways by the 1947 UN partition of Palestine into Jewish, an Arab, and an international sector, to safeguard the world’s great religious shrines and their faithful in the Holy City.

THE SHOCK OF THE NEWS

AT HADASSAH HOSPITAL, HILLMAN, LUNDSTRÖM, AND WESSEL, their clothes smeared with blood, waited silently outside the emergency room. Jan de Geer arrived from the nearby YMCA, where he had found Dr. Rudolf Ullmark, Bernadotte's personal physician. Because of the count's chronic case of bleeding ulcers, Ullmark always traveled with him, carrying a supply of Bernadotte's own blood for emergencies. Dr. Ullmark emerged minutes later from the operating room and silently shook his head.

There was nothing more for the stunned group to do but return to the YMCA and await the two bodies, which would lie in state there overnight. One of the first Israelis to reach the hospital was the dashing young military commander of Jewish Jerusalem, a thirty-three-year-old colonel named Moshe Dayan. "Extra Urgent," he cabled Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in Tel Aviv before racing to the hospital. "Just now at 17:30 I have received word that Bernadotte and the UN chief of staff have been shot in Katamon." Dayan's cable sent waves of apprehension through the Israeli prime minister. He knew that Jews held Katamon. He realized that his darkest fear had come to pass: the UN mediator had been killed by Jews—extremist Jews, undoubtedly—the same group with whom Ben-Gurion had collided at every juncture of his rise to the pinnacle of the Zionist movement. Ben-Gurion, the white-haired lion of Israel, the Founding Father, had failed to curb these *terrorists*.

To the prime minister, the brazen ambush of a man sent by the world to make peace bore the unmistakable signature of the Irgun or the Stern Group. The disregard of world opinion, the blatant challenge to the frail new state's authority, the swift professionalism of the crime's execution—these suggested the underground's work. The crime was a threat to the legitimacy of the four-month-old state. Acts of terror to protest the venal British Mandate were one thing, but Israel was a state at last, and this crime had been committed under Ben-Gurion's leadership. And Palestine was the first great test of the United Nations as international crisis manager. The UN's first attempt at mediation had climaxed in blood on a Jerusalem street. Would the world forgive Israel?

An hour and a half after Ben-Gurion first received word of the crime from Jerusalem, Dayan was on the phone and confirmed the prime minister's fears. He said he was certain the killers were either Irgun or Lehi.

In fact, the Irgun, under the leadership of a former Polish lawyer and editor named Menachem Begin, had denounced the crime as soon as he learned of it. Founded in 1937 as a breakaway faction from the Haganah (Palestine Jewry's self-defense organization) to repel British occupation by any means short of personal terror, the Irgun was less extreme in its philosophy than Lehi. At eight-thirty, Issachar Harel, Ben-Gurion's Secret Service director, arrived and asserted "from the highest sources" that the Irgun was not behind the assassination of Bernadotte.

Lehi, founded in 1940 by Avraham Stern, a former member of the Irgun, believed in individual terror as a legitimate means toward the goal of a Zionist state of biblical proportions, as defined

Genesis 15:18, “from the brook of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,” a goal that went far beyond what Ben-Gurion thought realistic for the infant state.

Nor was Lehi willing to disband peacefully, as the Irgun had largely done, and join the new state. Lehi deemed Ben-Gurion a dangerous compromiser willing to settle for a diminished version of Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). In Lehi’s eyes, Ben-Gurion was too accommodating to outside pressure, particularly those coming from the United Nations—and from Count Folke Bernadotte.

Now Ben-Gurion ordered the Army to surround Lehi’s three Jerusalem camps and arrest 260 of its members. The prime minister also ordered the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road, the main thoroughfare out of the Holy City, blocked.

Dr. Ralph Bunche, Bernadotte’s closest advisor, landed at the same airstrip where the Swede had arrived earlier the same day. An Israeli officer broke the news of the murder to Bunche. General Lundström, still wearing his bloodstained uniform, stood there, in silent shock. Bunche, an American with a stellar record of United Nations service (he was one of the authors of the United Nations Charter), had in four highly charged months formed an exceptionally close bond with Bernadotte. Bunche rushed to the YMCA, where his friend lay in the same room in which they had conducted talks with Arabs and Jews during that summer of fluctuating hopes. Two Israeli soldiers stood at attention over the UN-flag-draped coffins, Bernadotte’s first armed guards since his arrival in Israel.

Bunche, a man of legendary self-discipline, found release from his distress in an uncharacteristic way, pouring his pain and his anger into a cable dispatched to the foreign minister of Israel.

“The murder in cold blood of Count Bernadotte, United Nations Mediator in Palestine, and Colonel Sérot of the French Air Force and United Nations Observer, in the Katamon quarter of Jerusalem today by Jewish assailants is an outrage against the international community and an unspeakable violation of elementary morality. This tragic act occurred when Count Bernadotte, acting under the authority of the United Nations, was on an official tour of duty in Jerusalem and in the presence of a liaison officer assigned to him by the Jewish authorities.

“He was well within the lines of the armed forces of your government which has by official assumption responsibility for that part of Jerusalem controlled by Jewish forces. His safety therefore and that of his lieutenants, under the ordinary rules of law and order was a responsibility of the Provisional Government of Israel whose armed forces and representatives control and administer the area.

“This act constitutes a breach of the truce of utmost gravity for which the Provisional Government of Israel must assume full responsibility.”

The message filled Prime Minister Ben-Gurion with foreboding, all the more so as Bunche had just been appointed as the new UN mediator. The announcement, cabled to the UN’s Haifa headquarters and relayed to Bunche in Jerusalem by telephone, came from the secretary-general’s Soviet deputy Arkady Sobolev, as Secretary-General Lie was on vacation in Norway and could not be reached.

After an hour’s news blackout on the events in Jerusalem, the harsh trill of the alarm bell reserved for major breaking stories sounded on wires in newsrooms around the world. Working fast, the *New York Times’s* overnight editor rearranged the front page and composed a new banner headline: “Bernadotte Is Slain in Jerusalem; Killers Called ‘Jewish Irregulars,’ Security Council Will Act Today.”

That evening in Jerusalem, the representatives of the world’s major news organization found the

following single-page message in their mailboxes.

On the 17th of September 1948 we have executed Count Bernadotte.

Count Bernadotte served as an open agent of the British enemy. His task was to implement the British plans for the surrender of our country to a foreign rule and the exposure of the Yishuv [i.e., the Jewish population of Palestine]. He did not hesitate to suggest the handing over of Jerusalem to Abdullah. Bernadotte acted without interruption towards the weakening of our military efforts and was responsible for the bloodshed.

This will be the end of all the enemies and their agents. This will be the end of all the enemies of Jewish freedom in the Homeland.

There will be no foreign rule in the Homeland. There shall be no longer foreign Commissioners in Jerusalem.

HAZIT HAMOLEDETH, SEPT. 17, 1948

Hazit Hamoledeth, or Fatherland Front, did not exist. It was a name, borrowed from the Bulgarian Communist Party, that Lehi's three-man leadership chose as cover for their crime.

Thousands of miles from the tumult of Jerusalem, in a stately home at the edge of a Stockholm park, a twelve-year-old boy was passing the time tinkering with his absent father's shortwave radio set. A tremulous voice, announcing itself as belonging to an amateur radio operator from the Swedish town of Hel-enelund, made the boy pause. "Count Folke Bernadotte has been shot and killed in Jerusalem," the radio operator announced. Stunned, Bertil Bernadotte rushed to his mother. "I can't understand Count Bernadotte being shot," he cried. "But not Daddy."

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