

SACRED SOUND ON THE HOLLYWOOD FREEWAY By Si Frumkin

I was driving home from work that afternoon. It was the usual hot California summer day. The rush hour traffic was barely moving. My radio was tuned to the news channel for the five o'clock news.

The announcer said something I didn't quite understand and then, unexpectedly, there was the sound of a shofar - the ram's horn - that is blown on the holiest days of the year - "to-tooo-to-tooo - tadadada..." I pulled over to the shoulder, stopped, listened. Everything looked blurry and I didn't trust myself to drive. I was crying.

It was June 8, 1967, the 3rd day of the Six Day War - 40 years ago.

The war had begun that week. Egypt, Syria and Jordan, armed to the teeth by the best weapons the Soviet superpower eagerly supplied, moved against Israel - determined, brazen, proudly promising annihilation of the Jews.

Here is Egyptian president Nasser:

"As of today, there no longer exists an international emergency force to protect Israel. We shall exercise patience no more. We shall not complain any more to the UN about Israel. The sole method we shall apply against Israel is total war, which will result in the extermination of Zionist existence."

And the Syrian defense minister - three years later he murdered his way to become the ruler of Syria - Hafez al Assad:

"Our forces are now entirely ready not only to repulse the aggression, but to initiate the act of liberation itself, and to explode the Zionist presence in the Arab homeland. The Syrian army, with its finger on the trigger, is united....I, as a military man, believe that the time has come to enter into a battle of annihilation."

We knew that there was fighting. We knew that Jordanian artillery had shelled Jerusalem. We heard news reports from wire services and foreign correspondents about Egyptian tanks moving towards Tel Aviv, Syrians advancing on the Golan Heights, Jordanians advancing into Israel from the West Bank they had occupied in 1948.

We heard nothing from the Israelis. Phone calls didn't help – Israelis didn't know anything either or else didn't want to talk about it. My nephew Gaby, a lieutenant in the Golan brigade who was studying here, was going crazy trying to get back to join his unit. He and his friends sat in our living room making phone calls, begging, pleading, but there was no way to get back to Israel. Only officers above the rank of major and physicians rated a seat on El Al – the only airline flying.

Much later I found out that it was even worse for the Jews in the Soviet Union. There the radio was ecstatic about the victories of the Soviets' Arab brothers against the Zionist imperialists – one victory after another, the Israeli air force destroyed, Israeli warships sunk, and a lesson to be learned by all who opposed Soviet might and or refused Soviet protection.

The only reporter who knew the truth and had the guts to report it was an American, Michael Elkins. He filed a story that the Egyptian air force had been destroyed on the ground on the morning of the first day and that the Israelis had won the war. His was a lonely voice. His bosses at NBC and BBC held up his report for hours while wiring him that he was alone in reporting an Israeli victory and was jeopardizing the networks' credibility: "You better be right!" the wire said.

He was. By the end of the third day there were stories of tens of thousands of Egyptian prisoners taken, of Israeli advance to the Suez Canal, the capture of the Golan Heights and yes, the liberation of Jerusalem.

I had visited Israel in 1958. Jerusalem was a divided city – a wall crowned with barbed wire ran across it. I could see the Jordanian soldiers on top of the wall; once in a while they pointed their rifles at the people on our side and laughed. The Old City, the Western Wall, the Hadassah hospital – they all were on the other side. There were no Jews there. The ancient synagogues were torn down. The cemeteries were desecrated and their stones used for Jordanian army latrines. Jerusalem wasn't Jewish anymore.

As I drove home on that day June day in Los Angeles, Israeli paratroopers fought their way to the Wall and then a jeep brought Dayan, Rabin and a rabbi in uniform, a shofar in his hands. And then, there was the sound of the shofar.

This is what I heard on my car radio on June 8, 1967. Is it a wonder that I cried?

Now, there is talk of dividing our holy city again. The world doesn't want a Jewish Jerusalem. Hardly any countries have their embassies there. Very few – not even the U.S. – could be persuaded to come to the celebration of Jerusalem's recapture 40 years ago. The BBC shamelessly apologized for having slipped up by referring to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in reporting the event.

As for me, may my right hand wither if I forget Jerusalem – or forget how I cried happy tears when it was won back.

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