

Witness Remmers

Int. Seufert: So you were at home at first in the evening, but then you left for the airbase?

Remmers: Yes, that's one thing I remember very clearly. We spent the evening at home and we had the television on. And I mean, it was after nine, after 9 p.m., maybe a little later. It was already dark, and then the TV reporter said that events were now shifting location, and that the terrorists' demand for a plane to leave Germany, perhaps with the hostages, was being met, and that they were therefore going to a nearby airfield. And then the statement came, it electrified me, he said literally, the helicopters are now leaving the Olympic Village and flying away to the northwest, to Erding. Then I said to my wife, "well if there's one thing I know, it's that Erding is not in the northwest". And we discussed it briefly and I said, "You'll see, they're going to Fürst, you'll see, they'll come to Fürstenfeldbruck", without knowing that the supposed escape aircraft was already there. I didn't know that, but the overall situation at the airbase seemed to me to be ideally suited to be able to do something like that under exclusion of the public. But then we could already hear the helicopters in the air, and I said to my wife, "See? That's how it was."

From today's point of view, I have to say that we were naive and too curious back then – so we got in the car and went to the airbase. I didn't waste a thought that it might turn out in a way that might not suit me and my family. But I don't remember my wife trying to stop me, because she was also interested in the whole thing. So then I drove into the airbase, passed through the main gate, turned left at the main intersection in the airbase and came to the restricted zone. And there was a guard there, who was actually always there, and I thought I could make it clear to him with my ID card that I had the right to drive in. And then I saw the Boeing 727 standing there for the first time, out of the car window to my right, and I thought: "aha, so that's the plan", and then the guard said: "Get out of the car, park it somewhere, take cover, there will be shooting here soon."

So the helicopters had already landed, two or three of what we called lighting giraffes lit up the whole apron bright as day. And then it was quiet. So I got out of the car, took cover in the train tracks, lay down in them, and considered that to be reasonably good protection. I had parked the car a little further away, I don't even know where. And there I lay. But then apparently several people saw it the same way I did, because the number of cars that were turned away at the secured zone and had to be parked somewhere else, and the vehicle occupants, who then also sought cover in the track bed, slowly grew.

So there we were, five or six of us. And then nothing happened for a long time. We waited expecting to finally see somebody go over to the Boeing, because that seemed to be the intention, to then say, okay, the Boeing rolls out and case closed. After a long time, I can't say how long, three figures moved away from the helicopters. I couldn't see the helicopters clearly. I would have had to see around the corner of a building. I could see the tail of the helicopter parked to the east, that is, the right-hand helicopter as seen from the front. I could see its tail. And three figures came out, but as far as I remember they were wearing hoods, that is, from my point of view it was not possible to see whether they were Palestinians or hostages. One went to the boarding stairs of the Boeing 727 and boarded it, and came out again after a short time. And then those three, I think they walked side by side, went back to the helicopters and halfway there one of them shouted something to the others in the helicopter. I couldn't have understood it even if it had been in German or English, maybe it was some Arabic language. But then it was clear that the reaction in the helicopters, which again I could not see clearly, started at that moment. And at the same time someone shouted very loudly and clearly from the top of the wall of the control tower, which was obviously the center of the action: "Shoot for crying out loud!. Why isn't anybody shooting?" That was, as I later learned, the then Federal Minister of the Interior, Genscher. Then a shootout began like in the Wild West, which was, I must say, as I learned afterwards, completely aimless, completely haphazard. That then became obvious. But now I'm getting ahead of myself again. No allocation was made as to which shooter of the so-called snipers, which they weren't, was supposed to take on which enemy.

At the same time, however, I then saw or heard a detonation or even two, I can no longer say exactly, and saw a flash and a glow of fire. I found out later that it was the detonated hand grenades of the Israelis, which they threw into the helicopters – of the Palestinians, of course, excuse me – in which the Israeli athletes were chained up. They had no way to escape at that moment. They were firmly attached to the helicopter. At the same time I again heard the crackling of machine guns, and that was then, as I learned later, the Palestinians, who were shooting into the burning helicopters from the outside, just to make sure, sadly.

Even then the shooting continued. I couldn't see where, because, as I said, it was out of my line of sight. But the shooting certainly lasted until after midnight. In the process, whether intentionally or by ricocheting bullets, I don't know, the lighting cranes were shot out. It was then either completely dark or only illuminated by one single lighting unit. In any case it was much darker than before. I heard bullets behind me hitting the metal cladding of the heating plant. That was the first time I heard bullets whistle, that is, I didn't hear them whistle, I just heard the impact in the sheet metal. And that was the reason why, of course, we pulled our noses in even further, knowing full well that the bullets couldn't very well get into the recess of the track bed. And when there was a certain amount of calm, I got up, the others next to me too, and we ran to a position where we figured no bullet could reach us. It was a concrete pillar of the heating plant projecting forward. And we took cover behind it and waited to see what happened next.

Then we saw ambulances and armored personnel carriers from the Federal Border Guard from the city roll past us, into the middle of it all. Oh, an amusing little story by the way: On the control tower there is also a meteorological observation center, and they apparently had a shift change at midnight or shortly thereafter. A group of four or five people came along the main road, not marching or singing or anything, that would have been the only thing that could have made it more ridiculous, as if they had no idea about anything that was going on. They walked towards the restricted zone gate and were turned away by the guards, told not to go any further because it was dangerous there. That was obviously the first time they realized what had just happened or what was still going on.

That was after midnight. And then, after I reached my car, I drove to our VIP office in the officers' quarters and told the people there, who could only follow it on the radio or television what I had experienced as an eyewitness. I don't even know what they had shown on TV. But at that time I still assumed that perhaps everything had gone well in the shooting and in the attack with the hand grenades. I couldn't imagine why it might not have gone well at that point. Okay, the thing with the hand grenades, if the Israelis had been able to escape beforehand, that wouldn't have been so bad. I didn't know that the Israelis were handcuffed to the helicopter. And then the news spread in the VIP office via radio and television that it was probably over now and that one could speak of a good outcome, but that one of the possible assassins had apparently escaped in the dark and was running around in the area and that people in the neighborhood should keep their doors and windows closed and not react to ringing or knocking.

When I went home, I was home around one o'clock, I guess, I told that to my wife, and she also said, yes, on television they also said that they could not yet have a clear picture of the outcome of the event, but it looked good. And then I said that after what I have seen or guessed from around the corner, I could imagine that there must have been injured or dead on both sides. We then went to bed. The next morning my shift didn't start until, I think, twelve o'clock and the radio alarm clock woke us up with funeral music. I remember that very clearly, and I said to my wife: "It obviously turned out differently than we were supposed to believe last night."