



Vice President George H.W. Bush (seated in the floral armchair in front of the group) hosts senior officials and members of the Operation Goldenrod team, including the co-authors of this article, at his Naval Observatory residence after the capture of terrorist Fawaz Yunis. CTC Director Dewey Clarridge is seated on the right, in the floral chair nearest the camera. (White House photo)

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The Capture of Terrorist Fawaz Yunis

Vikki and Adam (pen names)

Vikki retired from CIA after 32 years of service, including as a founding member of the CIA Counterterrorist Center. Adam's career spanned more than 50 years, including service in the US Army, CIA, and State Department. Among other recognitions, he was awarded the Intelligence Star for Bravery. Adam and Vikki were leaders of the CIA "extraction" team in Operation Goldenrod.

Early on a cold, overcast morning on September 13, 1987, three people boarded a small fishing boat in Cyprus and headed into the Mediterranean Sea. The fog had not yet lifted. Operation Goldenrod was under way. The operation's aim was to arrest and transport a Lebanese terrorist, Fawaz Yunis, to the United States to stand trial for acts of terrorism against US citizens. Operation Goldenrod was the first operation targeting a terrorist overseas undertaken by the recently created

CIA Counterterrorist Center. Under the auspices of the White House and National Security Council, the operation fostered extensive, close planning, collaboration, and cooperation between federal law enforcement, diplomatic, intelligence, and military services. The operation had to be accomplished in such a way as to ensure it was legal under US and international law. Yunis would be tried, convicted, and sentenced to 30 years in prison in 1989.

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Terrorism in the 1970s and mid-1980s

Terrorism seldom has a clear beginning or a distinct ending. It has no shape, no structure and, in military parlance, no identifiable forward edge of battle (no front line). Terrorism changes; it evolves and transforms. Critical variations emerge; tactics change; new groups form, while some groups merge with existing groups or merely fade away. Technological innovations provide terrorists new capabilities in designing or undertaking attacks, which may have global impact. Terrorism was not a new phenomenon when discussions leading to Operation Goldenrod began in 1986.

By the 1970s, international terrorism had become rampant. Nationalist/separatist terror organizations, many with Marxist-Communist orientations, sought forms of self-determination or national liberation. Active in Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East, South America, and the United States, these groups conducted attacks worldwide. Palestinian terror groups, some aligned with the Palestine Liberation Organization, sought the establishment of a Palestinian nation. Kidnappings, aircraft hijackings, bombings, and suicide operations were at the forefront of attacks, many gaining international media attention.

By the mid-1980s, a number of nationalist/separatist terror

groups were no longer active or had merged with other terror groups. At the same time, new terror groups had emerged, such as Hizbollah and the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) in Lebanon. Amorphous terrorist groups also sprung up in Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation of that country in 1979. Nineteen-eighty-five was a violent year for terror attacks, including:

- January–June 1985: Four Americans were kidnapped in Beirut, Lebanon, and held captive by terrorists associated with the IJO.
- June 11–14: Royal Jordanian Alia Flight 402 en route from Rome to Athens was hijacked and its crew and passengers, including two Americans, held for four days in Beirut.
- June 14–30: Hizbollah terrorists hijacked TWA Flight 847 on the same day the Alia Flight 402 hijacking ended. The hijackers beat US Navy diver Robert Stetham to death and threw his body to the tarmac. Over two weeks, some passengers were released while others were removed from the aircraft, dispersed in small groups, and held under guard in Beirut's southern suburbs.
- September 16: Terrorists lobbed grenades into the Café de Paris restaurant in

Rome, wounding 38, including nine US citizens.

- October 7–10: The cruise ship *Achille Lauro* was hijacked by Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) terrorists. US citizen Leon Klinghoffer was shot and tossed overboard while confined to his wheelchair.
- December 27: near-simultaneous machine gun and grenade attacks at airports in Rome and Vienna left more than 20 people dead, including five US citizens, and wounded 120.¹

Moving Into Action

The series of terrorist attacks would lead to a whole-of-government response, beginning with White House authorization to engage CIA in counterterrorist operations abroad, with or without the approval of foreign governments.

Congress, too, came into play, months later enacting the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Anti-Terrorism Act of 1986, which established extraterritorial jurisdiction over terrorist acts overseas against US persons or interests.² The act was a landmark law that, among its provisions, strengthened security for diplomatic personnel (and family members) and facilities, established a rewards program and expanded Federal jurisdiction to investigate terrorist acts against

US persons or properties overseas and to arrest those responsible.³ Two years earlier, Congress had passed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 which gave the FBI jurisdiction over terrorist acts in which Americans were taken hostage or injured, no matter where the act of terrorism had occurred.⁴

The 1986 act principally affected the State Department and diplomatic security, which defined terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine state agents, usually intended to influence an audience. International terrorism is terrorism involving citizens or territory of more than one country.”⁵

CTC Established

At the same time, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Casey had also recognized the need for stronger action against terror organizations and was prepared quickly to act on the White House authorization. In February 1986, he announced the creation of the DCI Counterterrorist Center (CTC) and placed its establishment and management under the CIA’s Directorate of Operations (DO). Before CTC’s creation, counterterrorism had been handled

by the Counterterrorist Group of the DO, while the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) maintained its own office for counterterrorism analysis.

CTC would officially be established in April 1986 and placed under the leadership of Duane “Dewey” Clarridge. At the time, the center was unique in that it colocated CIA terrorism specialists from its then four directorates (the DO, DI, Science and Technology (D&T), and Support (DS) to counter and respond to terrorism. The center would also have substantial IC representation in its ranks. CTC was the first center of its kind in CIA.^a

Under Clarridge’s leadership, CTC implemented a proactive stance, going beyond just responding to terror attacks to implementing operations designed to prevent or thwart terror attacks. Simply stated, CTC’s mission was to preempt, disrupt, and defeat terrorism. Senior officers in CTC and the FBI recognized that, at its core, a terror attack (or threat to conduct an attack) is a criminal act and, as such, terrorists must be prosecuted for their actions.

Before any prosecution, however, suspects must first be identified and arrested. CTC would work with other federal offices

to identify and pursue terrorists responsible for attacks involving US citizens and ensure their arrest and prosecution in US courts. In September 1987, *Operation Goldenrod* did just that.

Selecting the Target

From mid-1986 into 1987, US law enforcement, intelligence, and military entities worked jointly under the auspices of the White House and the NSC to design, implement, and undertake an operation to 1) arrest any foreign terrorist involved in attacks against US citizens and interests overseas; 2) transport captives to the United States; and 3) arraign captive terrorists in a US federal court. Meetings were held to identify foreign terrorists who would meet the criteria and might be accessible for arrest.

In his memoir, *A Spy for All Seasons: My Life in the CIA*, Clarridge recalled some of the terrorists on CTC’s radar at the time:

- Muhammad Rashid, a Jordanian linked to the Palestinian 15 May terror organization, for his role in placing an explosive device on Pan Am Flight 830, from Tokyo to Hawaii, in 1982. The device detonated over the Pacific Ocean, perforat-

a. In 2015, the center construct became the norm for CIA when, under the rubric of “modernization,” an agency-wide reorganization created a fifth directorate, Digital Innovation, and ten integrated “mission centers,” including CTC. The number and nature of the missions of centers would evolve until 2026; today, CIA has 11 mission centers, three of which did not exist in 2015 at the time of the reorganization.

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Map of Cyprus. Operation Golden Rod activities were concentrated around Limassol and Larnaca on the southern coast.

ed the aircraft's cabin, killed a Japanese teen, and injured 16 other passengers.⁶ (Husayn Muhammad al-Umari, aka Abu Ibrahim, remains on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List for his role in this bombing.)

- Imad Mughniyah, associated with Hizbollah, for his role in the hijacking of TWA-847, which initially involved 153 passengers and crew (including many US citizens), and for his suspected involvement in the kidnapping and detention of US citizens in Lebanon.

- Fawaz Yunis, Lebanese Amal terrorist, as a hijacker of Royal Jordanian Alia 402 on which three US citizens were passengers, and his role in the detention of US citizens who had been passengers on TWA-847.

By February 1987, the focus of the investigation had turned to Fawaz Yunis.^a One factor in the selection of Yunis—indeed, the pivotal one—was a DEA source, Jamal Hamdan, who had indicated to his DEA handlers that he had known Yunis since the early 1980s, when both lived in Beirut. After Hamdan relocated to Cyprus, the two remained in

touch. According to Hamdan, Yunis needed money to support his wife and two children and might be interested in entering the lucrative drug business. According to Clarridge, the means to make Yunis “accessible” quickly became evident.⁷ Operation Goldenrod was approved to arrest Yunis in an “extraction” operation, “as in the removal of a bad tooth.”⁸

Operational Planning Begins in Washington...

DCI Casey oversaw the initial planning for Operation Goldenrod, while the principal responsibility for its execution fell to Clarridge

a. Fawaz Yunis's surname is often rendered in writings involving him, including FBI histories, as Younis. Court documents related to his trial during 1988–89 render the name as we do here.

and CTC.⁹ In the NSC meetings, Casey, and later William Webster, represented the IC and CIA.¹⁰ At the NSC Coordination Subgroup (CSG) meetings held at the White House, members became more focused as the operational plans developed and meetings increased as Operation Goldenrod drew nearer. In his autobiography, *A G-Man's Journal*, retired FBI Executive Associate Director Oliver "Buck" Revell noted the main participants at the NSC/CSG meetings were Amb. L. Paul Bremer (State Department), Richard Armitage (Defense Department), Lt. Gen. Tom Kelley (Joint Chiefs of Staff), Clarridge, Revell, and Charlie Allen (IC). Others also served on the NSC/CSG, but those listed above were the most essential members.¹¹

In his memoir, Clarridge described how the Department of Justice (DOJ) set most of the ground rules. "CIA would run the extraction operation—up to a point." DEA would turn their source, Jamal Hamdan, over to the CIA for handling. Clarridge wrote: "We would dangle the bait, set the trap, and be sure that the target was delivered into the FBI's hands in international waters."¹²

CIA would be required to place "eyes on the target" at the start of the operation to confirm the person to be arrested was, in fact, the Fawaz Yunis who had participated in the Royal Alia hijacking. The FBI would then take custody,

as CIA does not have authority to arrest individuals.¹³

Once FBI special agents took custody of Yunis, they would formally arrest him and accompany him to the United States. The US Navy would transport Yunis and the agents holding him to US soil on its ships and aircraft. Once there, DOJ would prosecute the case. To ensure a clean, unbroken line of jurisdiction, Yunis was to be "apprehended in international waters or airspace, remain solely in FBI custody, and avoid the territory of a sovereign nation."¹⁴

For his participation, Jamal Hamdan had a requirement: asylum for him and his entire family in the United States to protect them from retaliation after his role in delivering Yunis to the FBI became public. Enter the Department of State into the conversation. Because of Hamdan's record of drug dealing, "only after a great deal of discussion in Washington about this issue, was permission granted."¹⁵

Within CTC, Dewey relied on Howard, as chief of CTC's Special Operations Group (CTC/SOG), and Bruce, a branch chief, to develop and oversee the initial planning. Two CTC staff officers (the coauthors) became part of the extraction team: Adam, as team leader and Vikki as his deputy. Adam brought operational, intelligence, maritime and paramilitary skills to bear while Vikki had

recent training in CTC operations and experience as an imagery analyst. Three other officers rounded out the team: Ed, a former Navy Seal, brought small-boat and navigation expertise; Denise had security and intelligence analysis experience; and Chris was a former police sniper.

In advance of the team's deployment to Cyprus, Howard met with Adam and Vikki to outline his and Dewey's expectations. At one point in the meeting, Howard referred to Vikki as a girl; she replied, "Call me what you want, but I'm not a girl." Shortly thereafter, while acknowledging "Vikki's" professionalism, Howard expressed regret to Adam for sending him out with a "feminist."

... and in the Field

With Yunis in Beirut and Hamdan in Cyprus, Beirut was ruled out for the extraction operation, in large part, because of the presence there of kidnapped US and other citizens being held for ransom by Hizbollah-associated groups. Plans instead focused on Cyprus. With Dewey at the helm in Washington, the senior on-site officer took the lead for the operational plans and decisions in the field.

With Cyprus confirmed as the jumping off point for the operation, extraction team members traveled separately to Nicosia as

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individual tourists. Once on the island, team members toured cities along the country's southern coast evaluating them for their potential utility in the operation. "Beach duty," according to Vikki. Locales scouted included Ayia Napa, Coral Bay, Larnaca, Limassol, and Paphos.

After visiting various places, Vikki and Adam met with CIA's senior officer on Cyprus to recommend Limassol. It was the second largest urban area (after Nicosia), the most populated municipality in Cyprus, had a main seaport, and its many small coves operationally enhanced concealment of the true nature of the mission.¹⁶ The senior officer concurred and forwarded the team's recommendation to CIA Headquarters. Limassol was selected.

Meeting with Hamdan, the senior officer instructed him to maintain contact with Yunis. The officer also worked with Hamdan's brother, Ahmad (a pseudonym), as he was known to and trusted by Yunis. As Clarridge noted, "We used Ahmad as a middleman in dealings with Yunis in Beirut and eventually he was brought to Cyprus to assist in the operation."¹⁷ On instructions, Hamdan invited Yunis to visit him in Cyprus on at least three occasions. During one visit, Yunis bragged about the Jordanian hijacking and his involvement in guarding TWA-847 hostages, a boast that was recorded and passed to the FBI and DOJ,

which had appealed for acquisition of solid evidence against Yunis.

According to Hamdan, Yunis was married with two young sons, was unemployed, and was in dire need of money.¹⁸ Given Yunis' financial straits, Hamdan was provided with cash to throw around, telling Yunis he knew people in the drug trade and might be able to arrange an introduction with "Joseph," a big-time drug dealer (a fictional character created for the sting).¹⁹ In one instance, having flashed a roll of money, Hamdan assured Yunis he could be rolling in cash if he was willing to work for Joseph.

Describing Joseph as extremely private, cautious, and guarded, Hamdan explained to Yunis that Joseph conducted his business from a luxury yacht, which his crew operated in international waters. Yunis expressed interest; he returned to Beirut to await a signal from Hamdan to return to Cyprus for the meeting with Joseph on his yacht just outside Cypriot territorial waters, where, instead of meeting Joseph, Yunis would encounter FBI special agents ready to take him into custody.²⁰

It sounded simple, yet operations rarely are simple. How best to get a willing, unsuspecting Yunis to a yacht stationed at least 12 miles off shore had to be addressed. The team determined that the sole option was rental of small boats on Cyprus. In researching

the prospects, the extraction team determined the majority of boat rentals came from local vendors who rented on an hourly basis and that the conditions of the boats were questionable at best.

Additional hurdles included: local boats lacked basic instrumentation, and their fuel capacity was extremely limited, as tourists tended to rent boats for a one or two hour excursion, usually remaining within sight of shore. Another complication: neither Yunis nor Hamdan could swim, and neither had been in a small boat or knew how to navigate.

With Limassol selected as the departure site, acting as cost-conscious tourists, extraction team members set about renting small motorboats. Rentals would be for one to two hours at a time, two or three times a day, from different vendors over several weeks. As team members arrived at the various rental locations wearing shorts and bathing suits and carrying picnic supplies, the rental site owners began to extend the time and distance in which their small boats could be rented. The owners probably assumed team members were seeking private, secluded locations for parties.

Initially there was concern that the rental business owners would become suspicious of the team's repeated patronage. It became apparent, however, that team members were actually a lucrative source

of income, and the owners did not have a problem with repeat rentals. As a side note, because rental boats tended to be well used and sometimes in poor shape, a propeller and compass were purchased locally, mounted each day when out of sight of the rental shack, and removed before returning a boat.

Extraction Planning

As the extraction team continued renting small boats in the Limassol area, Adam returned to Washington. In meetings, he recommended that, to be successful, the CIA portion of the operation would require the rental locally of three boats on the day of the extraction; each had to be capable of making the round trip to a point 12-plus miles offshore and back without raising concerns or undue attention. A fourth vessel, acquired earlier, was to be the putative Joseph's luxury yacht on which FBI special agents would, in international waters, await the arrival of Yunis and Hamdan.

No member of the extraction team could be present at the arrest, so Ahmad, who had no experience in boating, would need to be trained to pilot one of the small boats. Tentatively, the plan was for Ahmad and Hamdan to bring Yunis out to the yacht where he was to meet Joseph.²¹ Adam and the team proposed the following plan to officials in Washington:

The Name of "Joseph's Yacht"

In his memoir, Clarridge asserted that the yacht's name was *Skunk Kilo*, "a name that seemed to suit a drug baron." Rather, the name was a matter of happenstance according to a senior CTC officer aboard the USS *Butte* explained to Adam that the US Navy maintained continual radar watch around it to identify and track vessels that could pose a hazard to navigation or a threat to the *Butte*. Until positively identified, tracked vessels would be listed as a "Skunk" and given an alphabetic designation in the order of their appearance on the radar screen. "Joseph's" yacht happened to be the 11th vessel tracked that day and thus was named *Skunk Kilo*. An observer on the *Butte* thought this was the actual name of the yacht and, since then, the yacht on which the FBI arrested Yunis has been referred to as the *Skunk Kilo*.

The boats would, in effect, form a picket line from Limassol to the yacht. (See schematic.) First, was to be a 26-foot fishing boat to be crewed by Adam, Vikki, and Chris. Following at a good distance (and well out of sight) was a small boat, piloted by Ed and Denise. Ahmad, in the last boat, with Yunis and Hamdan, would follow until Ahmad saw the yacht. Planners in Washington approved the proposal.

A joint CIA-FBI team met in the Mediterranean, and took charge of an 81-foot luxury yacht. They sailed to rendezvous with the USS *Butte*, a US Navy

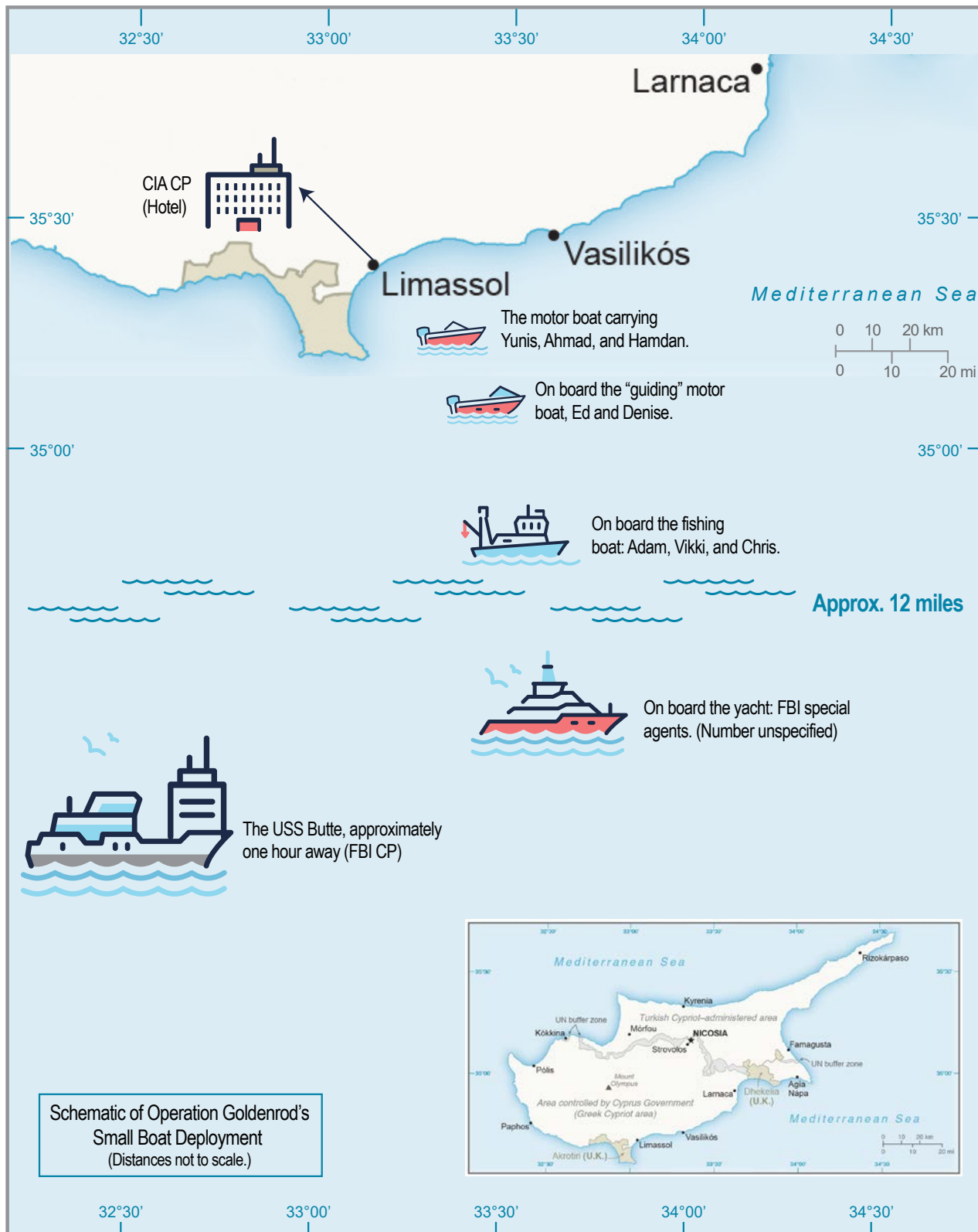
ammunition ship to which the captured Yunis would be taken. On reaching the Butte, the CIA officers went aboard, leaving the yacht in control of FBI special agents.²²

Ahmad's training was complicated by his lack of cover documents, which caused team members to decide he should not rent the boat he would operate. Moreover, the team worried that Ahmad could draw undue attention from Cypriot authorities if he was seen with a team member on a beach or while renting a boat. To work around these problems, the team rented a boat, then they met Ahmad at a location away from populated beaches.

The team knew Ahmad would need to learn how to navigate to a specific point under unknown weather conditions to locate and link up with Joseph's yacht (a yacht no team member had seen). All of Ahmad's training had to occur well beyond the shoreline. Ahmad proved to be a quick learner and, within weeks, had become familiar with basic navigation, docking, and trouble-shooting. Only on the morning of the operation did team members learn that Ahmad was exceptionally nervous because he, too, did not know how to swim.

As Ahmad's training continued, decisionmakers in Washington, DC, including Director of Operations Clair George and Clarridge, met and decided on September 13, 1987 as D-Day.

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Dewey further recalled: “On the way back to Headquarters following yet another interagency meeting, Clair turned to me and said, ‘I think you better go and out run this one.’”²³ The FBI’s “Buck” Revell supervised from aboard the Butte. In his memoir, Revell noted that, on September 7, while en route to National Airport, he received a call from Attorney General Edwin Meese. Revell recounted, “Meese told me that the President was enthusiastic about Operation Goldenrod and it was definitely a go.”²⁴

Dewey arrived in Limassol wearing a white safari suit, its pocket embroidered, as was his custom, with initials. He was accompanied by Howard and a communication specialist. Like the extraction team, they traveled as tourists. All three registered in the Sheraton Limassol, a luxury waterfront hotel that had recently opened, with some areas still under construction.²⁵ Dewey and the communications specialist were ensconced on the top floor in the hotel’s largest suite. The suite filled with people and equipment including satellite communication (SATCOM) gear, whose antenna was directed—unobtrusively the team hoped—toward the living room window. Dewey recalled:

We had enciphered SATCOM links to CIA Headquarters in northern Virginia which, in turn, had a relay to the White House, FBI, and State Depart-

ment. The US Military Command in Stuttgart, Germany, insisted on monitoring our communications because of its responsibility for the USS Butte, and, of course, we established communications with the Bureau’s command center on the USS Butte, which had communications with the Skunk Kilo. We also had less powerful handheld radios for communications among the suite, small guide (picket) boat and the lead boat (fishing boat).²⁶

The hotel offered unique advantages and disadvantages. Typically, tourists to Cyprus arrive with a suitcase, camera, and sunscreen, not large aluminum boxes of telecommunications equipment (this was years before laptops and cell phones.) Being newly opened, the hotel had few guests and furnishings, and bulky objects were still being delivered to it, allowing Dewey to explain away the aluminum boxes as containers for photographic equipment.

One disadvantage was that the manager was so delighted to have a big spender from the United States renting his suite, that he kept sending gifts to the room. Each time a hotel employee came bearing food, drink, or flowers from the manager, people and gear had to be moved out of sight of the doorway. With the team meeting to review plans in Dewey’s suite, Vikki solved the problem by donning one of the suite’s bathrobes, strategically

draping her clothes over furniture in such a way as to be obvious from the doorway, put a towel over her head as if just washed, and answered the door.

Vikki then left the suite for a short time to meet Ed, Denise, and Chris outside of the hotel to update them on the discussions with Dewey and group. On returning, she was instructed to put on a robe because she had been meeting the team members, another delivery was made and this time Dewey had to don a robe. Probably realizing he was interrupting a private party, the manager stopped sending gifts!²⁷

In contrast to Dewey’s group, the team members continued to act as frugal tourists, moving several times from one small hotel to another. They dressed in beach garb and got around the island on motorcycles or jeeps. No luxury beachfront hotels for the extraction team.

Final Stages

Days before the operation was to commence, Dewey learned from the senior officer on Cyprus that Yunis had reached the island, but, because Cypriot authorities had him on a watch list, they were searching for him in hotels and other locations. The officer, then questioned whether it was prudent to go forward. It would be bad luck if Yunis were to be picked up

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by the authorities; yet worse was the possibility the extraction team could be compromised. Traveling in Cyprus with no diplomatic immunity, the extraction team could find itself in an uncomfortable Cypriot jail if apprehended.

During a somber and tense meeting at an outdoor restaurant, Adam reported that Ahmad had become proficient enough to follow the guide boat, manned by Ed and Denise, to within sight of the yacht. Vikki assured Dewey the rental of the fishing boat had been secured and team members were ready. "Everything and everyone was in position."²⁸

Later that day, Adam and Vikki rented a small boat and picked up Howard at the hotel's dock. While out on a general area familiarization for Howard and to discuss any issues he or Dewey might have away from potential eavesdroppers, Howard asked Vikki why she had taken offense at being called a girl. She informed Howard she was too old to be called a girl and that she would never think to refer to him or Adam as a boy. Howard chuckled, said he respected the answer, and would never call her a girl again. And he never did.

Dewey instructed the senior officer that Hamdan, Yunis, and Ahmad should move from the apartment where they were staying. Thus, on Friday, September 11, two days before the operation was to commence, the three of them

checked into the same hotel in Limassol in which Dewey and his group were staying. "It was risky to have him check into a hotel, where his passport would be recorded," but by making the move at the start of a weekend, it was hoped no one would check passports in a high-priced tourist hotel until Monday—after Yunis had been arrested and was en route to the United States.²⁹

On Saturday, Adam and Vikki were called to a meeting in Dewey's suite. Initially declining, citing security reasons, they were overruled. Hopping on a motorcycle, dressed in days-old beach wear, they entered the hotel. With Dewey taking the lead, the senior officer on Cyprus, Howard, Adam, Vikki, and the communication specialist focused on a final review of plans and a last chance to express concerns. There were none. Before leaving, Dewey wished Adam and Vikki good luck for the next day's operation. Vikki surprised all present by responding, "We don't need luck. This is going to work."

Howard accompanied Vikki and Adam downstairs and, while standing in the lobby, Yunis, Hamdan and Ahmad entered through the hotel's revolving door. Vikki pointed the three out to Howard and Adam, specifically identifying Yunis. Adam asked, "How do you know?" Vikki replied, "His photo has been on my desk for over a year." As the three CTC officers left the hotel through the

same revolving door, they looked back into the lobby and saw Yunis and friends watching them!

Adam and Vikki then met with Ed, Denise, and Chris. Adam told the team that, based on his 25 or so years of experience, tomorrow's D-Day would be an opportunity the likes of which might never appear in most careers. Like a championship game, it would have a definite beginning and end, and there would be no do-overs. It would be our Super Bowl and, if we did not succeed, we would always look back and think of what we might have done differently. That evening, still acting their parts as tourists—at the same time, making an opportunity to check for surveillance—Adam and Vikki attended the Cyprus Wine Festival (and picked up shot glasses to prove it).

By September 12, the final stage of the operation brought encrypted communications to the forefront. The CIA command post in the Sheraton was led by Dewey and the senior officer in Cyprus. Revell's FBI command post, including a senior CTC officer, was in place on the *Butte*. FBI special agents were aboard the yacht, awaiting Yunis and Hamdan's arrival the next day, after which the yacht would sail to rendezvous with the *Butte* at a prearranged location, about an hour's sail away.³⁰

Meanwhile, DCI Webster was on an official visit to Israel. An encrypted satellite network allowed

Webster and the FBI's command post to establish direct contact with Dewey and enabled direct encrypted communications with Langley and the White House.

If all went as planned, it would be smooth sailing. What could go wrong? Well, there had been no opportunity for a dress rehearsal, much less to train together with FBI counterparts already on the yacht. Team members had trained Ahmad to pilot a small boat and conduct basic navigation, yet security concerns prevented Ahmad from practicing to dock his boat at the hotel's pier, much less with a yacht. Except for pre-paying the day before to rent the fishing boat, there was no way to know which small boats Ed or Denise could rent until the morning of the operation.

A further complication arose after someone in Washington determined the fishing boat, guide boat, yacht, and CIA command post did not need radio communications with each other. Fortunately, this changed after a last-minute meeting in Washington. Adam was given a pair of encrypted handheld radios—one for the fishing boat and one for the guide boat—that could link up with the yacht and the hotel's command center. These radios would prove critical.

September 13: Showtime!

D-Day for Operation Goldenrod arrived and brought with it less than ideal conditions, including heavy haze, mist, and overcast skies. Before sunrise, Adam, Vikki, and Chris arrived dockside to board the boat they had reserved and paid for the previous day. Wearing bathing suits covered by light shirts and carrying fishing gear as they boarded, they found an occupant asleep inside. They woke him by noisily bringing their gear on board.

The three also brought on detailed navigation charts, the encrypted radio they had just received, binoculars and a rudimentary, locally purchased handheld radio-direction-finder.

Later that morning, Ed, the former Navy SEAL, rented a small speedboat and then picked up Ahmad at a prearranged spot on the shore, well beyond sight of the rental shack. They changed the propeller, brought onboard a portable gas tank, then piloted the boat within sight of the hotel. Ed jumped overboard and swam to the hotel, where he met Denise. Ahmad docked the boat at the hotel to wait for Yunis and Hamdan. Denise and Ed drove to a different rental shack and got the small boat they would use to guide Ahmad to the luxury yacht and piloted it to a location about five miles off shore, where it would be in line with the yacht's expected position.

At the hotel, Howard was seated in a chair near the boats, assuming the look of a proper tourist. As Yunis and Hamdan made their way to meet Ahmad at the pier, Howard positively identified Yunis and signaled the CIA command center, which in turn sent a message to all participants via SATCOM that the extraction was under way. The message, Dewey noted, "also asked CIA Headquarters to activate the complex plan to move Hamdan's extended family out of the Middle East to the United States. Tickets, funds, and necessary visas had been positioned for this moment."³¹

Twelve miles off shore is a long way for a small boat—well beyond sight of land—where even a luxury yacht looks tiny, if visible at all, from that distance on open water.³² Moreover, the morning fog lingered. Dewey recalled the challenges in his memoir in this way:

Right away things started going awry. We had major problems with both navigation and communications. The picket [fishing] boat reported that it had been unable to find the Skunk Kilo, which had drifted off its designated longitude and latitude. Finally, sporadic communication was established between the yacht and the picket boat, and eventually the picket boat established a visual on the yacht.

Meanwhile, the speedboat with Yunis was roaring out to sea,

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The authors reconnoitered the island using small rental boats. This photograph of the authors on a rented fishing boat was taken shortly after Yunis had been arrested. (Authors' collection)

following the lead boat with the couple aboard. Because the Skunk Kilo was out of position, the picket boat was out of position. Thus the longitude and latitude that the lead boat was headed for to make the rendezvous was incorrect. Moreover, the picket boat, the lead boat, and the suite were experiencing intermittent communication blackouts with the handheld radios. The lead boat could not maintain communications with the picket boat long enough to get a fix on what its new course had to be to reach the yacht. Coupled with the extremely hazy

conditions, which made visual navigation difficult, we had the makings of a major disaster. ³³

To his credit, when plans were not going as designed, Dewey did not panic. While many of the participants asked for updates or progress reports, Dewey let the extraction team figure things out. Those on the fishing boat thought the lack of communication with the hotel/command post signaled Dewey's confidence in the team. It was not until his memoir was published in 1997 that team members would learn how often those in the command post had continually, yet unsuccessfully, attempted

to communicate with the team. Howard later mentioned to Adam that, when communications were unsuccessful in reaching the fishing boat or guide boat, Dewey told those in their command post that "we will catch that guy if we had to go all the way to Beirut to do it, and we don't need advice from those not on the scene."

The wake of a passing Russian freighter that Adam presumed was en route to Limassol, gave Adam a data point that allowed him to reorient the team members. Having received no information, not even a photo, with which to identify the

Skunk Kilo, identification of the yacht was established using the hand-held radios. After spotting the yacht, one of several in the vicinity, Adam radioed to ask someone on the yacht to raise its sails. Up went the sails. Then he asked to have the sails lowered. Down they went. Identity confirmed.

Meanwhile, on the guide boat, Ed and Denise knew something was wrong—they were too far out to sea and had surely overshot the *Skunk Kilo* and the fishing boat. Ed took the initiative to turn back, with Ahmad following at a considerable distance.³⁴ On that boat, Yunis was getting nervous about being at sea for so long, with no sight of the yacht. After turning back, Ed reestablished radio contact with Adam on the fishing boat.

Adam asked Ed if they had seen the Russian freighter. Indeed, they had. With the additional data point on the freighter's location, Adam was able to calibrate a new course to the yacht for the guide boat leading Ahmad. Thanks to some crude radio direction-finding using a wire coat hanger and ingenious piloting by Ed and Denise, Ahmad delivered Yunis and Hamdan to the yacht.

Upon arrival, they were welcomed, according to Dewey, by two bikini-clad women, frisked, and then “slammed” to the deck and formally arrested by FBI men. (CIA had recommended the FBI agents treat Hamdan and Yunis with equal

severity so as to maintain Hamdan's cover.³⁵)

Aftermath

Initially, the Operations Center in the hotel was to be dismantled as Dewey's group checked out. Extraction team members would separate and catch various flights out of Cyprus and eventually reconnect in Washington, DC. Dewey had another plan, as he instructed the extraction team, via radio, to meet in the hotel parking lot before leaving Cyprus. “For security reasons, we could have only the briefest celebration, a hand-shake with the participants who had been operating outside of the hotel suite.”³⁶ As Dewey handed out cigars to the men in the team, Vikki asked if she and Denise were to get cigars as well. Dewey replied “These are expensive ones. Are you really going to smoke it?” The ladies got their cigars.

At the airport, team members pretended not to know each other as they awaited flights to various European locations. As Murphy's Law would have it, Adam and Vikki ended up on the same flight (different rows) but could not relax until they were out of Cypriot airspace, a moment delayed by their aircraft's late departure. As a result, the two missed a connecting flight to the United States and ended up at an airport hotel in yet another European city. Because the earliest flight they could get to the United

States did not leave until the next afternoon, Vikki shopped in the morning, while Adam enjoyed a true European breakfast.

Meanwhile, back in the Mediterranean Sea, after Yunis's capture, Revell had sped to the yacht on a launch from the *Butte*. Revell recounted, “I could see Yunis sitting on the deck handcuffed.... Once aboard, I could see it was him.”³⁷ Yunis, Hamdan, Revell, and some of the FBI special agents boarded the launch for transfer to the *Butte*. Four days later, Yunis was transferred to the USS *Saratoga* aircraft carrier.³⁸ From the *Saratoga*, Yunis, an FBI special agent, and a physician were flown aboard a Navy aircraft to the United States. The 13-hour flight required two mid-air refuelings.³⁹

Operation Goldenrod, although not its operational name, made the television evening news on three Washington, DC, channels shortly thereafter. The *Washington Post* published an article on September 18, 1987, entitled “FBI Dupes Terror Suspect, Brings Him to US for Trial.”⁴⁰

Days after Yunis's arrival in the United States, Vice President George H.W. Bush invited CIA and FBI participants to the vice president's home at the Naval Observatory for an after-action report and to thank those involved. “The only photograph that exists of the event shows just the backs of the heads of the participants, for

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security reasons.”⁴¹ It was memorable when Barbara Bush came out to the porch, welcomed the arrivals (including Dewey by name), then took off jogging. After the meeting ended, Mrs. Bush rejoined the group and asked Adam, “How do you want your eggs cooked?”

Yunis was tried in federal court, found guilty in October 1989, and sentenced to 30 years in prison. He was released on February 18, 2005, after serving 16 years, and deported to Lebanon.⁴²

Results

The arrest and prosecution of a foreign national terrorist was a priority for President Reagan and his administration. In announcing Yunis’s arrest, then-Attorney General Edwin Meese called the arrest a unilateral action by the United States” and “an important step in our policy of bringing terrorists to justice.”⁴³ Operation Goldenrod’s success set a precedent for future operations against terrorists. It marked the first time the United States went outside its territory to arrest a known terrorist abroad, and it demonstrated the United States could undertake proactive, credible operations against terrorists overseas. Operation Goldenrod proved to terrorists and other nations that the United States could go it alone in devising and carrying out unilateral capture operations with no other nation’s involvement. Writer Steven

Emerson observed in a May 1989 *Penthouse* article on the operation’s significance:

*It is a story whose lessons have reverberated throughout the world, as terrorists have been put on notice that they are safe nowhere, that the long arm of the American law can and will reach them no matter where they are. As a result, U.S. intelligence officials say that several known international terrorists are now afraid to travel freely overseas and are keeping a lower profile. Equally important, the success of the operation demonstrated that the U.S. can mount an aggressive attack against terrorists, and that if no other country can be depended on to help the U.S., then American agents will go it alone.*⁴⁴

Within the IC, Operation Goldenrod displayed unprecedented inter-agency collaboration. It demonstrated US intelligence, federal law enforcement, and defense entities under White House and National Security Council guidance could work jointly to confront foreign-based terrorism. While this article focuses on CIA’s role in Operation Goldenrod, its ultimate success involved DoJ/DEA; DoJ/FBI, DoD/Navy; DoD/NSA (oversaw communication interactions), State Department, the Justice Department (in prosecuting Yunis in US Federal court) NSC and, ultimately, the White House

for its approval to undertake the operation.

LESSONS LEARNED

Every plan has its snags; this operation was no exception. A few observations are offered as possible aids in planning future, unilateral (maritime) extractions.

Personnel

The extraction team had time to plan and rehearse its role in the operation. Team members were provided appropriate mission tasking and clear guidelines while, at the same time, they were encouraged to apply their own expertise to solve problems as they developed. Lines of responsibility among the team members were clearly delineated.

Operational Planning

The fast-breaking, sometimes changing, requirements; participation of several CIA components (CTC, maritime, communications); and, involvement of other federal government entities precluded working-level advance coordination for those actually participating in the rendezvous. The extraction team had no opportunity to plan and rehearse the most critical phase of the operation—to locate the yacht and deliver the terrorist to the FBI in international waters. Extraction team members had no opportunity to see the yacht before the operation, which would have



A patch commemorating the capture and delivery to justice of Fawaz Yunis. An image of the patch appears on the US Naval Institute's Instagram site with a brief account of the distance record-setting flight of a Navy S-3 Viking from the USS *Saratoga* to the United States.

assisted in its identification on the day of the operation.

Given that FBI personnel alone were required to make the arrest of Yunis, there nevertheless was no planning or rehearsals with the FBI yacht crew before the onset of the operation. It would also have been helpful to have available appropriate intelligence resources at CTC. Overhead photography of the beach areas, for example, would have allowed the extraction team to accurately plot locations of launch points.

On-Site Preparations

The necessity of training and rehearsals cannot be overstated. Each time extraction team members

rented a small boat and trained away from the shore, new aspects were identified that could be applied in the final planning phase.

Team members planned and practiced to meet a number of contingencies that could arise during the locate-and-deliver phase of the operation as well as training Ahmad who piloted Yunis and Hamdan to the yacht.

On-site, planning was modified and refined several times to reflect changes of policy or refinement to the ground rules resulting from inter-agency discussions in Washington, DC. Because the mission required precise timing and coordination,

various elements had to be locked in for early mobilization, thus denying last minute modifications of the scenario or equipment.

Communications

Extraction team members should have been involved in evaluating and selecting communication equipment because of the distance to be traveled from shoreline into international waters. Instead, they were given digital voice, privacy handheld radios just days before the operation.

Navigation

With the operation under way, CIA extraction team members realized that FBI agents on the yacht had only a hand-held radio with limited range with which to establish contact with CIA officers on the fishing and guide boats. A secure communication package could have facilitated contact between the yacht and the two boats. This is less an issue in today's world, given the availability of satellite links.

The boats used by the extraction team had no instruments beyond marine compasses, purchased locally. A hand-held radio-direction-finder (medium wave and beacon bands) could have helped team members fix positions between the fishing boat and guide boat relative to the coast by keying on the major beacons in the area while the operation was under way.

Additional Sources

The majority of public information on Operation Goldenrod focuses on the role of the FBI; little other than a chapter in Clarridge's memoir, *A Spy for All Seasons* (1997), has addressed the actions undertaken by CIA and CTC officers. Almost a year to the date after Operation Goldenrod, a *U.S. News & World Report* cover story—also written by Steven Emerson—entitled “The Capture of a Terrorist,”

discussed FBI and Navy participation. Emerson's May 1989 *Penthouse* magazine article, entitled “Operation Goldenrod,” provided similar information. Two years later, in April 1991, Emerson, writing for the *New York Times*, described the capture of Mohammed Rashid, mentioned early in this article.

The senior FBI special agent on the scene, Oliver “Buck” Revell, focused on Operation Goldenrod

in his memoir, *A G-Man's Journal* (Chapter 15, “An Overseas Success and Trouble at Home”).⁴⁵ Goldenrod was a feature story on the History Channel as well as the television series *F.B.I. Files* (season 6, episode 18) on the Discovery Channel—Clarridge offered his insights in that 50-minute film. Finally, the FBI's public website features Operation Goldenrod in its “Famous Cases and Criminals” section of its history. ■

Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1985* (October 1986), 11–20 and 33–40.
2. Duane Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons* (Scribner paperback edition, 2002; first published in 1997), 350. The chapter in Clarridge's memoir dealing with the operation, "Chapter 11: Bring 'Em Back Alive—or Not," runs from page 347 to 360; Exclusive Report, "The Capture of a Terrorist," and Steven Emerson with Richard Rothschild, "Taking on Terrorists," both in *U.S. News and World Report*: September 12, 1988.
3. PUBLIC LAW 99-399—99th Congress—AUG. 27, 1986, "CHAPTER 113A—EXTRATERRITORIAL JURISDICTION OVER TERRORIST ACTS ABROAD AGAINST UNITED STATES NATIONALS
4. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/fawaz-younis>; Wikipedia.org/wiki/Fawaz_Yunis.
5. U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1986* (October 1987), inside cover.
6. Mohammed Rashid's capture was discussed in detail in the *New York Times*: Steven Emerson, "Capture of a Terrorist": 21 April 1991.
7. Clarridge, 350–51.
8. *Ibid.*, 351.
9. *Ibid.*, 351 and 347–60.
10. Director Casey suffered two seizures in December 1986 and never returned to his office. He died on May 6, 1987; William Webster, who had been serving as director of FBI (1978–May 25, 1987) was sworn in on May 26, 1987.
11. Oliver Revell and Dwight Williams, *A G-Man's Journal* (Atria, 1998), 266 and Clarridge, 324.
12. Clarridge, 351.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 351–52.
16. Wikipedia, Wikipedia.org/wiki/Limassol; U.S. News and World Report, 29; Clarridge, 350.
17. Clarridge, 353.
18. *Ibid.*, 350.
19. Revel and Williams, 265–70; Clarridge, 352–53.
20. Revel and Williams, 269; Clarridge, 354.
21. Revel and Williams, 267; Clarridge, 353.
22. Clarridge, 353.
23. *Ibid.*, 352.
24. Revel and Williams, 269.
25. Clarridge, 355
26. *Ibid.*, 355–56.
27. *Ibid.*, 356.
28. *Ibid.*, 355.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Steven Emerson, "Operation Goldenrod," *Penthouse Magazine*, May 1989, 110.)
31. Clarridge, 356–57.
32. *Ibid.*, 353.
33. *Ibid.*, 357.
34. *Ibid.*, 357–58.
35. *Ibid.*, 358.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Revel and Williams, 272.
38. Revel and Williams, 272, and *U.S. News & World Report*, 34.
39. Revel and Williams, 275, and *U.S. News & World Report*, 34..
40. George Lardner, Jr. and Nancy Lewis, "FBI Dupes Terror Suspect, Brings Him to US for Trial," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1987.
41. Clarridge, 359, and Revel and Williams, 275–76.
42. Fawaz_Yunis: OPERATION GOLDENROD, at <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/fawaz-younis>.
43. George Lardner, Jr. and Nancy Lewis, "FBI Dupes Terror Suspect, Brings Him to US for Trial," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1987.
44. Emerson, "Operation Goldenrod," 118.
45. Revel and Williams, 264–67. ■

