

# What We Must Learn From the 'Bloodiest Battle in Arab-Israeli History'

In less than a month, Israelis will celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of the biggest military victories of all time—the Six-Day War. As a tribute to what many see as God's victory, CBN Documentaries produced *In Our Hands: The Battle for Jerusalem*.

The docudrama tells the story of Israel's victory in the city during the 1967 Six-Day War through the eyes of the paratroopers.

CBN's Scott Ross interviewed the film's writer and director, Erin Zimmerman, at Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem.

"Ammunition Hill is the site of what is still today the bloodiest battle in Arab-Israeli history," Zimmerman said.

Working with a cast and crew of more than 200 mostly Israelis, Zimmerman said they had the run of Ammunition Hill for two-and-a-half nights to reenact the four-hour battle that turned the tide for Israel.

"We had snipers shooting from the bunkers. We had them crawl through the grass, up the hill, through the barbed wire," Zimmerman said.

"They even showed us the original bunker. The battle, kind of, ended when the Israelis got to the top of the hill and they found the Jordanian command bunker, and they took 21 pounds of TNT and blew that sucker into next week," she said.

"And so they showed us that and they said, 'Well, you're welcome to use this bunker again to stage your explosion,' and we thought 'Great! You know, if it survived a real explosion,

it can survive a fake movie one,'" she said.

*Click here to get tickets for "In Our Hands: The Battle for Jerusalem"*

Based entirely on facts, the film includes dramatizations of important scenes—like Commander Motta Gur talking to troops on the Mount of Olives.

"We are sitting on a ridge, overlooking the Old City, and soon we shall enter it. The Old City of Jerusalem, which generations have dreamed of and longed for—we will be the first to enter," Gur told his troops at the time.

In other scenes, they ran through streets of Jerusalem's Old City under threat of sniper fire to take the Western Wall and Temple Mount where Gur proclaimed his famous words:

"Har HaBayit B'Yadeinu [the Temple Mount is in our hands]," from where the film *In Our Hands* takes its title.

"We had done another docudrama, *The Hope*, about the beginning of Israel and we thought, 'What's the next chapter in that story?'" Zimmerman explained. "We went to '67 and it's such a great story and we thought, 'Let's not do a dry documentary. Let's get to know some of the men who actually lived it.'"

The docudrama combines the use of historical films and photos, interviews with paratroopers who fought in the battle as well as dramatizations of important scenes.

Zimmerman said she used primary sources like diaries, minutes from Israeli government meetings and personal interviews to write the dialogue in the film.

As a result of the war, modern Israel tripled in size—beating the combined armies of Syria, Egypt and Jordan to win the Golan Heights, the Sinai Desert, Judea and Samaria, and reuniting beloved Jerusalem.

"To cover the whole war would take too much time. So we narrowed it down to the battle of Jerusalem, and then we narrowed it down further to one group of men, the 55th paratrooper brigade," Zimmerman said.

"I really liked them because they weren't regular army. They were the reservists. They were a little bit older. They were the husbands and the fathers and the businessmen, and they were the guys that ended up going into Jerusalem," she added.

"These actors are very realistic," Ross said. "Did it have an effect on the actors themselves because it's more than just history? In many cases, [it's] their fathers, their grandfathers they're depicting. How did they respond to that?" he asked.

"I had a lot of guys tell me their personal family histories. I had so many guys say to me, 'Oh, my grandfather was in the Holocaust,'" Zimmerman said. "In one case, Sharon Friedman, who played Motta Gur, said his grandfather was one of the guys who fought for Jerusalem in '48 and saw the whole siege and everything."

From start to finish, Zimmerman worked on the film for just a year. She said one of the things that interested her most was the response to the paratroopers when they arrived in Jerusalem.

"They were heroes. These families came out. Now, keep in mind there was also a blackout because of the Jordanian shelling. There was all of that going on and still these women would come out of their houses with food," she said.

In another scene, the paratroopers are hosted in homes for a meal by Jewish residents of Jerusalem, whom they didn't necessarily know. The grandmother in one home gives a paratrooper an Israeli flag that had flown in the Old City before the Jews were run out by the Jordanians in 1948.

"The little woman who came and offered up the flag—she wanted that flag to be used and flown at the Western Wall," Ross commented. "That brought tears to my eyes."

"Oddly enough, the paratrooper, Yoram Zamosh, who's part of that story, I asked him, 'Did you ever see that family again?' And he said 'we did.' And he said a few months after the war, the old grandmother passed away," Zimmerman recalled.

"It was like she was waiting. She had lived through getting kicked out of her home in '48 and she'd lived through all of that hoping to see Jerusalem reunited," she added.

Ross asked Zimmerman how the film affected her personally.

"From the film side, I learned what an amazing thing can happen when everybody works together and you have so many good people doing what is their specialty, whether it's training the army, whether it's doing make-up, whether it's doing explosives," she said.

"What I took away from the war—there are two things you can do in life: You can practice and plan and plan and just the hard work and living something to see that result come out the way that it did. Or you can be in a situation like the paratroopers where you train for one thing. Then life throws you another way, and can you adapt to that?" she added.

Zimmerman said she wants the audience to take away two things.

"I tried hard to keep it as apolitical as possible to give it a wider audience. So No. 1, I want them to see the sacrifice that these men made," she said.

"No. 2, we went back 20 years to 1948 to what happened when the Jewish Quarter fell and the Jordanians ethnically cleansed every Jew from the Old City of Jerusalem."

"And then at the end of this segment, the Jordanian officer says we have so completely destroyed this place that no Jew

can ever return here. So then we fast forward 19 years and show how they did," she said of the Israelis' return to the city.

Zimmerman said she hopes Israelis will "take away a pride in their heritage."

"And after all the blood-letting and everything else that's occurred here historically, there's no way that Israel, Jews are going to give up this city?" Ross asked.

"No. I don't think so, no," Zimmerman said. "I mean, [then Israeli Defense minister] Moshe Dayan said it when he got to the Western Wall. 'We've come to the city, never to depart from it again.'"

{eoa}

Copyright The Christian Broadcasting Network, Inc., All rights reserved.