

The "One" Squadron's "Yom Kippur" War

Israeli Air Force

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October 1973, the "One" Squadron which began the "Yom Kippur" war with remnants of euphoria from its actions in the 1967 "Six Day" War, lost seven airmen, 14 others were taken captive and its commander was injured and replaced in the midst of intensive combat.

43 years have passed since the "Yom Kippur" War, which surprised the state of Israel and the IDF. The presumption was that as a result of the crushing victory of the 1967 "Six Day" War, the Arab states wouldn't initiate another war against Israel. "At 13:58, when most of the squadron members were busy preparing to attack the T-4 airport, the siren sounded. A first formation of four took off and two more followed. In seconds, the squadron was empty. Only once we received permission to patrol over crucial areas and search for enemy jets, it became clear – a war had begun", the F-4 Phantom squadron's book describes the first minutes of the campaign.

A Local Matter

In 2003, 30 years after the war, then IAF Commander, Lt. Gen (Res.) Dan Halutz, wrote about those moments in the eyes of a young reservist in the squadron. "October 6, 1973, Saturday morning, 'Yom Kippur'. At about 06:45 I awoke to the roar of a jet engine in low flight over my house. In the beginning, still foggy, I thought that it was another routine sortie. Quite quickly I recalled that it was Saturday, and 'Yom Kippur', the holy day and it became clear to me that it was no routine sortie. From the window I saw an A-4 Skyhawk flying low. 'Something happened', I said to Irit, my wife. I got dressed and decide to walk down to the closest payphone and check what happened.

A call on the intercom stopped me in my tracks. 'Who is it?' I ask. 'It's Shmueli, I'm here to bring you to the squadron'. Shmueli, a young WSO from the squadron, was sent to bring me. What happened, why, for how long? The questions hung in the air. Shmueli didn't have any answers. We get in the car and make haste to the squadron. On the way we meet Gal Yohar, another WSO, who joins us and rushes us to go faster so we don't miss an interesting sortie. We are all sure that it was a local matter and it was clear to us that if we wouldn't get there on time, we would miss it".



"A first formation of four took off and two more followed" | Archive Photo

Into the Inferno

On the second day of the war, the squadron experienced a dramatic event. The Operation Order for Operation "Model 5", to destroy Syrian missile batteries, was sent down from IAF HQ to a number of different squadrons, the "One" among them, whose personnel began planning the operation. It very quickly became apparent to the planners that the flight path was problematic as a result of the multiple threats it held for the squadron's aircraft. The results were harsh: in only five minutes, six of the squadron's aircraft were hit – four of them were abandoned by their crews and some of the airmen were taken captive, two others were hit but managed to safely land in Ramat-David AFB.



An Egyptian MiG, seconds before crashing & an F-4 Phantom turning to the next MiG | Archive Photo

In His Way

During the war, the Squadron's command was held by three different commanders. When the war broke out, the Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Yiftah Semel was in the U.S, so his deputy, Brig. Gen. (Res.) Ron Huldai, took his place. Shortly after Lt. Col. (Res.) Semel returned and took over the command once again, he ejected from his aircraft, was injured and was replaced by Maj. Gen. (Res.) Eitan Ben Eliyahu, then head of a Branch in the IAF's operational HQ and a former deputy commander of the squadron who later went on to become IAF Commander. When he was appointed, he was told by Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amos Lapidot, then the squadron's AFB Commander: "I suggest that we give the squadron a day off". "Under absolutely no circumstances", shot back Maj. Gen. (Res.) Ben Eliyahu. "There will be no recess of flights".

"Fine", said Lapidot. "But let's agree that in the next few days the squadron will receive missions of a lower operational class". "Amos, I want you to understand me", answered Ben Eliyahu while his face went red. "I have no intention for you to force my squadron to rest, it doesn't matter what you call it". "Oh alright", sighed Lapidot, "Do it your way".

And he surely did. Even though the squadron lost 40 percent of its airmen and more jets than any other F-4 Phantom squadron, when the war ended, the "One" Squadron had downed more enemy aircraft than any other squadron. In 2013, the squadron inaugurated a monument for the squadron members who fell in the war. Beside the names, a silhouette of the "Sufa" (F-16I) is etched on the monument, the jet operated by the "One" Squadron today, with which it continues to write the squadron's story in the pages of history.



A "Sufa" F-16I Jet from the "One" Squadron | Archive Photo