

## CAPTAIN YORAM (ZANDBERG) HARPAZ Z"L

*The boy who devoted his life to the skies*

As Eliezer Zandberg walked with his wife and a young daughter on his final journey, from the Kutno ghetto to a pit, he looked straight ahead at his murderers and said in his heart: You cannot have me! I was killed, these two precious and pure souls by my side you will murder, the members of my community will be buried in this pit that opens at our feet, hundreds and thousands of the communities of Israel will be destroyed – but the victory of Israel will be forever. For this people of ours, whom you are plotting to annihilate under the name of the Lord, has put deep stakes in the land of his fathers and there he will renew his days as before. From the bereavement and the sea of death, a new generation will be forged, who will marvel the whole world with his deeds. And to me – a portion and an inheritance in the resurrection that will take place, because the murderer will not touch my two sons. My eldest son – Yehoshua, lives in the land of his ancestors and his younger brother Mordechai will get there when the day comes. I'm sure he will. Although it upsets you, the generations of our lineage will continue to live and within them tens and hundreds of thousands of our sons. And this people will live!

And Eliezer Zandberg, one of the leaders of the Kutno community and his loved ones, knew what his heart expressed. For from the dawn of their childhood he planted in the hearts of his sons a love for Zion and was privileged to see them grow and the seed he had planted in their souls sprouted and grew a blessed fruit. Both are active in a national Zionist youth movement, both calling for a challenge to the malefactor<sup>1</sup> who will lock the gates of the homeland before them. The eldest son forced his way through the checkpoints and then took his young wife with him and brought her to a safe shore. And when the first attempt failed, and she was imprisoned in Bethlehem prison and then returned to the Diaspora by order of the foreign government, he got up and returned to his hometown and took her out again. They are now free people in the great Hebrew city and awaiting the birth of their first child, his first grandson.

In the same year that the Kutno community was destroyed, its eight thousand martyrs from old age to adolescence suffocated in the gas chambers, a descendant of one of its respected families was born in Tel Aviv, and his father Yehoshua Zandberg called him Yoram.

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25 years after, the world stood in awe and amazement at the heroic deeds of the Israeli Air Force, which within three hours landed a crushing blow on the enemies of the State of Israel and together with the ground soldiers ensured its continued existence and future. The heroism of Israel was carried by everyone. The great powers of the world were struck in shock, at this proof of the secret strength of the isolated and small among the

neighboring countries. Aviation experts from all over the world have raised the speculation that Israeli pilots used a secret weapon to strike enemy targets with amazing precision. Tough military men and sober statesmen secretly pondered in their hearts that they were witnesses to a miracle they could not comprehend.



Captain Yoram  
(Zandberg) Harpaz

In vain did they search for the secret weapon in the wonders of technology and thick science books. In vain did they rummage through political and military documents. If we were asked, we would refer them to the sources of the blood and tears of this people, to the books of remembrance compiled in memory of the Jewish communities that were destroyed by the people who increased technology in the twentieth century, and instituted scientific methods in the death factory he established to murder an entire people. These gloomy and mourning books will reveal to them the secret of the IDF's victory, the secret of the supreme heroism of the Israeli Air Force pilots in June 1967. Over their pages are portraits of Jews with beards and wigs, bent over Torah scrolls, pictures of young men and women huddled under a blue-and-white flag spread on a wall in a Zionist youth movement's nest, in one of the Diaspora towns. Illegal immigrants to Mandate Palestine aboard a rickety ship sailing across the waves on its way to break the closure imposed on the shores of its homeland. In these lies the secret of the legendary Israeli pilot. Because he knew how valuable the property entrusted to him was, he knew that longings of generations and oceans of blood preceded the revival of the State of Israel, for whose safety and existence he was entrusted. Therefore, he spread steel wings and emerged to strike at the enemy before he could carry out his plot to plunder the land of Israel again.

Here is this book before us, a book of remembrance for the Kutno community – browse through its pages and find in it those pure souls on whose wings their descendant Yoram went to fly, to bring victory to a country fighting for its existence. You will find in him the father of his grandfather, the chassid who believes with all the fervor of his heart in the coming of the Messiah, his grandfather who understood that the Savior Messiah will not come unless we take our destiny into our own hands and face him on the ancestral land. And he instilled in his sons the love of Zion and instructed them in the ways of its fulfillment. His father and uncle teaching their trainees in the *Beitar* nest in the town the lyrics of the song "In blood

<sup>1</sup> TN: the British government in Mandate Palestine.

and fire, Judah will rise" and who rose and immigrated to Israel in order to translate the lyrics of the song into the language of action.

But unfortunately, you will also find in it a picture, given in a black frame, of Air Force Capt. Yoram Harpaz, who never set foot on the soil of the Polish city of Kutno.

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Some of the symbolism lies in the fact that Yoram was born in the year the Kutno community, the hometown of his parents, was destroyed. It was as if destiny had destined him to be among the defenders of the land in which the remnants of the bereaved people had gathered. But more than fate chose him – he himself chose his own destiny. Even before he presented his small feet on the ground on his own – he looked up. And from the moment he started playing with toys, he began to imagine that they were carrying him to the top. And when the boy grew up and became a boy, he clearly knew what his life would be like. At the age of 14, he enrolled in the Jewish Youth Battalions-Air and began building airplanes. Even then, in early childhood, he took his occupation very seriously. The models he built had to fly higher and farther. He would hungrily devour books on the history and development of aviation. He was in correspondence with factories to create aircraft and received professional material from them in the field of interest and when the long-awaited day arrived and he was accepted to a pilot course, he was already in fact a professional pilot. But Yoram was one of those young people who are strict with themselves and are not satisfied with what they have achieved – everything he did, he had to do for the best. Despite the baggage of knowledge that he brought with him upon entering the course, he worked hard and did a lot of training and graduated as an outstanding trainee.

A few days passed and Yoram was already training pilot trainees with of all the youthful vigor in him and his love for the skies that he instilled in his trainees, and they gave him endless love and admiration.

Concern gnaws at parents' hearts – their only son spends most of his days in the skies in fast and dangerous aircraft. Dangers lurk everywhere, but they are seven times greater in the fiery azure skies spread over our land surrounded by enemies. Worry and pride for the son who grew up to glory touch the heart. But as soon as he appears on the doorstep of the house, wearing an Air Force officer's uniform and pilot wings worn on his chest, the good smile on his lips and full of confidence, pride overcomes worry and the father accompanies him with some loving and sad look: if his grandfather had seen him... he sighed in secret.

The happy day arrives, the parents lead their son to the canopy. He builds his own house. And the house is full of joy. Loving and beloved wife, friends, youthful laughter and constant diligence in studies and progress in the path of life he has chosen for himself. On holidays, the family gathers together, everyone follows Yoram with admiring eyes. His younger sister, his cousins, – never tire to listen to the stories of his flight experiences. Yoram only complains about one thing: he was never lucky enough to

take part in a combat operation. The mother holds back a cry about to escape her mouth: and I wish it would not happen to you next time either...

The day has come and Yoram is being released from service in the regular army. However, he does not land himself. He continues to fly, now in the service of the national airline El Al. Even on vacation days, he flies, just for fun. And when he got a vacation last spring, the last spring of his young life, he is about to fly overseas. This time he will take his wife on a flight over the ocean. He will compensate her for the many separations in their four years of marriage. They will spend time together. They will fly together. And they are already at the airport and are about to board a plane. There, he receives a call-up order. The IDF calls him! "That's it." Yoram says, "This time, I'm going in!"

His young wife returned home, him to the Air Force base. Weeks of feverish alert. Anxiety in the civilian public. Yoram appears for short vacations and dispels the fears: "We are ready, just waiting for the order to move, within a few days we will teach them a lesson..." He is in a hurry to get going. He is impatient. In the brief meetings with the family, he is soothing, encouraging and... grumbles "What are we waiting for?!"

Last Shabbat, he returned home from the base. He did not have time to go up to his parents' house. His father came to see him at his house. He finds Yoram bent over maps, staring at airways. "Dad," he says with a smile, "there is nothing to worry about, I promise you that at most the matter will continue for six days and we will end it."

Monday, June 5. Alarm horns howl in Tel Aviv. Radio *Kol Israel* announces fierce battles in the airspace. The IDF's spearhead was pulled from Israel's combat airfields. Steel birds emerged at targets in enemy territory. Captain Yoram Harpaz flies his "Hurricane" towards Egypt. He returns safely from two raids. As always, he did his best, he hit the target with maximum accuracy. On his return to base from the second raid came the news that Jordan had entered the war, Jerusalem was bombed, the eastern border was set on fire. Yoram strongly demands that he be allowed to go on another outing. He has not yet finished his first day of war. It's three in the afternoon. He attacks the new target, which is closer than the previous two, and does not return. He was hit, crashed with his plane in the air. The plane crashed into thousands of shrapnel and with them the pilot's body. His soul ascended to heaven, to the endless expanses of air which he loved with all the fervor of his heart, of which no trace remained of his body. He was not buried in the soil he was protecting, he was buried in the skies, for to them he bestowed his life and with them he merged forever in his death.

Only in March 1968, Yoram's remains were found in the Negev. The funeral took place in Tel Aviv, on March 12, 1968 (12 Adar 5728).

Chaya LAZER