

THE TERRIBLE PRICE OF WARFamilies Who Made The Double Sacrifice

Many families share in the memory of dear ones who fell in battle. The entire nation is united as it remembers the dead and the missing. But the pain of each individual family is deep, personal and inconsolable. Writers for "Haaretz" visited several families who had made a double sacrifice, families who had lost two sons in the war, and learned about their losses.

We Were Such a Happy Family, Their Mother Said

The two brothers, Pinchas and Yair Marnin, lived at 15 Hashkadim St. in Kiryat Tivon. According to members of their family, they were extremely close to each other despite the four-year difference between them. Twenty-three year old Pinchas was a fine example to his younger brother Yair. That was why both of them joined the armoured corps at their respective call up, and at home they argued over the advantage of the Centurion over the Patton.

Both saw action in the first battles of the war, blocking the enemy's advance. One was killed in the Golan Heights and the other in Sinai. According to their mother, the two must have fallen at exactly the same time, between nine and ten in the morning of that fateful day, October 9, 1973.

Pinchas and Yair majored in the sciences at the high school in Kiryat Tivon. The older boy was a serious and diligent student, always the one to initiate social activities at the school, and a basket ball enthusiast. After his release from the regular army he worked very hard to earn a living, including repair work on agricultural machinery. As an enterprising fellow he was appointed to be director of the Haifa branch of the Automobile Road Service Agency. At an early age he married a classmate of his; Edith.

The younger brother who hadn't had sufficient time to branch out on his own, was known as a jolly good-natured guy, always ready with a sunny smile.

When Pinchas was called up on Yom Kippur he was already a lieutenant in the armour corps, and a war veteran. According to his parents, he was second-in-command of a squad of fifteen tanks which held back the Syrian advance near Nafah. Confronting them were masses of deadly weapons, but they held them off. Nevertheless, not one single man was left alive.

The war found Yair in the regular army completing a course for tank commanders. The men in the course were flown to the front, and there they fought and died facing the Egyptian Second Army.

How was the news of the deaths conveyed to the parents? A month passed without their receiving a word and they ran frantically from one city office to another. When they were finally told, they didn't want to believe it.

Lucy and Yaakov Marnin (Marchevsky) came to Israel as pioneers from Argentina in 1951. After eight years in Kibbutz Ramat Hashofet they and their two sons moved to Kiryat Tivon, where a daughter was born to them, now sixteen. The mother is an English teacher in Migdal Haamek, the father a chemical engineer doing fieldwork for the Ministry of Agriculture.

The parents reveal an amazing self-control, as does Edith, the widow of Pinchas. They speak quietly, without emotion and without tears. It is as if they are constantly trying to grasp what is beyond their comprehension.

"I still can't get used to the knowledge that the boys are dead. Every moment I expect to hear a knock on the door and see Pinchas coming in to make sure everything's all right, and Yair behind him with his constant smile," says the mother quietly.

The father is silent. He shows us family pictures: the boys skiing during a visit to relatives in Argentina. "We were such a happy family," says the mother.

Still, she keeps up. A month after Pinchas was killed, his daughter was born. His wife Edith is a student in her fourth year at Haifa University. The bereaved mother hugs her four-month-old daughter and says, "Who knows, maybe she is the one who keeps me going..." The name of the infant who came into the world after the double tragedy is Shachar (Dawn). After the darkness of grief came this tiny ray of light.

Friends Tell About Yossi and Dan

Yossi and Dan Sapir, two brothers who were born in Kibbutz Gat, fell in the Yom Kippur War within a period of fifteen hours. Yosse was born in 1952, the youngest son of Leah and Meir Sapir. He died on Monday October 8 at two o'clock in the morning. His brother Dan, who was born in 1939, died that same day at five o'clock in the afternoon.

Dan, the first son, was sent, in 1949, with a number of the oldest boys from Kibbutz Gat, to study at Kibbutz Ma'abarot in a group called "Shachaf." Within five years he was a leader in the Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard) movement, and three years later he was called up into the army. He served in the Golani force, was a platoon commander in the battle of Tufik and an instructor in a section commanders' course of the Golani. In 1960 he was released from the army and went home. There he became a farmer and at the same time worked as a youth leader. Four years later he settled down with Tirzah to raise a family

and after a year their first son, Gal, was born. In 1967 he was appointed treasurer and chief representative of the kibbutz. He remained in this position for three and a half years.

In the Six-Day War he commanded an infantry squad, and he was decorated for his valor in battle. A year after the war his second son, Nir, was born.

In 1969 Dan was given command of a reserve battalion of the armoured infantry. He was a member of the workers' committee in the Kibbutz Ha'artzi (organization of Israeli kibbutzim), of the Mapam Labour Party Committee and of the administrative boards of many regional organizations. In 1970 he entered the economic branch of the Kibbutz Ha'artzi as secretary of the department.

On Yom Kippur he set out as commander of a tank company to the canal zone, and fell in action on October 8 in the initial battles blocking the enemy.

One of the men under Dan's command, Sergeant Menachem Ben-Yitzchak, told me that Dan was a sympathetic and extremely popular commander, particularly with the company's corps of officers. Many officers who served in his company and who lived in the northern section of the country remained in this company because of him. In his contact with the soldiers he was unofficial and informal. He helped each soldier, even with personal problems. Sergeant Ben-Yitzchak tells that when he used to visit Dan at his home in Gat, he was welcomed warmly by his commander. Dan took an interest in what happened to the men.

Dan was called up on Shabbat, Yom Kippur, at noon. He quickly organized his company and set out for the canal zone with the first squad that was ready. On Monday, October 8, he fought in the blocking action on the Tasa-Ismailiya road. With eleven tanks under his command he faced an entire brigade of enemy tanks. In an artillery battle he and his men destroyed a large number of enemy tanks. Toward evening it seemed to Dan that the pressure from the enemy had been reduced, and so he ordered a move westward. Dan moved first, and immediately enemy fire opened up on the advance from close range. Dan's tank suffered a direct hit and he was killed on the spot. The attack was blocked, but his body remained in enemy territory.

The younger brother Yossi was one of the most talented and outstanding students at school in his studies, in sport and social activities. Even then people spoke about him as an outstanding personality. He was sharp-witted and agile. He was a voracious reader, like his brother Dan. Yossi looked for challenges, and when he was called up to the army in November 1970, there were many openings for him. He passed the courses one after another, never complaining about the physical and psychological difficulties they presented. Within a period of twenty months he completed basic training, school for armoured warfare and an officers' course, in which he distinguished himself as a student.

People especially remember his warm relations with his fellow soldiers. His

parents recall one Shabbat when he conveyed chicken, schnitzle and hot soup from the kibbutz to his friends who had to stay on the base.

In the middle of August 1973, Yossi found a new challenge as operations officer in an armoured battalion. On Yom Kippur he was among the first to face the Syrian invaders, and on the next evening he fell in a night battle. On October 6 he had been promoted to captain, and he was only twenty-one.

Lieutenant Colonel A. Erez, who was with Yossi's battalion, related how the war caught them at a village called Houshniya. They made a fast move to the southern sector, in the region facing Houshniya extending to the Souther Golan. Yossi was with him in the tank as operations officer of the battalion. He knew Yossi from the school for armoured warfare. "To me and to all the soldiers in the unit he was a solid and able officer, devoted and resourceful; a man with a sense of responsibility beyond the call of duty.

"We clattered down to the southern sector. Shmulik, assistant officer, blocked the enemy in the Tel-Kudna area. The scattered tank companies engaged the Syrian armour in fierce battles. It was a war against superior forces, without artillery or air support. The Syrian tanks attacked our thin line and penetrated the Golan at several points. They gained control of the oil lines. The posts were evacuated.

"At night the fighting continued in concentrated face to face combat, on Sunday morning it became clear that the Syrians blocked our freedom of movement and therefore we--the remnants--had no alternative but to enter Tel Faras and to 'dig in.'

"When darkness fell I decided to advance to the western sector of the Golan which we still controlled. We began the advance in an area that was massed with Syrian armour. We proceeded slowly and carefully, and this lasted for hours. There was deadly silence. Yossi, who knew the Golan well, knew trails through country that was thought to be impassable; however, our tanks succeeded in getting through. When we reached the fringes of the area that was in our control, fire was suddenly opened on the first tank, on which Yossi sat. The tank was hit and Yossi was killed, right at the end of the holding action. He died after accomplishing his mission of directing and leading us to the area under our control."

The Husband Fell in '48 And Now-The Two Sons

Lottie Aharon of Givat Haim has experienced mourning and bereavement several times in her lifetime. In 1938 she lost her brother, in the War of Independence, her husband, and in the Yom Kippur War, her two sons. Three hours and 500 meters separated the deaths of the two brothers who fell in the battle to block the enemy's advance. Lottie, their mother, knows, for she was there.

Lottie Aharon isn't prepared to talk about her sons. At least, not yet. She

says that their deeds and exploits will yet be told. Those who knew them know that there is much to tell--but it is too early. Stories told by her and by friends are taped, so that when the work is done, a book will appear. "They tell things that I never knew," she says. "And nothing will be left out."

Lottie Aharon speaks quietly, her pain controlled. Only her eyes, which glisten more than usual, let fall a hidden tear. "I talk about them a lot," she says. "I grieve...I am not made of iron."

Both sons came back for the war from overseas. One, from his work, and the other from a trip. By Sunday night, the day after Yom Kippur, she heard from them. A telephone call direct from Tel Aviv informed her that the boys were all right. But unaware that her sons were even in Israel, she exclaimed, "What is this?" Later she realized that they must have come, and gone immediately to the army. Indeed, the next day the younger son arrived, and on the following day, the older one.

Names were not mentioned in this conversation. Lottie spoke instead about the older and the younger one.

The older son, who was twenty-nine, served in a Shock Commando unit and afterwards in a Parachute Commando unit. The younger one also served in a Commando unit after passing an officers' training course with distinction. He got to his division but couldn't find his own company, and so he went over to the officers' quarters, and from there to the front, where "the two of them took part by chance in the same battle in the breakthrough under Arik Sharon's command."

Lottie Aharon was not ready to give out her sons' photographs to the press. She is not yet able to bear this. The only source of comfort she finds is in raising her grandchildren on the kibbutz. She has much to say about our failures and someday she will have her say.

A kibbutznik who pointed out her home to me said, "They didn't even have enough time to sit down for coffee." They grabbed their uniforms and set out for the war. They did not return.