

The Yom Kippur War Spurred Young Men on to Join the Air Force

Six Air Force Cadets who have passed the initial tests successfully, are interviewed in this article. They have already been through six months of gruelling training under pressure and have not yet been "thrown out". 'Not yet', as they say. Others already regard them with admiration - 'the best to the Air Force' as the saying goes. But they know that they are still far from attaining "their wings". They are still at zero point, according to them. [They claim that a pilot is not necessarily a better or superior being, a kind of superman. He is simply good at flying, they say, being endowed with the appropriate talents. A good person is somebody with a wider outlook, and more profound in his feelings and thoughts than the average, they say.]

They began the course after the Yom Kippur War. What did the war mean for them and does it affect them as they face up to difficult challenge presented by the Air Force course?

Let them speak for themselves.

Jonathan: Challenges for Eight Years

When I was a child I was not attracted to the Air Force. In our kibbutz there are no pilots, and maybe that is the reason. At school I met a boy from another kibbutz who was crazy about flying and I caught the disease from him. I joined the Gadna (the pre-army Youth Organization) Air Force cadets with him. I also joined a gliding club and enjoyed it very much. It seemed natural to me to apply for the Air Force preliminary tests. I was afraid of the results. I knew only that I wanted to get in, not whether I was suitable for it or not. I passed - and then went to work for a year as a youth leader in town. I had received a letter stating that when I was mobilised I could join the Air Force, but I had my doubts.

I see myself as a kibbutz member. My ideal of a good man is someone whose life does not consist merely of eating and drinking. I want to improve and better myself during my eighty years of life, I hope. I want to become a part of society and at the same time to jolt it out of its complacency, to give it a push forward. Simply to exist undisturbed alongside one's fellow-men is easy and not enough. That's when I asked myself whether the Air Force course, which involves signing up for several years, fits in with this idea. I asked myself whether flying wouldn't estrange me from the

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kibbutz. But I decided to join the course nevertheless. I was found suitable to serve the State in the way that seemed best both for me and for the State. That's a good enough reason. It is also a personal challenge for me. The effort to be a pilot and still be part of the kibbutz will also present me with a challenge. I like to face up to challenges.

The Yom Kippur War strengthened my resolve. It became clear that our security is no game. The part played in the Yom Kippur War by the Air Force also confirmed my decision. The losses give me the feeling that I'm not just going to play around with beautiful machines but am also going to endanger myself. At the same time, it is important for me that the danger faced by a pilot is different from that faced by soldiers in the other services. It is important to me that the better pilot wins in air battles.

The kibbutz encourages me to succeed in the course. In times of stress I think of the members there and I can keep going. True, it's not only encouragement but pressure of a certain kind. But it's only natural.

What would happen if I were thrown out of the course? I would try to be accepted by the most demanding commando unit. Obviously I would sign on for an officer's course. I would do my very best, and wouldn't let others suffer at my expense.

#### Assaf: To Fight a Personal War

At first I didn't think about the Air Force. Even when I was called up I didn't think about it, until I was sent for tests. I received a nicely-printed notification, signed by Motti Hod. Two weeks after the tests I was informed that I could start the course. I was the first in my class to get the notification and it was a real celebration. There is only one pilot in our kibbutz. I was not born in the kibbutz but brought in from the outside, as they say. I consulted my peer-group counsellor before I decided to go to the course. An adopted son of hers had once gone to the Air Force course and had been killed during training. She said to me: go to the course. It was presented as a challenge.



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From the end of the tests at Passover until mobilisation in November I lived, and breathed thinking about being a pilot. I collected stories about the course, about the relationship between the instructor and the cadet during the course, about the Air Force in general. I would drive a tractor or lorry and imagine myself flying a 'plane. I would also dream about it.

My motivation: I was called up, I was suitable, so I'm going. Do I generally seek out challenges? Not particularly. At the same time, when I am faced with a challenge I face up to it. For example? When I was thirteen I decided that I didn't like city life, neither the education in a city school, nor the leisure activities. I knew what kibbutz life was like from visiting my uncle and I liked it - the work, the farm, the community life. Then I decided, as a child, to move to kibbutz, and I did it. I think I have succeeded in fitting in.

Did the war have an effect on me? It was the realization that security is important for us and that, if I'm suitable, I want to fight a more individual war, a pilot's war, not in the masses of the infantry or armoured corps.

What will happen if I'm thrown out? I'd try to get into one of the commando units.

#### Eitan: I Don't Want to Waste my Potential

Our kibbutz is situated quite near an airport and from an early age I have seen 'planes and learned to identify them. There are pilots on the kibbutz. We kids all said we'd be pilots when we grew up. When I was mobilised I asked to be allowed to go in for the Air Force tests, and I passed them. After that I went off to do a year's voluntary service as a youth leader in town, in a pioneering youth movement. The kibbutz is important to me as a way of life. It is important to me to live in a just society. The year of being a youth leader in town helped me to build up a firmer psychological link with the kibbutz. I came to the Air Force course after a year as a youth leader.

What are my motives for getting through the course and being a good pilot? Both the challenge and the objective itself motivate me. The kibbutz appreciates people who volunteer for fighting units, and it is natural that each one of us aspires to be accepted by the most demanding units. The Air Force is one of them. I would like to emphasize at the same time that the kibbutz, or mine at least, does not regard a pilot as necessarily better or superior. Thus anyone who is thrown out of an Air Force course is not rated lower economically. The kibbutz knows a person through his work and as a human being far too well for a failure in an Air Force course to have much effect on his standing.

What will happen if I'm thrown out of the course? I don't want to get stuck in the ranks. I don't think about that possibility, but if it happens, then I'll go to a commando unit. I don't want to waste my potential while serving in the army.

Tzahi: Ambition - to be a Pilot-Doctor

Our house was full of model 'planes. I was in the Gadna Air Force cadets, the Flying Club and all the rest, until I got to the Air Force course. I'm also attracted by medicine. Before mobilisation I was a candidate for both the pilots' course and the School of Medicine, within the framework of the Academic Reserves. I didn't know what I'd do if I received an affirmative reply from both of them: which one to go to first? My ambition to be a doctor and a pilot seemed vital to me. I was not accepted by the School of Medicine, and that solved the problem of choice.

What attracts me to the pilots' course and to flying is that I'll have to give everything I have - brains, body, the correct coordination - all that is demanded. I'm also attracted by the fact that a pilot is very much a "fighter" in the battles.



Gideon: Being a Pilot Means Being in the First Class

Until I reached the tests I hadn't thought of being a pilot. Even now I still can't think of myself as a pilot. I am less ambitious than others. In our class each one wanted to be in a combat unit. A pilot is in the First Class. That's why I was pleased when they told me I'd passed the tests. They called me up to the course and now I try my best to be as successful as possible. Just from one day to the next, without setting myself remote challenges. If I'm thrown out? A combat unit.

Ran: I Was Cut out to be Pilot from Birth

You could say that I was cut out to be a pilot since the day I was born. My father was a pilot in the Air Force, I heard about flying all the time, and I never thought about anything else. Naturally I was in the Gadna Air Force cadets, and I also flew - I'm not unique in that, many sons of pilots of my acquaintance are following in their fathers' footsteps. My father is really pleased that I'm carrying on, even though he tries not to show it too much. I have three younger brothers and at least two of them are planning to follow the same path.

It's natural that I should want to continue - I regard flying as serving the State while fulfilling personal aspirations, though it is at the same time something of a burden. I'm one of those people who simply have to succeed. People try to tell me that if I fail it won't be a tragedy, or warn me about being over-motivated; but that's just it - I am over-motivated, and I have to accept that fact. Every little failure for me in the tests is a crisis. I don't want to think about what would happen if I failed the course, but if I did I would want to join a strong commando unit.

During the Yom Kippur War I worked in the Aircraft Industry. I saw damaged 'planes, I heard about losses - pilots whom I had known since childhood, fell. I want to continue in their footsteps. The Yom Kippur War intensified my desire to serve as a pilot in the Air Force, if it was possible to intensify an already intense desire.

*(Article written in Hebrew by Yosef Bar-Yosef and published in the army magazine BAMACHANE)*