

Avigdor Kahalani. *The Heights of Courage: A Tank Leader's War on the Golan*. New York: Praeger, 1992. Pp. xxiii, 198. Cloth, \$42.95; paper, \$12.95.

In the Yom Kippur War (October 6-25, 1973), Egypt and Syria nearly ended Israel's perfect record in military conflicts with the Arabs. Maximum surprise was achieved by timing the attack for Yom Kippur, the most sacred day of Judaism. The two-front attack was well planned, coordinated, and executed. The Israelis had become overly confident in the capabilities of their equipment. Although outnumbered by the Soviet- and French-equipped Arabs, Israel's weapons were superior in combat when used by properly trained personnel. Moreover, the Arabs used tactics unanticipated by Israel.

Arab infantry, humiliated by Israel in the Six-Day War (1967), had acquired new anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry that had greatly increased its firepower. In 1973, however, formidable Arab infantry spearheaded the assault along two wide fronts and nearly overwhelmed the Israelis. Israel's response to the unorthodox assault was to counterattack. These moves, spearheaded by tanks for their psychological shock value, were very nearly checked by the firepower of Arab infantry.

The stalemated war quickly became marked by high rates of material attrition that neither side could maintain for very long. Tank losses on both sides outstripped World War II levels. Some 3,000 tanks, seventy-five percent of them Arab, were destroyed in less than three weeks. Each side pressed its superpower sponsor for resupply. Both the Soviet Union and the United States were strapped to meet the needs of their warring surrogates.

Avigdor Kahalani has written a brief memoir of his role in the fighting. A veteran of the Six Day War, he was a Lieutenant Colonel in command of the 77th tank battalion that faced the Syrians on the Golan Heights in October 1973. *The Heights of Courage* first appeared in Hebrew under the title *OZ (Courage) 77* in 1975. This edition was translated by Louis Williams from the Hebrew edition.

Kahalani's work, written in diary format, might be good oral history, if he had referenced specific interview transcripts. Kahalani did refer, however, to "tape recordings of battle conversations." Presumably, these documents remain classified. Incredibly Kahalani depicted the airwaves between headquarters and tanks in the field as a crackling confused cacophony of orders, requests for air and artillery support, medical aid and the like, without ever hearing a single expletive in three weeks of close quarter fighting. The absence of any verifiable sources leaves the reader skeptical as to whether such cool conversations really took place in the heat of raging tank engagements at ranges of less than fifty feet. Similar conversations, supported by secondary sources, appear in Donald Neff's 1988 work *Warriors Against Israel*.

Kahalani is justifiably proud of the courage displayed by his men. His thesis, that only the courage of the Israeli troops won the victory, leaves many questions unanswered. Only briefly did he mention that the Russian-made tanks confronted by his men were in many ways inferior to the British and American-made tanks in Israel's arsenal. While the Russian tanks had larger, but less maneuverable cannon, their operation range was much shorter. Most important for desert warfare, the engines of Russian tanks were less powerful. Being air-cooled, they were subject to further power reduction in the desert heat.

This book might be used as a reader for an upper-division or graduate course. With a more believable dialogue, and a good film editor to adroitly handle the confusing flashbacks to the 1967 war, *Courage* would be an excellent screenplay.

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