

ARIEL SHARON'S CROSSING OF THE SUEZ
CANAL: FACTORS AND PEOPLE WHO
CONTRIBUTED TO THE CROSSING, 1948 - 1973

By

LEVI DEL CANTRELL

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Thesis Approved:

Laura Belmonte

Thesis Adviser

Lesley Rimmel

Thomas Carlson

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Name: LEVI DEL CANTRELL

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Abstract: Sometimes historical figures unfairly receive all the credit for astounding feats. This thesis argues that others along with General Ariel "Arik" Sharon should receive credit for the Israeli Suez Canal crossing during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In 1973, Ariel Sharon's troops opened the bridgehead for the Israeli Defense Forces to surround the Egyptian Third Army through the help of his combat and post-combat experience from his formative years as an officer (1948 – 1956); experience from negating Egyptian military advantages in 1967; Israeli military advantages; and the aid of fellow Israelis, American President Richard Nixon, and American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. This work discusses Sharon's battles within the First Arab-Israeli War, the Suez Crisis, the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and his retaliatory raids at Qibya and Qalqilya.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. ARIEL SHARON’S LESSONS FROM THE FIRST ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, RETALITORY RAIDS, AND THE SUEZ CRISIS: HIS FORMATIVE YEARS AS AN OFFICER, 1948 - 1956.....	5
Latrun.....	8
Qibya.....	14
Qalqilya.....	19
Suez Crisis	25
III. SHARON VERSUS THE EGYPTIAN ARMY: GENERAL SHARON’S ADVANTAGES AND THE CREATION OF EGYPTIAN DISADVANTAGES DURING THE SIX-DAY WAR, 1967	37
Abu Aghiela-Um Qataf.....	50
Nakhl.....	59

Chapter	Page
IV. WAR IN THE SINAI, 1973: ARIEL SHARON'S AIDES IN FORMING A BRIDGEHEAD AND ENCIRCLING THE EGYPTIAN THIRD ARMY	64
The Israeli crossing	79
Opening the roads to the bridgehead	83
The United States' airlift.....	90
V. CONCLUSION.....	96
REFERENCES	104

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1 Map of the battle of Latrun	9
1.2 Map of Sharon's Sinai route, 1956	28
1.3 Map of the battle of the Mitla Pass	33
2.1 Map of the battle of Abu Aghiela-Um Qataf.....	50
2.2 Map of the battle of Nakhl	59
3.1 Map of the Israeli Suez Canal crossing.....	78
3.2 Map of the Israeli siege of the Egyptian Third Army	86

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A detailed study of Ariel Sharon's combat experience as an officer is also a detailed study of Israel's military history until 1973. Although not all fronts are discussed, the former Prime Minister of Israel fought in all of Israel's wars during this period. His greatest military achievement was the crossing of the Suez Canal during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. His battlefield genius combined with his shadowing presence can easily lead to exaggeration regarding how Sharon formed this bridgehead. Perhaps the largest published exaggeration has been that any Israeli force on the west bank of the Suez Canal after the crossing was under Sharon's command. This feat must be studied in context and without all credit given to Sharon, though certainly much is deserved.¹

This study is a military biography of military officer Ariel Sharon from the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948-9 until the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Therefore, it will not discuss the First Lebanon War, because Sharon held the political position of Defense Minister at the time. This study argues that a combination of factors attributed to Sharon's successes within the Yom Kippur War. These factors include: combat and post-combat experiences from Sharon's formative years as an officer between 1948 and 1956, Israel's military advantages combined with Sharon's experience in negating

¹Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book, 1975), 249.

Egyptian advantages during the Six-Day War, and aid from fellow Israelis and two distinct American leaders during the Yom Kippur War. Combined, all of these aided Sharon in the actual canal crossing and subsequent siege of the Egyptian Third Army in 1973. Within this context, credit for the famous canal crossing becomes divided between many people and factors, including those who often do not have their names mentioned in history. Acknowledging that one man did not accomplish this feat alone clarifies this study of who and what contributed to the Israeli Suez Canal crossing.

Among the works on this same period and topic, there are biographies, national histories of Israel, works devoted to Israel's military conflicts, and political science works on the region which include the military conflicts to document the changing political climate. Among the biographies, Gilad Sharon's biography of his father, *Sharon: The Life of a Leader*, excels above others, because it provides intimate views on battles from within Sharon's family. Of course it must also be compared with other sources to remove bias from within the family. Although it is a primary source for Sharon's later life, Gilad Sharon was either too young or unborn during this work's time period, allowing the biography to be a valuable secondary source. Among works on Israel's history, Howard M. Sachar's *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time* spans the entire length of Sharon's military career, while documenting the history of Jewish Zionists in their "search for normalcy" within the Middle East. This work is a reliable Wikipedia article (if there is such a thing) on steroids. Sachar addresses any period of Sharon's military career with detailed and often rare facts, which provides a perfect starting point for understanding Sharon's conflicts. Of military works, Mordechai Bar-On's *Never Ending Conflict: Israeli Military History* addresses further battle details. The author also

acknowledges when military histories are lacking; the First Arab-Israeli War and Sharon's retaliatory raids are two such areas needing more published studies. Lastly, Fred J. Khouri's *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma* follows the diplomatic and political aspects of these wars, the larger "why" question behind the combat. As Sharon's military actions often crossed into the political spectrum, Khouri's work is a balance between Israeli and Arab perspectives on these battles. Despite all these works having relevant material to this study, this thesis is unique in topic, argument, and objective.²

This study disagrees with some historical arguments. The argument that the United States' military fought for the Israelis during the Six-Day War is flatly rejected for reasons given in the second chapter. Meanwhile, the argument that Sharon purposefully massacred civilians in his retaliatory raid on Qibya in 1953 is not rejected, but the argument is not fully accepted without further evidence against Sharon. This is not to claim that the deaths did not occur, rather the author questions the idea that Sharon purposefully committed this tragedy. Therefore, no judgement is cast on this issue, as this work only requires analysis of the post-combat experience which Sharon gained after the raid. The idea of Purity of Arms is not the focus of this work. In this regard, the author invites the reader to interpret Sharon's battles, including Qibya, as he/she may.

This study also agrees with other social and political arguments. The author views female acceptance in the military as positive social development. In regard to Israeli military advantages in the second chapter, female military participation, in spite of counterarguments, created a larger Israeli army which was more capable of fighting the Egyptian army in time of war. The author also agrees that peace can be achieved through

²Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), xxi.

a strong military in some cases. This argument is required to believe that Sharon's crossing of the Suez Canal in 1973 attributed to the peace between Egypt and Israel in the following years.

CHAPTER II

ARIEL SHARON'S LESSONS FROM THE FIRST ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, RETALITORY RAIDS, AND THE SUEZ CRISIS: HIS FORMATIVE YEARS AS AN OFFICER, 1948 - 1956

On May 26, 1948, just eleven days after the rebirth of a Jewish state, Ariel Sharon crawled through a smoldering wheat field near Latrun, a bullet wound through his groin and upper thigh. Without a canteen, he was parched from the loss of blood, and swarms of black flies surrounded him and the wounded men of his platoon. Transjordanian Legionnaires had defeated his men, and Sharon crawled over rocky terraces in an effort to save his life from the Arab irregulars who were looting dead Israelis on a nearby hill. Upon reaching a second rocky terrace, he knew that he was too weak to mantel it. Without anyone to help him, the story of Ariel Sharon might have ended there.¹

Ariel "Arik" Sharon was a complex man. He was born in the British Mandate of Palestine on February 26, 1928. His parents, Schmuel and Vera, migrated from modern Belarus, and raised their child in a communal farm at Kfar Malal. As was common among Israelis, Sharon changed his name from his original last name, Scheinermann, to the more traditional Hebrew name. Within the Israeli military, soldiers were encouraged and eventually forced between 1948 and 1949 to replace their last names with Hebrew

¹Ariel Sharon and David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (1989; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 55-8, 60.

names from an approved list. Sharon became a soldier at age fourteen, originally in the Haganah, the forerunner of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). He was eventually described as “a maverick, highly individualistic, and abrasive in his dealings with colleagues and superiors.” Sharon also became the “architect” of Israel’s military reprisal policy against neighboring countries involved in cross-border attacks against Israelis. His critics later described him as “Israel’s most brilliant general but a most dangerous man.”²

His formative years as an officer lasted from 1948 until 1956, from the First Arab-Israeli War until the end of the Suez Crisis. This account of his training will focus on lessons from combat experiences as an officer rather than on other military training. From combat experiences and the aftermath of battles, Sharon gained a resolve never to leave a soldier behind; he began to bypass the chain of command; he developed a rift between other generals and himself as a retaliatory raid leader, which made him more self-reliant; and he learned to be at the front with his troops in battle always, regardless of other possible enemy threats. Leaving aside his out-of-combat training, this paper will begin with Sharon’s combat as an officer in the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948-9, then discuss the two retaliatory raids of Qibya and Qalqilya, and end with the battle of the Mitla Pass in 1956.

The historiography involving his formative years as a soldier shows varying perspectives. Maan Abu Nowar presents events during the First Arab-Israeli War in his work *The Jordanian-Israeli War, 1948-1951: A History of the Hashemite Kingdom of*

²Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 741; *The Times*, November 7 and 19, 1973. See also Yablonka, *Survivors*, 143.

Jordan. His work follows the Arab Legion during the war, including the battle against Sharon and other Israeli troops at the ruins of Latrun. Godfrey Lias in his work, *Glubb's Legion*, describes the battle at Latrun as perceived by the British chief of staff of the Arab Legion. Meanwhile, Kennett Love examined Israeli retaliatory raids and Israeli-Egyptian battles during the Suez Crisis in his work, *Suez: The Twice-fought War*. While some of these works contain their own bias for or against Jews involved in these battles, the broad spectrum of secondary works on these battles should eliminate false or misleading information on this topic. Although these works record Israeli battles and raids, there are no specific secondary works with the purpose of solely tracing the development of Sharon as an officer throughout combat during this period.³

The First Arab-Israeli War of 1948-9 was the first of many wars in which Sharon participated as a soldier. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted for the Palestinian partition plan, and the resolution passed by a vote of thirty-three to thirteen. Fighting had broken out before statehood was declared. On May 14, 1948, Israel proclaimed its statehood, and shortly afterward, President Harry S. Truman recognized the state of Israel. Four days later, the other major power – the Soviet Union – also recognized Israel. Meanwhile, approximately 10,000 Egyptians, 4,500 Arab Legionnaires, 7,000 Syrians, 8,000 Iraqis, and 3,000 Lebanese attacked Israeli troops, and thus began the war. As the Israeli Defense Forces did not yet exist, the *Haganah* – meaning “defense” in Hebrew – was the main Israeli fighting force. During the war, Sharon was a part of the Alexandroni Brigade of the Haganah. After a battle against

³Maan Abu Nowar, *The Jordanian-Israeli War, 1948-1951: A History of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (Reading: Ithaca, 2002), 134; Godfrey Lias, *Glubb's Legion* (London: Evans Brothers, 1956), 190; Kennett Love, *Suez: The Twice-Fought War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 57, 500-1.

Iraqis at Bir Addas during the winter before Israeli statehood, Sharon was promoted to platoon commander.⁴

Early in the war, the Arab Legion blocked off the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem at Latrun. The Transjordanians used defenses made within the ruins of a Crusader castle there. To reopen the road, the Israeli 7th Brigade of the Haganah was formed on May 22, 1948, under the command of a Second World War veteran, Shlomo Shamir. Lacking sufficient numbers of battalions, he took the 32nd battalion from the Alexandroni Brigade. In this battalion, Sharon was the 1st Platoon commander within Asher Levy's B Company. At Latrun, Sharon's battalion was to attack from the south through wheat fields, across the Jerusalem Road, and up a hill to Latrun. Meanwhile, Zvi Gilat's 72nd battalion, comprised mostly of immigrants, would attack the Transjordanian flank to the southeast toward the Arab village of Deir Ayub past Beit Susin. This was Sharon's first battle with artillery support, in this case, two 65mm guns.⁵

⁴Sachar, *History of Israel*, 292, 294, 317; *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948: The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, 5 vols. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1975) 5:992, 1011; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 44.

⁵Dan Kurzman, *Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (New York: The World Publishing, 1970), 405-7; J. Bowyer Bell, *The Long War: Israel and the Arabs since 1946* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 152; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 52-3, 59.

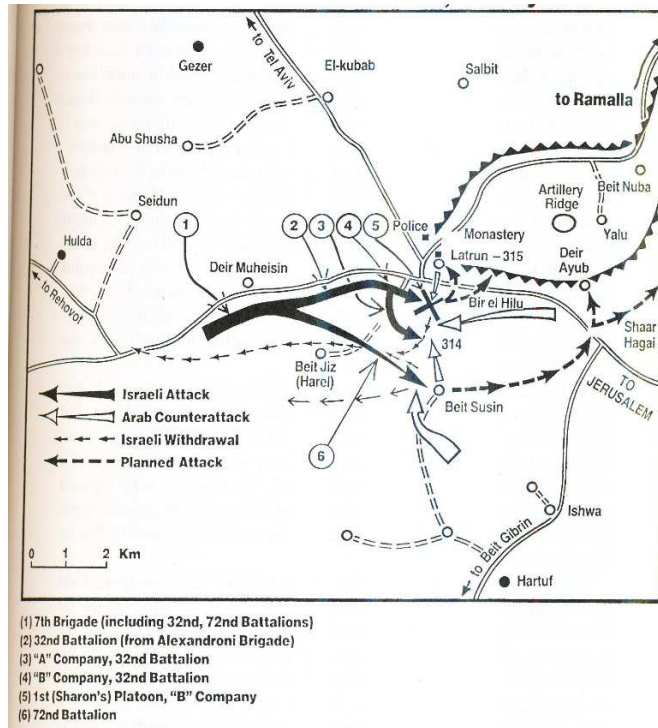


Figure 1.1. This map depicts the battle of Latrun.⁶

Transjordan's Arab Legion, commanded with some British officers, was thoroughly prepared for the Israeli attack and aided by Arab irregulars. Transjordan's King Abdullah was the Supreme Commander of the Arab Legion with Lieutenant-General Glubb Pasha as his Chief of Staff. Under the command of Glubb, Colonel T. Ashton sent the 4th Regiment to Latrun. This regiment of the Arab Legion, commanded by Colonial Habes al-Majali, was prepared for the Israelis, and on May 24, the arrival of Major Geoffrey Lockett's 2nd Regiment along with approximately 120 vehicles – including artillery – augmented the Legion's forces at Latrun. Lockett had served with Orde Wingate – one of the founders of the Haganah – with his commandos in Burma during the Second World War. Approximately 330 Arab partisans also aided the

⁶Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 59.

Transjordanians. The Legion's mortars, six pounder and twenty-five pounder guns, had already been ranged to hit possible enemy positions down the hillside. They also put wire defenses on the hills. On the night of May 25, a legionnaire fired two red flares, signaling the Jews' approach to his comrades.⁷

Outside of Sharon's platoon, the battle did not go smoothly for the Israelis. When the battle began, Arab soldiers blocked the 72nd battalion at the village of Beit Susin, a village which faulty intelligence reports claimed was vacant. As the ill-trained immigrant troops panicked, the lack of a common language limited their officers. There were two other battalions of the 7th Brigade, but they were in reserve to guide a convoy of supplies to the Jews in Jerusalem after others reopened the road. They were left out of the battle in vain, because this road was not reopened.⁸

Around 3:30 am on May 25, the Israeli attack, called Operation Ben Nun, began. Mortar fire and artillery fire from the two Napoleonic sixty-five millimeter cannons erupted against Latrun. Under the direction of Lieutenants Mahmoud al-Maaitah and Abd al-Razaq al-Sharif, the Transjordanian artillery damaged both Napoleonic cannons, quickly making them inoperable. Sharon had a disadvantage in this battle, because although he had been trained in reconnaissance, he never actually saw the battlefield prior to the attack. He had Azriel Ratzabi set up his platoon's mortar as they approached the road below Latrun, but Arab forces fatally shot Ratzabi through the lungs after only a few shells. Sharon's company continued through the morning fog along the Jerusalem road to approach from the right side of Latrun, but on the way, an enemy bullet hit his platoon's

⁷James Lunt, *Glubb Pasha: A Biography* (London: Harvill Press, 1984), 124; Kurzman, *Genesis*, 404, 409, 411; Nowar, *Jordanian-Israeli War*, 133, 135, 137, 139; Lias, *Glubb's Legion*, 190.

⁸Kurzman, *Genesis*, 409, 413.

radio, breaking it. The company was now out of contact with the other Israelis. At dawn, Sharon still had not crossed the Jerusalem road, and enemy fire pinned down his troops, who were surrounded by smoky, burning wheat fields. Meanwhile, A Company, commanded by Captain Ram Ron, captured Hill 314 to the south of Sharon and to the north of the 72nd Battalion. These soldiers held this hill to Sharon's right flank.⁹

At the base of the hill to Latrun, without crossing the road, Sharon's men suffered. Several waves of Legionnaires attacked down the hill with shouts of “*Etbach el Yahud*” – “Kill the Jews.” Sharon's men had Czech rifles, Sten guns, and hand grenades to defend themselves. The platoon leader concentrated his wounded by a muddy spring, where black flies swarmed over the bleeding soldiers. During these counter-attacks, Asher Levy sent a holocaust survivor named Mordechai Duchiminer as a runner to fetch Sharon's mortar, but after taking it, Duchiminer died on the way back to Levy. Now the platoon was without radio and minus a mortar.¹⁰

Things went from bad to extremely painful for Sharon. Around midday, a bullet hit him between his stomach and his groin, exiting through his thigh. After two hours with the wound, he noticed Hill 314 toward the south (his right) was now vacant of Israelis, and that Arabs were looting the remaining bodies. Of his wounded, eleven could walk, and there were not enough healthy men to carry all the others. In this situation, Sharon gave a particular order for the first and last time in his life: “retreat and leave the wounded.” One of his men, Simcha Pinchasi, was injured in both legs and offered to cover their retreat. The platoon leader gave him a grenade, knowing his fate. Unable to

⁹John Bagot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), 132; Kurzman, *Genesis*, 405, 412, 414; Nowar, *Jordanian-Israeli War*, 139; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 53-5.

¹⁰Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 56. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 55-7.

walk, Sharon crawled over the rocky terraces from the battlefield toward Hulda, burning his hands on the charred earth. By the second terrace, he was too weak to crawl over it. Fortunately for him, a sixteen-year-old soldier under his command named Yakov Bogin helped him over the remaining rocky terraces. Bogin, suffering from a bullet wound in his jaw, crawled along with him until they met with other wounded. Finally, some soldiers loaded Sharon into a half-track and drove him away, and he eventually arrived at a hospital near Rehovot, where he recovered.¹¹

The battle lasted about thirteen hours. After the Israelis retreated, the Transjordanians and Arab Palestinians looted the battlefield and acquired “250 rifles, twenty automatic rifles, four PIAT anti-tank weapons,” four two-inch to three-inch mortars, ten radios, some mines, and some grenades. The Transjordanians and Arab Palestinians had suffered five dead and nine wounded, including civilians. Transjordanian forces claimed to have killed between six hundred and eight hundred Israelis. Meanwhile, Israelis counted their casualties at approximately 140. Out of the thirty-five originally in Sharon’s platoon, fifteen were now dead, eleven were wounded, and five were missing-in-action. Three days later, with the road to Jerusalem still blocked, the Jews of the Old City surrendered.¹²

Never again would Sharon leave his troops alone in the field. Looking into the eyes of his men as they retreated, he became haunted by their shock and sorrow. He reaffirmed this resolve after he returned to the battlefield from the hospital. While

¹¹Gilad Sharon, *Sharon: The Life of a Leader*, Trans. Mitch Ginsburg. (New York: Harper Collins, 2011) 52. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 58, 60-3.

¹²The PIAT anti-tank weapon is a type of rocket launcher. Lias, *Glubb’s Legion*, 190. See also Lias, *Glubb’s Legion*, 190; Glubb, *Soldier*, 129, 132; Kurzman, *Genesis*, 415; Sharon, *Sharon*, 51.

collecting the dead at the Kuleh hills near Lod, he found dead Israelis with fingers and ears cut off or with their genitals removed and placed in their mouths. Although atrocities happened on both sides of this war, the sight deeply affected him. Sharon's son Gilad wrote that his father trained his men never to leave a man on the field; "That oath [never to leave them] . . . can be traced back to that brutally hot day in May 1948 when my father was left wounded on the wadi beneath the monastery at Latrun." Hereafter, this would influence his actions in combat throughout his life as a soldier.¹³

After the battle, Sharon recovered and fighting continued. On June 27, 1948, during the first ceasefire, the Israel Defense Forces were created. So Sharon switched from the Haganah to the IDF. Toward the end of the war, he was promoted to reconnaissance officer for his battalion, and later he was made company commander. He also experienced another defeat at the village of Faluja (Fallujah) against Egyptian forces under the command of Sudanese General Said Taha Bey. This force eventually met for diplomatic talks between Yigal Allon's aide, Major Yerucham Cohen and Taha Bey's counterpart, Major Gamal Abdel Nasser. Sharon would later fight two wars against Nasser's Egypt.¹⁴

After the war ended, it became evident that Israelis needed to create an elite force. Five years after the battle of Latrun, Unit 101 was created to fulfill this role with Sharon as its commander. As a battalion commander in the reserves, Sharon wrote to David Elazar about leading a reprisal raid in response to the recent murder of some Jews. Eventually, Colonel Mishael Shaham recommended to David Ben-Gurion that Sharon

¹³A wadi is a valley or a ravine. Sharon, *Sharon*, 53. See also Sharon, *Sharon*, 52; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 65.

¹⁴Sharon, *Sharon*, 55; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 66; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 341.

lead a new commando unit to respond to cross-border attacks or abductions. Thus, Unit 101 was created when the commander was only twenty-five. The creation of Unit 101 was the beginning of the Israeli policy of retaliatory raids.¹⁵

The Israelis had held a policy of *Havlagah*, or “self-restraint,” until the final years of the British mandate. This policy disappeared and retaliatory raids became the standard Israeli response to frequent infiltrations across its borders. The retaliatory raid at Qibya was the first major Israeli response to Arab cross-border attacks. At the time, Canadian General E. L. M. Burns, chief of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, believed that “the determined effort to suppress infiltration [of Arabs from the West Bank] stemmed from Glubb Pasha and the British officers who served under him” rather than from the Jordanians. However, attacks still came from the West Bank – part of Jordan at the time.¹⁶

One such attack would lead to Sharon’s raid against Qibya in 1953. On October 13 of that year, three Arab infiltrators threw a grenade into a civilian home in Tirat Yehuda that killed a mother and two of her children. The Israel-Jordan Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC) – a half-Arab, half-Israeli group formed to monitor armistice violations – concluded that it was the act of Jordanian terrorists. The Jordanian Legion suggested the Israelis use dogs to track the attackers’ scent, allowing the Israelis to follow

¹⁵Sharon, *Sharon*, 61, 76-7.

¹⁶By this time, Transjordan became Jordan. Bell, *Long War*, 257; Lieutenant-General E. L. M. Burns, *Between Arab and Israeli* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1962), 48. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 86.

the trail into Jordan. However, the dogs lost the trail near the village of Rantis, shortly after crossing into Jordanian territory.¹⁷

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion personally ordered the retaliatory raid.

Historian Kennett Love believed that Israelis targeted Qibya not for the killers being located there, but for the village's close proximity to the attack's location within Israel – thirteen kilometers away. Meanwhile, Sharon claimed that the investigation revealed that the attackers came from the direction of Qibya. Indeed, Qibya was near the village of Rantis, where the search dogs lost the murderers' scent. Love and Glubb Pasha both believe that the raid was prepared in the months before the Arab attack into Israel due to the special demolition packs used, the training required, and the time needed to learn the terrain. Sharon met with headquarters the morning after the attack; the planned retaliation raid placed one hundred paratroopers under his command with another twenty-five troops from Unit 101 as a diversion unit.¹⁸

The following night, October 14, 1953, Sharon and his men covered their faces with camouflage and attacked Qibya. Some of Unit 101 left first under the command of Meir Har-Zion as a diversion and to protect the flanks of the main force. Sharon, other members of Unit 101, and the paratroopers left an hour later for the target village. They brought automatic weapons, Bangalore torpedoes, grenades, and TNT. On their way, Israelis captured and bound two Arab watchmen, but one escaped to tell the village of the coming attack. According to Sharon, as he and his troops hiked toward the village, the

¹⁷The mother's name was Susan Kantias, who also lost her four-year-old child, and her ten-month-old baby. *Jerusalem Post*, October 14, 1953; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 444; Glubb, *Soldier*, 309; *New York Times*, October 17, 1953.

¹⁸Love, *Suez*, 11, 56-7; *Jerusalem Post*, October 16, 1953; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 86; Glubb, *Soldier*, 309; *New York Times*, October 17, 1953.

Arab Legion noticed the coming Israelis and opened fire. The paratroop company commander, Aharon Davidi, led two platoons directly toward the Legion's trenches, killing between eight and ten men. In General Glubb's version of events, the Israelis started to fire mortars and rifles toward the village first, when forty entrenched Jordanian National Guardsmen returned fire. The firefight lasted from about 10:30 pm until 12:30 am, when the Jordanians began to run out of ammunition. The National Guard apparently forgot about the extra ammunition inside of their commander's house, which was later blown up by the Israelis.¹⁹

These Jordanians managed to send a message to their brigade commander, "Teal" Ashton, but he only sent ten men from the 10th Regiment from Budrus to aid Qibya. Reports of attacks were common and were taken lightly by the British officers due to false alarms. These men did contact the Israelis, but Radio Ramallah reported that Israeli forces had blocked these men from aiding Qibya. Sharon later noted that as his men entered Qibya, two of these Jordanian reinforcements arrived in a jeep, but the paratroopers quickly killed both men. Afterward, his troops fired mortars at the two near villages of Budrus and Shuqba.²⁰

Sharon and his troops then entered Qibya, where devastation ensued. Glubb Pasha believes the Israelis indiscriminately fired their sub-machine guns, because of the many bullet holes left in the remaining buildings. Israeli sappers then destroyed forty-two buildings with specialty-made backpack charges, each containing ten kilograms of TNT. Sharon claims his soldiers cleared each house before demolition, and that Israelis

¹⁹Love, *Suez*, 59; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 88-9; *Jerusalem Post*, October 16, 1953; Glubb, *Soldier*, 309.

²⁰Glubb, *Soldier*, 309; *Jerusalem Post*, October 16, 1953; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 89; *New York Times*, October 17, 1953.

saved two Arabs from houses set with explosives. Eventually, the soldiers destroyed forty-two houses and then returned to Camp Sataf in Israel.²¹

In the morning, it soon became evident that many civilians had in fact died. Of sixty-nine Jordanian casualties, between half and three-quarters of them were women and children, with fifteen more wounded. The destroyed houses had buried their occupants under rubble. Sharon claimed that Israelis had never destroyed more than a few houses in a raid before; therefore, with no history of mass destruction, he believed the residents of Qibya unfortunately must have hidden in their homes, trying to wait until the raid was finished. By 6:30 am, United Nations Military Observers were at the village. In their report, the observers wrote:

Bullet-riddled bodies near the doorways and multiple bullet hits on the doors of the demolished houses indicated that the inhabitants had been forced to remain inside until their homes were blown up over them. . . . Witnesses were uniform in describing their experience as a night of horror, during which Israeli soldiers moved about in their village blowing up buildings, firing into doorways and windows with automatic weapons and throwing hand grenades.

The MAC correctly concluded that half a battalion launched the raid against Qibya. Regardless, Israel tried to keep it secret that the army had performed the raid, but afterward, the United States still suspended U. S. aid to Israel in response to the attack, which had caused a devastating loss of civilian lives.²²

The objective of this deadly raid was not simply to cast lead; rather, the Israelis wanted to deter the violent attacks coming from the Jordanian frontier, especially the West Bank portion. As Sharon wrote:

²¹Glubb, *Soldier*, 309-10; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 88-9.

²²Love, *Suez*, 59. See also Bell, *Long War*, 260; Love, *Suez*, 11, 57, 59-60; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 444; Glubb, *Soldier*, 310; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 90.

Kibbiya [sic] was to be a lesson. I was to inflict as many casualties as I could on the Arab home guard and on whatever Jordanian army reinforcements showed up. . . . The Jordanians were to understand that Jewish blood could no longer be shed with impunity. From this point on there would be a heavy price to pay.

Afterwards, Glubb Pasha did in fact order the Jordanian National Guard “to shoot Arab infiltrators if necessary to stop them.” Defenders of retaliatory raids used statistics showing that Israeli deaths from infiltration attacks had dropped from fifty-seven in 1953 to thirty-four in 1954 and then to eleven in 1955. By 1954, approximately half of prisoners within Jordan were being held for infiltration. Despite the continuance of the raids, the events at Qibya reset future retaliatory raid targets back onto military and armed targets rather than civilian homes.²³

The raid affected Sharon in a different way. He believed the raid had raised army morale, because the raid proved that “Israeli forces were again capable of finding and hitting targets far behind enemy lines.” Days after the attack, the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion invited Sharon to meet him for the first time. The Prime Minister told Sharon, ““It doesn’t make any real difference about what will be said about Kibbiya [sic] around the world. The important thing is how it will be looked at here in this region. This is going to give us the possibility of living here.”” Out of this first meeting, Ben-Gurion grew to prefer Sharon over other, higher-ranked officers, creating jealousy and resentment among his peers. These negative feelings toward Sharon would be compounded as time passed. Dayan commented that Ben-Gurion preferred Sharon, because he “embodied the character of the Israeli Jew of [Ben-Gurion’s] dream: a man of integrity, a daring fighter with confidence in himself, who was unapologetic about his

²³Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 88; Love, *Suez*, 61. See also Bell, *Long War*, 260-1; Love, *Suez*, 61.

Jewishness, at home in the terrain, knew the Arabs, and knew his profession.” Most importantly, as Yitzhak Rabin noted, the relationship between Ben-Gurion and Sharon started Sharon’s practice of going over the heads of his commanders to get his way. In the beginning, Sharon would go to Ben-Gurion, but in later years, he went to other high-ranking officers to pitch his opinions. Out of this tragic raid, Sharon concluded that Israeli military responses to Arab attacks were the answer to the problem. Yet, he noted, “despite our counterstrikes, the terrorists’ savagery seemed to reach new peaks.” The Israeli retaliatory raids continued to escalate.²⁴

On January 14, 1954, between the raid on Qibya in 1953 and the raid on Qalqilya in 1956, Moshe Dayan merged Unit 101 and the paratroopers under the command of Sharon. Sharon then appointed Aharon Davidi as his second-in-command. By the time of this raid, Sharon was only twenty-eight years old. He was ordered to demolish the police fort at Qalqilya, a town in the present-day West Bank.²⁵

This raid was in retaliation for the murder of two Israelis in an orange grove near Even-Yehuda, approximately ten kilometers from Qalqilya, but other events also had infuriated Israelis. In the orange grove attack, a couple of men with sub-machine guns had shot two civilians, Yehiel Pinara and Zachariah Ratzabi, during the daytime, and these murderers had cut an ear off each of the dead, likely for proof of their deed. This attack followed others by Jordanians against Israelis. On October 4, five workers at the potash plant near Sodom were killed in broad daylight. The attackers had set up an

²⁴Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 90-1, 134; Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: Story of my Life* (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 524. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 90-1, 99; Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 407.

²⁵Sharon, *Sharon*, 91; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 93.

ambush with rifles and sub-machine guns to kill people in passing vehicles on a road there. Before this on September 12, the same Sodom attackers had murdered three Druze Israelis further north at Ein Ofarim. The Israeli leadership uncovered the assailants' identities and sent this information to Jordan's King Hussein. The Jordanians discovered the attackers, who were in jail for smuggling, but afterward, King Hussein sent an order to release them from their cells, which infuriated Israelis.²⁶

With Israel on the verge of being an ally to the British against the Egyptians in the coming Suez Crisis, Moshe Dayan tried to argue that restraint had to be used in the raid against Britain's ally, Jordan. As Dayan concluded:

We must remember that military action is not an end in itself; it is taken to achieve a political end, and we, the Army, must suit ourselves to the conditions prescribed for us by the political circumstances. Otherwise, we may well reap military victories [sic] but they will turn into political defeats.

The Israelis were to attack the police fort at Qalqilya on the night of October 10, 1956. Sharon claimed that the orange grove murderers were from "the neighborhood of Kalkilya [sic]." Despite the aim of restraint, Dayan admitted that the Qalqilya police fort also was chosen for its proximity to about 20,000 civilians. However, unlike at Qibya, Israelis were not targeting civilian structures; rather, the Israelis chose that location to deter infiltrations into Israel from the large border population.²⁷

²⁶The names of those killed near Sodom were Ya'acov Lustig, Ephriam Waldman, Haim Kuperstein, Gavriel Dahan, and Arye Lahav. The Druze are a religious group. It is noteworthy that Jordan had dismissed Glubb Pasha by this time. Burns, *Between Arab and Israeli*, 173; *Jerusalem Post*, October 7 and 10, 1956; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 208-9; Major-General Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. (London: Cox & Wyman, 1966), 44.

²⁷Dayan, *Diary*, 47; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 136. See also Naphtali Lau-Lavie, *Moshe Dayan: A Biography* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1968), 147; Dayan, *Diary*, 45.

Sharon had advantages and disadvantages in the raid, called Operation Branch. He had the advantage of studying a police fort similar to that of Qalqilya at Kefar Saba in Israel, because the British constructed both forts similarly during their mandate over Palestine. While planning the raid, Sharon claimed, restraining decisions from Central Command exposed some of his flanks. Central command did not allow him to place troops in certain locations during the attack. He was allowed to station men to protect his flank on the road to Azun, but not by the same road in the hill trenches of Zuffin, between this flanking force and Qalqilya. Headquarters also told him not to attack the Jordanian trenches to the south of the police fort; he protested to no avail.²⁸

Sharon began the attack with 25-pound artillery, but in Dayan's opinion, Sharon ended his barrage too early. By around 9:50 pm, Israeli soldiers were about 200 yards from the fort fence, fighting against the Arab Legion to the south. Two hours later, Israelis had charged the police fort in hand-to-hand combat against about 200 Jordanians, eventually blowing up the fort. The large explosion could be heard across the border in Israel.²⁹

To the east, Sharon had a unit of fifty-four troops blocking possible Jordanian reinforcements on a road to Khirbet Azun. Two companies of the Arab Legion's 9th Battalion – Bedouin troops – drove fifteen trucks down this road to aid Qalqilya, but the first four were decommissioned by Israeli fire. The Israelis moved to another hill on the road to prepare another ambush, and they decommissioned another two Jordanian trucks

²⁸Dayan, *Diary*, 45-6; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 136-7.

²⁹Dayan, *Diary*, 47; *New York Times*, October 11, 1956.

about an hour later during the Legion's second attempt to pass. By this point, the roadblock unit had no casualties.³⁰

After being repelled, the Arab Legion created an ambush on the road behind the Israelis, blocking them from rejoining the main Israeli force at Qalqilya. This 9th Battalion had been trained well by their former commander, Peter Young, a British commando from the Second World War. As the Israelis moved back to Qalqilya, the Legion's ambush of machine-gun fire and grenades quickly wounded eleven Israelis, with one killed. Five of seven officers were hit, leaving only a major and a twenty-one-year-old platoon leader to direct the troops. The major was in shock, only responding "yes" to radio transmissions, so Sharon called for the platoon leader to take the radio. Able to direct his men, the platoon leader filled his only three stretchers with wounded – other troops carried the rest – and moved up a hill for defense until help arrived. The remnant of the unit could not defend itself very long, because it was armed mainly with Uzis.³¹

To protect the group, low on ammunition, artillery was the only quick option for the commander to cover his troops' distant position. A gunnery spotter with the surrounded troops on the hill sent positions over the radio to the Chief Artillery Officer of the Army. With this information, the Israeli 155mm battery shot shells eight and a half miles to cover the besieged unit. The unit quickly dug into the hill for cover as Israeli shells with a blast radius of one hundred yards hit as close as fifty yards away.³²

³⁰Dayan, *Diary*, 47-8.

³¹Dayan, *Diary*, 48. See also Lau-Lavie, *Moshe Dayan*, 148; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 138; Dayan, *Diary*, 48.

³²Dayan, *Diary*, 49.

Around 1:30 am, Sharon sent two companies on armored carriers to rescue the troops, and four aircraft covered the battlefield. Nine of the carriers broke through the Jordanian siege with headlights on, while the rest lost their way in the dark and returned to base. As the nine carriers loaded the wounded, “the other troops had to sit on the sides, fully exposed, without cover,” and, for these exposed Israelis, the deadly return to Qalqilya started at 3:00 am. By this time, the Legionnaires had taken the hill trenches at Zuffin and were reinforced, shooting machine-guns, anti-tank guns, and lobbing grenades at the convoy. Here, the Jordanians killed five and wounded about twenty Israelis.³³

As the convoy returned, one carrier was hit and crashed into a ditch near Zuffin, unbeknownst to the others. When the Israelis noticed it, Lieutenant Yirmeyahu Burdanov argued with Major Moshe Breuer over whether or not to retrieve the lost carrier before dropping off their wounded. Overruling Breuer, Burdanov ordered his carrier to turn back, and three other carriers joined his rescue effort. The lieutenant was a retired officer and commando, who met with the attacking unit that night in his white, civilian shirt to join the mission. When they arrived at the lone carrier, Burdanov attached a tow cable while having to use headlights to see. His white shirt in the bright light attracted enemy fire; he died from a burst of machine-gun fire hitting him in the stomach. Moments before, Major Breuer also died while directing the armored carrier. The surviving Israelis rescued the crippled carrier. Having the men back in Israel relieved Moshe Dayan, who

³³Dayan, *Diary*, 50. See also Dayan, *Diary*, 49-50; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 139.

then canceled an order that dawn for other infantry units, an armored force, and the air force to rescue the stranded soldiers.³⁴

After the battle, United Nations Military Observers viewed the bodies of forty-eight dead Jordanians, including five civilians, and even more wounded. Israelis counted eighteen of their own dead – eight of whom were officers – while over fifty were wounded. This was the largest loss yet of Israeli lives in a raid.³⁵

The direct lesson Sharon learned was that officers who made the battle plans needed to be at the battlefield. His flanks had been exposed, causing his troops to suffer more casualties. In previous battles, he had not received orders to expose his flanks. From now on, Sharon made sure to keep high command from exposing them, even during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. His desire to have his commanding officers visit the front before their orders would be followed led to greater strife until the end of his military career.³⁶

The battle also caused a reappraisal of retaliatory raids for Sharon and the Israeli military. He and Dayan changed their views on retaliation. Dayan reconsidered retaliatory raids at night. He favored instead a full war or using raids during the day with armor and aircraft to force an end to infiltration attacks from Israel's neighbors. His other plan was to capture territory and exchange it for an end to the attacks. Meanwhile, Sharon had learned that deterrence raids would not end these attacks into Israel. These changes divided the Israeli military on the issue of how to deal with their neighboring

³⁴Dayan, *Diary*, 50-2; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 139-40; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 209.

³⁵Burns, *Between Arab and Israeli*, 173; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 208; *New York Times*, October 12, 1956.

³⁶Sharon, *Sharon*, 103.

enemies. From then until after the Yom Kippur War, Sharon believed that he was now ideologically separated from Dayan and other Israeli generals. Thus began a new lesson for the young officer within the social and political aspects of military affairs.³⁷

Before this raid occurred, Israel and the Soviet Union had become closer economic partners until the Soviets changed their foreign policy toward Israel in 1955. Seeing how British-Egyptian ties were attenuating, the Soviets changed their diplomatic position toward Israel while trying to form an arms deal with the Egyptians. Out of the Czecho-Egyptian Arms Purchase Treaty of October 1955, the Soviets were sending 200 tanks, 100 tank destroyers, 170 military aircraft (MiG 15s or Ilyushin 28 bombers), and fifty 122mm artillery pieces among other military equipment such as rifles, ships, and armored troop carriers to Egypt. In the middle of this deal, on June 23, 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser became president of Egypt through a referendum.³⁸

This new president nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26 of that year, to the chagrin of Great Britain and France. Both nations had wanted to retake the canal. Meanwhile, France, dealing with a war in Algeria, sympathized with Israel, whose enemy, Egypt, had been supporting and supplying Algeria throughout the war. Israel also wanted to reopen its shipping out of its Red Sea port of Eilat. Egypt had announced on September 11, 1955 that all neutral ships traveling through the Strait of Tiran – near the nation's missile batteries at Sharm el-Sheikh – had to receive a permit from Egypt beforehand. France, which was allied with Great Britain, also allied with Israel. Out of

³⁷Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 210; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 136.

³⁸Bell, *Long War*, 251, 269; Robert Henriques, *A Hundred Hours to Suez: An Account of Israel's Campaign in the Sinai Peninsula* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), 27; Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012), 40.

this situation, the “Tripartite Aggression” of Great Britain, France, and Israel emerged. Israel would be a warring force toward the Suez Canal that would create a need for France and Great Britain to retake the canal to protect shipping. The Israeli leadership codenamed the attack into the Sinai Peninsula “Operation Kadesh.” By October 30, 1956, Egyptian newspapers had already guessed that this alliance had been created.³⁹

These factors led to the Suez Crisis of 1956, when Sharon’s Sinai battles culminated in his battle for the Mitla Pass. Historian and Israeli soldier Robert Henriques met with Colonel Ariel Sharon after the Sinai Campaign and considered the later to have a “full measure of military impudence.” Sharon had already been transformed from the slim, young man of the Israeli War of Independence into a burly, prematurely-graying brigade commander. Upon viewing the post-war paratroopers, Henriques considered them “first class” professionals with “well-mannered pride.” Little did they know, they were about to enter into the longest Israeli battle within the Suez Crisis. As one Israeli soldier wrote, “None were so savage or so fierce with the clang, blood and drama of primitive, elemental man-to-man clubbing as the long day of fighting in which paratroopers were yet to stand pitted in that God-forsaken wickedness of rock at the Mitla.”⁴⁰

On October 29, 1956, sixteen DC-3 Dakotas – escorted by Meteors, Ouragans, and Mystère fighter jets – carried the Israeli 890th Paratrooper Battalion to the eastern side of the Mitla Pass, one hundred thirty miles behind enemy lines. Rafael “Raful”

³⁹Kandil, *Soldiers*, 46. See also Aharon Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years’ War: Israel and the Arabs* (New York: TV Books, 1998), 65; Bell, *Long War*, 270; Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, 3rd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1985), 209; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 208; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 30, 1956.

⁴⁰Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 67, 68; Shlomo Barer, *The Weekend War* (Tel Aviv, Karni Publishers, 1959), 139.

Eitan commanded the 394 men of this battalion, who were generally armed with Uzis. Dropping with these men was Uri Dan, a young military correspondent who would follow Sharon throughout his military and political career. The war plan sent the paratroopers to the Mitla Pass to have troops near the canal – about forty miles distance (France and England wanted the conflict near the Suez Canal as a reason to reclaim it from Egypt). Two of the paratroopers broke their legs during the airdrop, and the battalion fortified themselves at the wrong hill location at a road junction, about a mile from the entrance to the pass. At this location, they defended themselves as they waited for the rest of Sharon's brigade to join them.⁴¹

While there, the paratroopers attacked Egyptian transports and received airdrops of water and 120mm mortars while waiting for the rest of their brigade. By daylight on October 31, Eitan had realized that the southern side of the pass overlooked his position, and that his paratroopers had received Egyptian mortar fire. By their second day there, the rest of the paratroopers had constructed an airdrop zone. On the same day, Israelis jets stopped two Egyptian platoons, the only ground force that attacked the lone paratroop battalion. With this attack, wrecked vehicles now blocked the road within the Mitla Pass.⁴²

The rest of Sharon's 202nd Paratroop Brigade assembled at Wadi Faran by the Jordanian border in a ploy to surprise the Egyptians at Quntilla. This added another 120 miles by road to the long trek. Here, the other battalions began to receive some G.M.C. six-wheel, front-wheel drive trucks from France for the rugged, sometime roadless travel

⁴¹This pass is also known as Jebel Heitan. Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 63, 82; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 144; Barer, *Weekend War*, 118.

⁴²Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 82; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Sinai Campaign, 1956* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), 105-6; *Jerusalem Post*, November 2, 1956.

in the Sinai; the rest of the new trucks arrived along the convoy's route. From Israel, they raced to capture Quntilla in the Sinai on the way to reunite with Eitan's battalion. Sharon's objective was to meet at the Mitla pass within twenty-four to thirty-six hours of the paratroop drop. That evening, he sent his troops behind the company of Egyptians at Quntilla, using the setting sun behind Israelis to their advantage. Only seven of his thirteen new French AMX light tanks had arrived for the attack. The mine field at the entrance there detonated under two halftracks and a jeep, injuring one Israeli soldier, but Quntilla quickly fell.⁴³

⁴³The AMX had a 75mm gun and 40mm light armor. Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 144; Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 71, 74; Barer, *Weekend War*, 132; Dayan, *Diary*, 81, 83; Kenneth Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank: The Illustrated Story of Armored Battlefield Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Topsfield, MA: Salem House Publishers, 1988), 167.

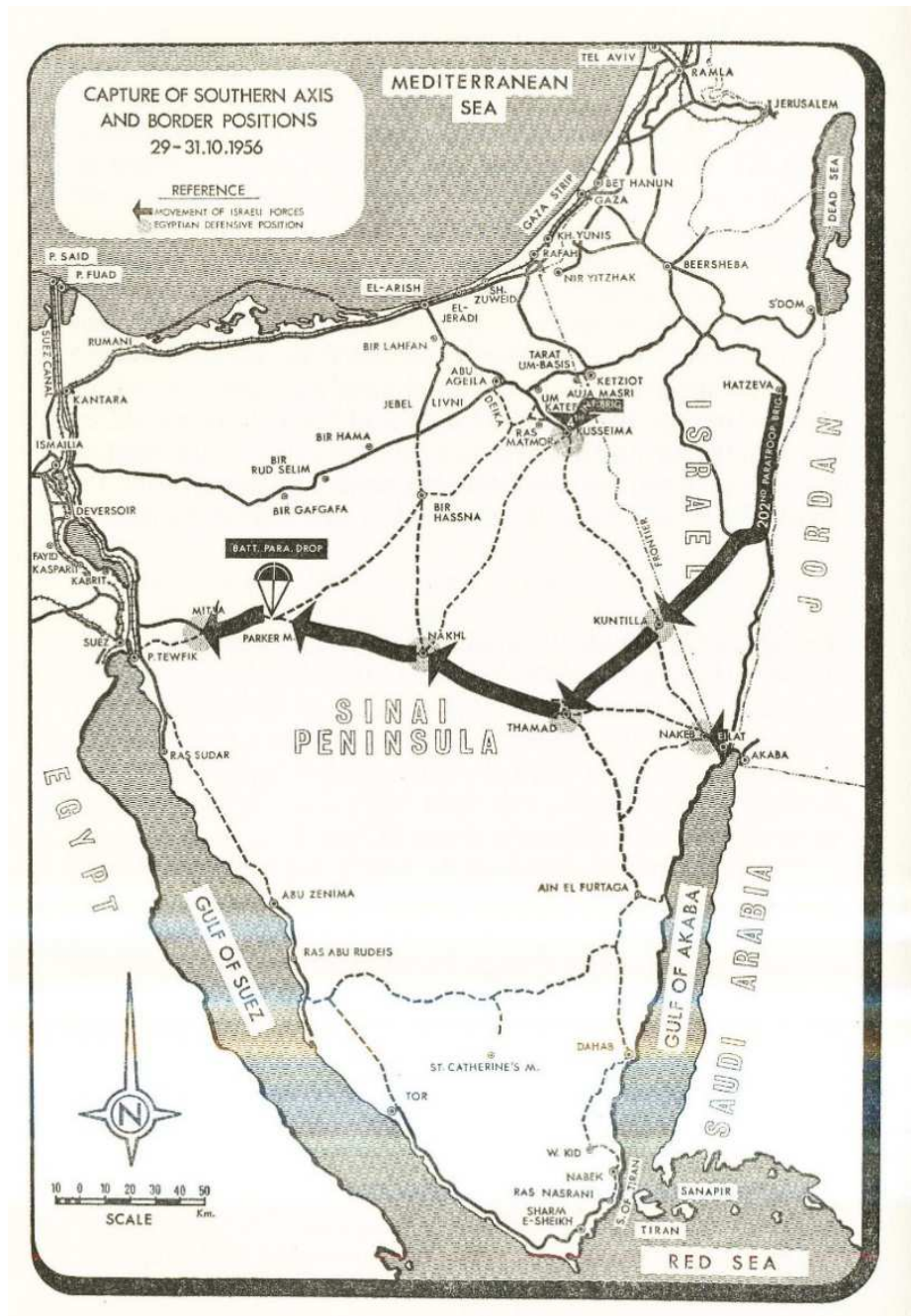


Figure 1.2. The map depicts Sharon's route during the Suez Crisis.⁴⁴

Sharon's troops needed to drive to Themed next. While driving without a road in many places from the Negev to the oasis of Themed, Sharon lost almost sixty vehicles

⁴⁴Dayan, *Diary*, 82.

and seventeen of his eighteen field guns to the sand dunes and wadis. His new six-wheel-drive trucks also did not have spare tires or parts when they arrived from the French. Many drove through the desert on their rims. By the time of the attack on Themed, only three AMX tanks remained.⁴⁵

In the morning, with the sun at the Israelis' backs again, the Israelis attacked the two defending infantry companies at a road junction near Themed. Mine fields and barbed wire constrained the Israeli attack to the main road, where five Egyptian machine guns were concentrating their fire. Aharon Davidi commanded a battalion led by ten halftracks and the three light tanks against these Egyptians. His company commander smashed through the main gate, received a debilitating wound when his halftrack hit a mine, and then covered his men with smoke grenades while bleeding on the ground near the wreckage. About fifty Egyptian and Sudanese dead remained at Themed (a company was Sudanese) while the living fled on foot or in jeeps. Four Israelis also died and six were wounded. Here, Israeli DC-3s dropped fuel and equipment, but Egyptian MiG-15s and Vampires scattered the refueling Israeli ground troops four times with strafing fire.⁴⁶

Before the Egyptian air force attack, Sharon managed to refuel Major Mordechai "Motta" Gur's battalion first and quickly sent them to the last village on the way to Eitan's men, Qalaat el-Nakhl – "Fortress of the Palms." At Nakhl, there was a military headquarters for the Egyptian 2nd Motorized Border Battalion, consisting of Egyptian and Sudanese troops minus their two companies previously mentioned at Themed.

Advancing against these troops, three companies of Israelis in halftracks attacked around

⁴⁵Themed is also called El Thamed or al-Thamd. Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 73, 75; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 145; Bell, *Long War*, 312.

⁴⁶Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 76; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 145; Barer, *Weekend War*, 133-4; Love, *Suez*, 508; Bell, *Long War*, 313.

4:45 pm. Late in the afternoon on October 30, the village fell to the Israelis with the help of two of their artillery pieces. The Egyptians who had withdrawn sometimes left their arms, but many also left their boots to cross the desert more lightly. At Nakhl, fifty-six more Egyptians and Sudanese died, but no Israelis had. The Israelis found about six Soviet armored troop carriers abandoned here, and they eagerly used them in their need for transport. They now could race for the pass.⁴⁷

By 10:00 pm that night, Sharon's leading battalion reunited with Raphael Eitan's battalion at the Mitla Pass. After the group combined, the Israeli Air Force sent intelligence that the Mitla Pass was unoccupied by Egyptians. By this point, Israeli Meteors were providing support in the skies above the brigade. Then, Sharon and his troops finally slept. Around 6:00 am, headquarters ordered the 202nd Paratroop Brigade to remain at the eastern end of the pass without entering it.⁴⁸

There was a problem with remaining outside the pass. An Egyptian armored brigade was forty miles northeast of the Israelis at Bir Gifgafa and moving west. By now, the Israeli brigade was weak. Sharon only had three AMX tanks and some artillery at the pass, and he had left a battalion at Nakhl and a company at Themed to protect his withdrawal route. As his troops arrived, he stationed them along a wadi and on rocky ground to the south. Meanwhile, his headquarters and artillery filled the available positions at Eitan's paratrooper hill. Outside of the pass, the soil was hard and flat, leaving little cover or protection from an Egyptian attack. To make matters worse,

⁴⁷Barer, *Weekend War*, 135. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 145; Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 65, 78; Love, *Suez*, 510; Barer, *Weekend War*, 135; Bell, *Long War*, 313; O'Ballance, *Sinai Campaign*, 114.

⁴⁸Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 78; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 146; Bell, *Long War*, 314.

elements of the trailing battalion at Nakhl continued to rejoin the brigade by the Mitla Pass and overcrowded the remaining positions offering cover. If Sharon could move troops into the pass, its ridges would give cover to the Israelis and bottleneck any coming Egyptian tanks. Eventually, headquarters gave him permission to send a reconnaissance team into the pass with the condition that he “not [...] get involved in any large-scale action.”⁴⁹

He sent his three tanks and two companies in armored carriers commanded by Mordechai Gur into the pass, and Sharon also claimed that he ordered Gur to withdraw if there was contact with the enemy. The objective was to capture all twenty miles of the pass if there was no resistance, but before traveling a mile into it, enemy fire stopped the first two armored carriers. The Egyptians had laid an ambush at a bend within the pass. Gur’s Lieutenant Arie Crespi was killed in the first halftrack when the Egyptians opened fire. Gur then used his third halftrack to push away a disabled Egyptian truck blocking the road, but his halftrack crashed into a wadi on the side of the road in the process. Of the soldiers in the first three halftracks and first tank to enter the area, twelve died there within the Egyptian ambush.⁵⁰

The Egyptian 5th Regiment and a company of the 6th Regiments of the 2nd Infantry Brigade held scattered positions on ledges or in caves on both sides of the pass. By 10:00 pm on October 29, 1956, a chain ferry near Suez City began to carry the battalions to the Sinai, an operation that lasted twenty hours. Once crossed, they advanced to the Mitla

⁴⁹Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 147. See also Love, *Suez*, 510; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 145, 147; O’Ballance, *Sinai Campaign*, 115; Barer, *Weekend War*, 140.

⁵⁰Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 147; Bell, *Long War*, 315-6; Love, *Suez*, 516; Barer, *Weekend War*, 153.

Pass, taking positions at a bend in the Heitan defile. They were armed with fourteen medium machine guns, twelve 57mm anti-tank guns, and other small arms. These soldiers fought valiantly, despite the disadvantageous circumstance that most of their officers had fled before this battle. When fighting began, they quickly decommissioned the Israeli mortars. Nevertheless, some of the Israelis with Yitzhak Hofi, Sharon's second-in-command, made it through the ambush to the west with two of the tanks and some halftracks. Under smoke concealment, one of these tanks pushed a charred truck out of the road, allowing Hofi's vehicles to pass another two or three miles to the west.⁵¹

Before further discussing the battle, it is important to note why Mordechai Gur stayed in the ambush rather than withdrawing. As previously discussed, Sharon had trained his men never to leave the wounded or dead behind, and Gur, in the third carrier with Uri Dan, instinctively moved further into the pass to rescue his comrades in the first two disabled carriers. Sharon believed that in the long-term, this practice of rescue bettered the paratroopers, because they could perform more courageously in combat knowing their comrades would always rescue them. The Israelis inside the pass had lost radio contact with each other as well as the soldiers outside due to the dense, twisting rock of the pass. Sharon had no idea of the carnage in the pass until Aharon Davidi sent a message to him. To make matters worse for the Israelis, Egyptian Vampire aircraft began to strafe their position outside of the pass.⁵²

⁵¹Dayan, *Diary*, 101; Love, *Suez*, 501, 516; Barer, *Weekend War*, 149-51; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 150.

⁵²Barer, *Weekend War*, 145, 150; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 148; Bell, *Long War*, 316.

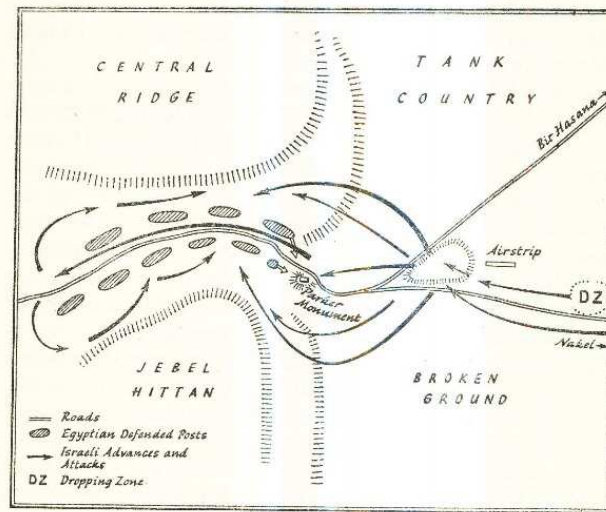


Figure 1.3. The map depicts the battle at the Mitla Pass.⁵³

When the battle began, Sharon did his best to remedy the situation. He sent Eitan with reinforcements to aid Davidi at the bend before the ambush. At the entrance, the rest of the brigade set up defenses facing outward at any possible Egyptian armor moving into the eastern side of the Mitla Pass.⁵⁴

During the day, Israelis made two unsuccessful attempts at clearing the pass of Egyptians. First, Israeli troops tried to climb the northern cliff, not knowing Egyptians were on both cliff sides around the pass. Smoke and dust rising up from the vehicles and from the wildly-shooting Israelis concealed the Egyptian locations. The Israelis reached the top of the ridge, but Egyptian fire from the other side engulfed their position. Under this fire, they withdrew. After realizing that Egyptians were on both sides, Davidi sent

⁵³O'Ballance, *Sinai Campaign*, 133.

⁵⁴Barer, *Weekend War*, 157; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 149.

about twenty-five men to both sides to clear the Egyptian positions, but after much carnage, the Israelis on the cliffs withdrew around 4:30 pm.⁵⁵

Afterwards, Israeli troops finally attacked and cleared the ridges from the east and from the west. By dusk, Hofi had returned with two tanks from the west of the Egyptian ambush toward Gur's pinned troops. His troops eliminated six enemy positions on the southern cliff, then cleared areas on the northern cliff. Here, some Egyptians left their positions for the valley pass, but one of Hofi's tanks and his remaining men in the pass pinned down these Egyptians. Meanwhile, under the orders of Sharon, Davidi and Eitan sent two teams to clear out Egyptian troops in the cliffs from the east. From 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm, troops led by Levi Hofesh in the north and Oded Ladijinsky in the south killed Egyptian troops within caves and ledges with bazookas, small arms fire, grenades, or hand-to-hand combat. Pinned between the two companies to the east and Hofi to the west, the Egyptian soldiers courageously fought for their lives.⁵⁶

After the battle, many on both sides were dead, but the pass was peaceful. Ladijinsky, a veteran from the 1948 war, had died from a grenade explosion, and his deputy was also killed by enemy fire. Thirty-eight other Israeli troops had also died, and 120 were wounded. Among the Egyptians, about 260 had died, and the rest fled by morning. By the afternoon on October 31, DC-3s were landing on the makeshift airfield outside the pass to load the casualties. Sharon had his troops construct it to send his

⁵⁵Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 149; Barer, *Weekend War*, 148, 165.

⁵⁶Oded is named Oved in Barer's account. Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 150; Barer, *Weekend War*, 169-72; Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 84-5.

many wounded back to hospitals. By 9:00 pm, Gur's remaining men were exiting the Egyptian ambush area after about eight hours within the warzone.⁵⁷

As the fighting ended, the Israelis could rest. That evening, around 7:00 pm, French and British aircraft bombed the Egyptian airfields along the Suez in hope of retaking possession of the Suez Canal. This stronger force pressured Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to withdraw his Sinai forces to the canal. By November 1, an airman on a small Piper Cub of the Israeli Air Force had reported that the coming Egyptian armored brigade had actually withdrawn along another route toward the canal. With the pass clear and no one to defend against, Sharon's troops captured the other end of the Mitla Pass and reached their objective, the coastal road. After the battle, some of Sharon's troops went south to capture the oil refinery village of Ras Sudar and the village of El Tur, but by November 4, 1956, Sharon returned with his brigade to his Israeli base at Tel Nof. They were supposed to help General Avraham Yoffe and his 9th Brigade capture Sharm el-Sheikh to reopen Israeli shipping through the Straits of Tiran, but Yoffe accomplished the task without needing support.⁵⁸

Sharon received criticism from officers of higher and lower ranks for the Mitla battle. Israeli chief of staff Moshe Dayan believed that Sharon had disobeyed orders by engaging in battle inside the pass. Dayan also did not consider the large number of troops in the pass – two companies on halftracks, three tanks, a reconnaissance unit, and an artillery group – to have been a properly sized patrol. He claimed that the battle “was not essential,” opining that this fight had entailed a needless loss of life. This further

⁵⁷Barer, *Weekend War*, 168, 173, 175; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 149-50.

⁵⁸Sachar, *History of Israel*, 499; Henriques, *Hundred Hours*, 85; O'Ballance, *Sinai Campaign*, 165; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 153.

strained the relationship between the two officers. From a lower rank, Mordechai Gur criticized Sharon for not having been in the pass to direct the battle, but the latter defended himself by claiming that the greater danger to his brigade had come from the Egyptian armored brigade outside the pass. He also had all of his senior officers fighting the Egyptians in the pass save one Deputy Battalion Commander. This danger of Egyptian armor seemed most imminent during that period, requiring him to watch and direct that end of the pass. It is the author's opinion that this criticism from Sharon's own men taught him a lesson. After this battle, Sharon constantly stayed with his troops in combat at the front, guiding his men. This will be further shown through Sharon's actions in the following chapters on the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973. It is a major lesson that stayed with him throughout his military career.⁵⁹

Through his formative years as a soldier, Sharon learned lessons from combat that would influence his actions throughout his military career. At Latrun, he learned never to leave a soldier on the battlefield; after Qibya, Sharon gained a powerful friend who could overrule Sharon's commanders; at Qalqilya, he learned to cover his own flanks regardless of orders and to be more self-reliant; and at the Mitla Pass, he learned to always be with his men at the front, regardless of possible enemy threats elsewhere. With this foundation from his formative years, Sharon was prepared to excel during the Six-Day War and overcome during the Yom Kippur War.

⁵⁹Dayan, *Diary*, 102. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 151; Dayan, *Diary*, 100; Barer, *Weekend War*, 168.

CHAPTER III

SHARON VERSUS THE EGYPTIAN ARMY: GENERAL SHARON'S ADVANTAGES AND THE CREATION OF EGYPTIAN DISADVANTAGES DURING THE SIX-DAY WAR, 1967

On May 27, 1967, General Ariel “Arik” Sharon was with his troops in Shivta, a town of ancient ruins from the Byzantine era in the Negev desert. He was already a proven leader from his battles in the Sinai in 1956. The following day, his troop morale rose after five Egyptian soldiers – three were officers – rode a Soviet jeep almost directly into the Israeli camp. One Israeli officer, who fought in the Sinai in 1956, commented, ““They haven’t changed”” due to the feudal differences between officers and enlisted men. The prestige of the officers, one Israeli soldier described their clothes as “made of a type of silk,” compared to the “rags” of the enlisted men, reflected the differences between the nobles and peasants of medieval Europe. One Egyptian newspaper editor, Mohammed Hassanein Heykal, wrote that Egyptian officers developed “a mentality of absolute ownership and feudalism thinking” over their troops. This Egyptian disadvantage, compounded with others, caused the oncoming war to favor Israel from the beginning.¹

¹Yael Dayan, *A Soldier's Diary: Sinai 1967* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967), 21-2; *New York Times*, October 7, 1967. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 18, 21; *New York Times*, June 16, 1967.

Sharon's troops had several advantages over the Egyptian forces with whom these Israelis battled, but to win the largest Israeli victory in the Sinai, the Israeli general strategically negated remaining Egyptian advantages in the battles of Abu Aghila and Nakhl. To understand these Israeli and Egyptian military advantages and disadvantages, there must be an analysis of each country's military, how actions of Sharon and his troops negated Egyptian advantages, and how the overall war strategy further compounded these positives and negatives. The Israeli army socially modernized more quickly than the Egyptian army and gained air superiority before the battles began in 1967. Meanwhile, the Egyptians possessed more modern military equipment than Israel and stationed overwhelming numbers of troops in fortified positions within the Sinai Peninsula. The *Jerusalem Post* also noted that the Egyptian "fighting spirit [was] incomparably stronger than that displayed by the predecessors in the Sinai Campaign." Nevertheless, Sharon commanded his men to undo advantages of the 2nd and 6th Egyptian divisions during two major battles of the Six-Day War. This work will focus on the differences between the two armies, Sharon's battles at Abu Aghila-Um Qataf and Nakhl, and the tactics and strategies used by the Israeli generals. Because of the neutralized Egyptian power and the result of the war, it became known as *al-naksa* – the setback – within Arab-speaking countries. For Sharon, it was one of his greatest victories. These battles are critical to understand, because they relate how the Israeli military advantages and Sharon's experience in nullifying Egyptian advantages affected the Yom Kippur War only six years later.²

²*Jerusalem Post*, June 9, 1967. See also Laura M. James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 102.

Within works on the Six-Day War, authors recorded Sharon's advantages and Egyptian disadvantages in the Sinai, but these positives and negatives were never the primary theme of these works. Authors such as David Dayan, Abraham Wagner, Hazem Kandil, and Michael B. Oren list events of the war but do not always describe how the general used different tactics within an overall strategy to establish superiority over the Egyptian divisions. For example, Kandil, in his work *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen*, writes an apology for President Gamal Abdel Nasser's actions during the Six-Day War and blames field marshal Abdel Hakim 'Amer for many of the Egyptian problems. This work discusses disadvantages for Egyptian troops without analyzing how Sharon and the Israeli army created some of these. Oren and Dayan possibly have written the most on the advantages of the IDF and Sharon versus the Egyptian army, but neither author devoted their whole work to Sharon or the Sinai in particular.³

By 1967, Sharon had developed as an officer. Some compared him to U. S. General Patton in self-assuredness and temperament. Moshe Dayan's daughter Yael, who served under Sharon during the Six-Day War, described the general as a man who believed that he fought the same continuous battles as Biblical figures such as Joshua. Although Sharon was not religious, he was a figure who could "have stepped straight from that era of patriarchal scripture," according to her. Through training, tactics, and

³David Dayan, *Strike First! A Battle History of Israel's Six Day War* (New York: Pitman, 1967), 55; Abraham Richard Wagner, "The Six Day War: A Study in Crisis Decision-Making" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1973), 1-3; Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012), 82; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Presidio Press, 2003), 201-2.

ruses, the general won battles against the Egyptians during Israel's largest military victory.⁴

To understand how the battles developed as Israelis attacked into the Sinai, it is important to know how Israeli troops formed for battle. The military hierarchy in the Sinai consisted of several experienced generals including Sharon, Israel's Director of Training at the time. The man in charge of Southern Command for Israel was Brigadier-General Yeshayahu Gavish. Under Gavish were two armored divisions led by Brigadier-General Yisrael Tal and Brigadier-General Avraham Yoffe, and a third Armored-Infantry division led by General Sharon. He was the youngest Brigadier-General in the Israeli army at thirty-eight years old, and the Six-Day War was his first time leading a division into battle. He controlled one French-made AMX-13 tank reconnaissance battalion, one engineer battalion, and six artillery battalions. Under his command were also three brigades: an armored brigade led by Colonel Mordechai "Motke" Zippori, an infantry brigade led by Colonel Yekutiel "Kuti" Adam, and the 80th Paratrooper Brigade led by Colonel Dani Matt. Zippori's armored brigade consisted of one British-made Centurion tank battalion, one American-made Super-Sherman tank battalion, and one armored-infantry battalion.⁵

⁴Steven Pressfield, *The Lion's Gate: On the Front Lines of the Six Day War* (New York: Sentinel, 2014), 206. See also S. L. A. Marshall, *Swift Sword: The Historical Record of Israel's Victory, June 1967* (New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1967), 55; Pressfield, *Lion's Gate*, 205.

⁵Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 55; Eric Hammel, *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the 1967 Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Scribner's, 1992) 429-30; Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 641; Ariel Sharon and David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Israelis had the pre-war advantage that social barriers between Israeli officers and enlisted men were almost nonexistent in contrast to the Egyptians. To begin, there is no word for “sir” in Hebrew to divide the enlisted man and the officer. Also, Sharon’s troops knew “that General Arik Sharon . . . wore the same battledress and same quality boots[, and] their infantry brigade commander and the gunner ate the same K-rations in the field.” Parade dress and military ceremony were not the focus of the Israeli army; the soldiers – wearing many variations of uniforms – only focused on winning the war. Another motto of the IDF that brought the officer and enlisted man together was the officers’ command “Follow Me” rather than “Forward,” because officers always lead their troops into battle.⁶

After May 28, 1967, Sharon prepared his troops for war by teaching close combat skills and other necessary tasks. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol’s stuttering speech to the Israelis on this day triggered the general’s actions. Eshkol appeared weak as Arab solidarity grew in the region. Egyptian President Nasser had recently ordered the United Nations Emergency Force out of the Sinai, and he closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping as the Egyptian army mobilized in the Sinai. At any moment, the Israeli soldiers had their weapon and helmet. Last minute training began, and many of the soldiers who were only reservists needed it. Part of this training taught troops how to fight in fortified positions, within close quarters. After the war, Sharon named this close combat training as an advantage, because in his opinion, the Egyptian troops “did not

Ariel Sharon (1989; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 191; Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 31.

⁶Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 22; W. Byford-Jones, *The Lightning War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967) 97, 101. See also Yigal Allon, *The Making of Israel’s Army* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), 45; Byford-Jones, *Lightning War*, 98.

have the nerve for hand-to-hand combat.” Historian Fred J. Khouri claims Egyptian troops also “were not adequately trained to use the sophisticated weapons supplied by the USSR.” In contrast, Israelis now were freshly ready for armor and infantry coordination, for using communication systems, for traversing the terrain of sand dunes, and for alternating between different methods of attack.⁷

The appointment of General Moshe Dayan to the position of Defense Minister by Levi Eshkol also increased the morale of the Israeli troops. Dayan was a war hero of the 1956 Sinai Campaign, and his appointment instilled confidence in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). During Sharon’s first battle at Abu Aghila-Um Qataf, Dayan rallied the troops over the radios, “they are greater than us in numbers but we will hold them. We are a small nation but we are determined. We seek peace but we are ready to fight for our lives and our country.” Sharon worked well with this new Defense Minister; the young general claimed, “When there’s no war, I might fight with Moshe [Dayan]. But when there is one, he’s our general.”⁸

Language was another Israeli advantage. Many Israeli troops knew Arabic among other languages, but Egyptian troops generally did not know Hebrew. Some of their Soviet artillery even lacked Arabic instructions. For Israelis, being surrounded by Arabic speaking countries and having the British Mandate of Palestine divided between Arabic and Hebrew speakers before 1948 caused the IDF to have many Arabic-speakers. Many

⁷The United Nations Emergency Force had operated to protect the border between Egypt and Israel since the end of the Suez Crisis. *New York Times*, June 18, 1967; Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, 3rd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1985), 261. See also Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 23, 25, 68.

⁸Abu Aghila is a village inside the defensive stronghold of Um Qataf. Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 55-6; *New York Times*, July 9, 1967. See also Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 36; Dayan, *Strike First*, 134-5.

of the Israeli troops also knew German, Polish, Russian, or French, but Hebrew and English united them, being the languages of their military orders. Meanwhile, Hebrew was not common knowledge to the average Egyptian soldier. Many were even illiterate. The Israeli soldiers' knowledge of Arabic had a demoralizing effect from understanding Nasser's propaganda prior to the outbreak of fighting, but gathering intelligence and understanding false reports of victories from Radio Cairo raised their morale during the war.⁹

Troop motivation was also an Israeli advantage. A lieutenant in the Israeli army claimed, "I did not want war for the excitement of it, I did not even want war for victory's sake, but I wanted war as a solution to a situation that was unbearable. Not war to kill[,] but war in order not to be killed." Many writers argue that the extermination of Israel was not possible, even if Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser attacked first; but this argument does not remove the Israelis' motivation at that time. This motivation was further strengthened when Egypt and Jordan signed a mutual defense pact on May 30, 1967. To add to Israeli worries, Iraq joined this defense pact the day before the war began. In response to this, Sharon wrote to his wife on June 4th, "This [war] is unavoidable, and if we don't do it immediately we will be risking destruction, particularly in light of Iraq's entry into Jordan." Meanwhile, the Egyptians had several reasons to fight the war. Simply being a member of the army or reserves attracted some to battle, others fought for their perceived religious duty to reclaim Israeli territory for the Muslims, and others mobilized in the Sinai for social reasons to create an undivided

⁹A key point to this argument against Israel's destruction is that Israel possibly had nuclear weapons as early as 1966. *Jerusalem Post*, June 19, 1967; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 24; Associated Press, *Lightning out of Israel: The Six-Day War in the Middle East* (New York: Associated Press, 1967), 82; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 273.

Palestinian state for the Arab-Palestinians. Although, Egyptian religious fervor and camaraderie to the Palestinians created a strong motivation for some troops, the motivation of a perceived threatened existence for many Israeli troops seemed to create an Israeli advantage.¹⁰

The IDF had better military intelligence. Israelis gathered their military intelligence within a book on Egyptian, Soviet-style defenses, which contained scale drawings of Sinai defenses collected by spy planes. With this information, Israel's chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin ordered military engineers to build a model of Abu Aghila-Um Qataf in the Negev desert before the war for practice. One of Sharon's lieutenants wrote, "They have forces and they move them according to the books. We know the books, we have done the exercises[,] and our advantage lies in forgetting them all and finding the one method which is not in the books."¹¹

The IDF had the advantage of being an integrated army of males and females. Israeli General Yigal Allon wrote, "Although some women entered combat units, the majority were assigned to office work and services, and to territorial and civil defense, thus helping to release more men for combat units." Perhaps the most famous female soldier under Sharon's command was Lieutenant Yael Dayan, the daughter of Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. This integration proved that the Israeli army was more socially advanced than the Egyptian army, who only allowed women to be nurses within the

¹⁰Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 26; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 191. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 27; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: Dutton, 1972), 413-4; *Egyptian Gazette*, June 5, 1967; *New York Times*, June 11, 1967.

¹¹Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 31. See also Sachar, *History of Israel*, 636.

military. It also increased the number of available troops as Israel had a much smaller population of around 2.4 million Jews compared to 30.9 million Egyptians.¹²

In spite of these positives, the mood within Israel was not always confident. Before the war, Israeli troops were sometimes unsure of their superiority in the battlefield compared to the modernizing Egyptian army. An Israeli spy, named Israel Beer, wrote a book called *Israel's Security: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, and in it, he proposed that Egyptian forces had grown stronger through the formation of a socialist government, Soviet military training, and Soviet support. Egypt did not have all of these new advantages under the Egyptian monarchy in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, nor directly after nationalizing the Suez Canal in the Sinai Campaign of 1956. The Pentagon's military analysts claimed that Egypt's army was stronger than in 1956. Some experts claimed this "new" Egyptian army could even advance into Israeli territory.¹³

The Egyptians held the advantage in numbers of soldiers. The Egyptian second division faced Sharon's men across the Sinai-Negev border, and this division concentrated in two locations: Abu Aghila and Quseima. Israeli troops also amounted to one division, but when attacking a fortified enemy, the attacking army usually requires three times the number of defending troops. This position at Abu Aghila was Egypt's strongest defense in the Sinai. Overall, Egypt had seven divisions in the Sinai – only two of which were armored. Meanwhile, Israel had only three divisions and two independent brigades attacking: two armored divisions and Sharon's 38th Armored-Infantry Division.

¹²The population of Jews in Israel is given as Israeli Arabs were not drafted into the military. Allon, *Israel's Army*, 47. See also Lieutenant General Saad el Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980), 50; Allon, *Israel's Army*, 62.

¹³Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 42; *New York Times*, June 6, 1967.

In all, approximately 80,000 to 100,000 Egyptian troops were in the Sinai against approximately 51,000 Israelis.¹⁴

Israel lacked many military supplies at the beginning of the war, but as the war progressed, the IDF used abandoned Egyptian equipment to restock. When war broke out on Monday, June 5, 1967, last minute supplies were rushed to the southern command headquarters in Beersheba, but not enough Uzi submachine guns were available to supply all of the soldiers. The IDF also lacked goggles to protect their eyes from the harsh desert winds filled with sand, but Israelis captured Egyptian, Soviet-made gas masks and made makeshift goggles from them to solve this problem after their first victories.¹⁵

Knowledge of the terrain was originally an Egyptian advantage, but soldiers within the Israeli army, including Sharon, neutralized it through learning from the experience of fighting against Abu Aghila in the Sinai Campaign. Eleven years earlier, two Israeli battalions attacked this fortification, but the Egyptians repelled their two separate attacks. Although Israelis never captured Abu Aghila through force in that war, the battle experience prepared the Israelis for a second attempt at capturing the fortress. Lieutenant Dayan blamed the earlier failure on the lack of coordination among Israeli troops and the lack of knowledge of the Egyptian stronghold. Sharon's new strategy and knowledge of the terrain demonstrated how the Israelis learned from past mistakes.¹⁶

Another important factor was the tanks used. The design of the British-made Centurion 3 tank was the best-performing of any tank in the Six-Day War. To upgrade to

¹⁴Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 30, 26; *New York Times*, June 18-19, 1967; Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 21, 55; Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 429-30; Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London: Penguin, 1971), 496.

¹⁵Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 47; *New York Times*, June 21, 1967; Associated Press, *Lightning out of Israel*, 121.

¹⁶Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 78, 51.

the Centurion 3, the British had integrated new, gun stabilizing technologies, 152mm armor, and a better, high-caliber cannon to the Centurion Mark 1. Israeli Centurions were mounted with new transmissions and 105mm cannons which used a tracer-firing machine gun aligned with the main cannon for accurate aiming. Israel and Egypt both owned different forms of the Centurion tanks – Egypt owned Mark II models, but Sharon used a majority of the dominating tanks for a key victory against Egyptian tanks at Abu Aghila.¹⁷

Before the war, the most modern tank might have seemed to be an advantage, but against the Israeli Centurions, Egypt's modern Soviet tanks faltered. The most modern tank used was the Soviet T-55, a model upgrade of the T-54 tank. The Egyptian army owned many of these, while the Israeli army possessed no Soviet-made tanks. Soviet designers incorporated infra-red, night-vision targeting systems into these new tanks which allowed up to a one-thousand meter view range in darkness. Other features of the tank were 170mm turret armor, a 520 hp engine, and a 100mm cannon. However, Soviet materials were not suited for fighting in the Sinai. Troops protected springs from sand damage by wrapping them in cloth, and engines overheated or cracked commonly in the high temperatures.¹⁸

The remaining Egyptian and Israeli tanks were of a lower quality; these tanks were T-34/85s, Super-Shermans, and AMX-13 tanks. The Egyptians used an upgraded World War II tank, the Soviet-made T-34/85. It had 75mm armor like the T-54 model, and an 85mm cannon. The Israeli-modified, American-made Super-Sherman was also an

¹⁷Kenneth Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank: The Illustrated Story of Armored Battlefield Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Topsfield, MA: Salem House Publishers, 1988), 164-6, 154; Byford-Jones, *Lightning War*, 48.

¹⁸Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank*, 154-6; *Jerusalem Post*, June 26, 1967.

outdated World War II tank. Sherman tanks had 105mm armor and 450 hp engines. Israelis fitted a 105mm cannon to the tanks, and throughout the war, they managed to perform well in combat in spite of their age. Israelis purchased AMX-13 light tanks from France in the 1950s, which used German, 75mm L70 cannons and only had 40mm armor. These three types of tanks were the most vulnerable during the war.¹⁹

The last Israeli advantage formed before the ground war when Israeli Mystères and Mirages carried out a surprise air attack on foreign air bases beginning at 7:45 am on June 5, 1967, directly after Egyptian morning patrols. The Egyptians lacked concrete hangers for their planes, and Israelis used newly-developed bombs to form craters in the runways. Israeli pilots destroyed between 286 and 320 Egyptian planes, leaving Egypt with as few as twenty remaining aircraft, while the Israeli air force lost only twenty-six planes on all fronts during the first day of the war. With this operation, they secured air superiority.²⁰

One final note must be made toward dispelling a myth about American and British collusion with Israel during the Six-Day War. If left unaddressed, it could be said that this “collusion” was an advantage, unmentioned within this work, to Israel or to Sharon. During the war, Nasser claimed American planes from the Sixth Fleet attacked Egypt. Because of this lie, American embassies and consulates were attacked in several Middle Eastern cities, American citizens were deported from Egypt, and seven nations broke diplomatic ties with the United States. On June 8, 1967, Israeli Army intelligence intercepted an agreement between the Egyptian and Jordanian leaders to lie by blaming

¹⁹Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank*, 111, 136, 147, 163, 158, 166.

²⁰Sachar, *History of Israel*, 640; Stephens, *Nasser*, 493; Nutting, *Nasser*, 417; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 171, 174.

the United States and Great Britain for aiding Israel with combat aircraft. Afterwards, the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahmoud Riad admitted in his work *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* that American and British planes did not partake in the fighting. Former U. S. Ambassador to Israel Michael Oren claims that Nasser and his field marshal decided to create this myth “to minimize Egypt’s dishonor and to prod the Soviets to intervene.”²¹

With the advantages and disadvantages from before the ground war explained, the examination of Egypt’s neutralized advantages within Sharon’s battles can begin. Abu Aghiela was “the core of the Egyptian defense in the Sinai.” The Egyptian 2nd Infantry Division held this position, and the defenses stretched for 14 to 15 kilometers, encompassing both Abu Aghiela and Um Qataf. Sharon desired to capture this area before the town of Quseima, because capturing the former would allow Israelis to block the escape routes from the latter. Egyptian defensive lines stretched from “impassible” dunes on the northern flank to a high-ground cliff on the southern flank, and mines were laid to block Israeli tanks in front of the defenses and in between the Egyptian lines. From behind three lines of troops, consisting of four infantry battalions and ninety tanks, eighty Egyptian artillery pieces prepared to fire on Israelis caught within the minefields. Certainly, the Egyptians held the original advantage with better defenses, better firepower, and the comfort of well-supplied, concrete bunkers.²²

²¹Oren, *Six Days of War*, 209. See also Pressfield, *Lion’s Gate*, 333; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 217-8; *Jerusalem Post*, June 9, 1967; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 25.

²²Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 60. See also Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 55-6, 61, 69; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 188; Stephens, *Nasser*, 500; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 181.

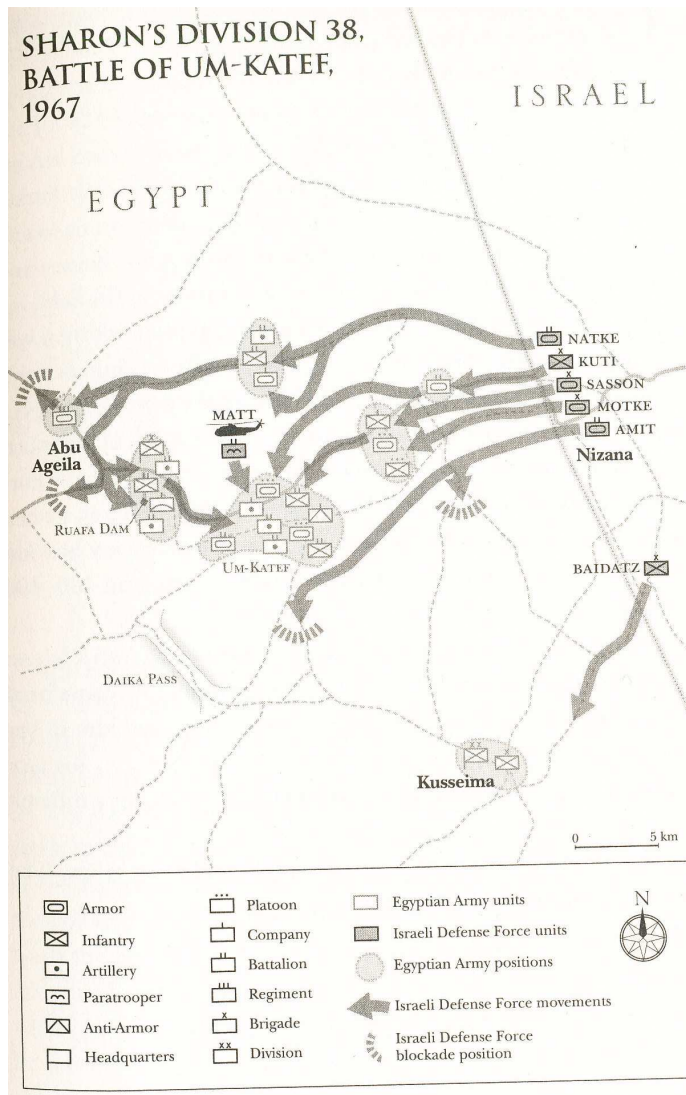


Figure 2.1. Sharon's division's battle at Abu Aghiela-Um Qataf. "Natke" Nir moves through Outpost 181 from the north, "Kuti" Adam crosses northern sand dunes, and "Motke" Zippori attacks from the east.²³

Sharon's first stage to capture Abu Aghiela was a tank attack on a northern fortification, outpost 181. By 11:00 am, the attacking Israeli Centurion tanks had lost a regimental commander and two company commanders to Egyptian defensive fire while

²³Gilad Sharon, *Sharon: The Life of a Leader* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 131.

attacking the outpost. Sharon ordered these tanks to withdraw from the minefield at that outpost and to regroup for a second attack. By this point, the Centurions already destroyed some of the Egyptian T-34s; the Israeli tank soldiers now knew that they had an advantage over the weaker tanks. The Centurions began their second offensive and gained control of the outpost within thirty minutes through the help of a helicopter spotting mines for the tanks.²⁴

While air superiority was not a major factor in this initial battle, Israelis maintained this advantage. At approximately 12:30 pm, Sharon's troops saw Israeli Ouragan and Fouga bombers fly overhead to provide support. This was the first time the general used the Air Force during the war, and by this time, his troops knew that Israel had the aerial advantage. After Egyptian anti-aircraft fire shot down one plane, Sharon called off the air support, because he believed that it was not absolutely necessary. Once the battle of Abu Aghiela began that night, the general never used these fighter-bombers again for the duration of the battle.²⁵

Israel had better supply lines and transportation than Egyptians because early air support had cut off the long Egyptian lines. A lieutenant under Sharon's leadership recalled, "the [road] stretching toward . . . Nitsana was already crowded with incoming vehicles carrying ammunition, petrol[,] and supplies." Meanwhile, the Israeli general did not have enough proper army transport vehicles, but he used civilian buses from Israel to move troops forward during the battle at Abu Aghiela.²⁶

²⁴Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 56-7, 60.

²⁵Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 57; Dayan, *Strike First*, 55; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 191; *New York Times*, June 18, 1967.

²⁶Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 58.

Sharon had a multi-faceted plan to capture the fortress at Abu Aghiela and counter the better Egyptian artillery. With outpost 181 taken, Lieutenant Colonel Nir's Centurion tanks circled around the Egyptian defenses from the north to combat Egyptian tanks. The second part of the plan negated Egyptian artillery superiority. Israeli artillery was less powerful than the more than eighty Egyptian pieces, which used 122mm or 130mm guns. The Israeli artillery also fired within a shorter range than the Egyptian artillery, which had a longer range between thirteen and fourteen miles. To remove this advantage, Sharon sent Colonel Dani Matt's 80th Paratroop Brigade to drop from helicopters behind Abu Aghiela to destroy the artillery. These paratroopers attacked from the west. To expose Egyptian tank vulnerabilities, Colonel Zippori's Super-Shermans attacked from the east, in front of enemy defenses. While Egyptian tanks and artillery were preoccupied, Colonel Adam's infantry charged north of the minefield over the "impassible" sand dunes, and his three battalions divided to attack the three Egyptian trenches from their north side. During these flanking and pincer maneuvers, Sharon sent his engineers to clear the minefields with steel wands around 1:30 am. The general correctly claimed, "The key to success would be the closest co-operation between the different elements of our forces."²⁷

Sharon also asserted that he did not use improvisation in battles; rather, he used precise planning to defeat his enemies. Colonel Dani Matt claimed that what appeared to be random improvisation under Sharon was actually "the payoff of scrupulous preparation and drill." The general had the option of fighting at night without air support

²⁷Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 189. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 62-3, 84, 67-8, 75; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 188, 190; *New York Times*, June 18, 1967; Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 60.

or waiting until the next day to attack with air support, but he chose to battle at night, using darkness to his advantage. Night-fighting was a special tactic of the Jews since the period of the mandate of Palestine, and the paratroopers were well-versed in it. Although this choice created harder conditions for Sharon's troops, it also created confusion and chaos among the surrounded Egyptians.²⁸

American General S. L. A. Marshall seemed surprised at the "foolhardy complexity of [Sharon's] plan that . . . embraced five separate movements, all but one of them convergent and all having to be regulated at night." However, Colonel Matt informs how Sharon kept the operation simple. Matt claims Sharon kept the overall plan to himself, while telling subordinates only their role within the battle plan. Sharon's plan, using so many attacking groups, created a "*tachboulah*" or "ruse." Sharon designed these ruses to force the Egyptians to respond to chaotic situations for which they were not prepared.²⁹

Before the war, the general had been the leader of the paratroop brigade, and he knew its leader, Colonel Dani Matt, since before 1953. Matt claimed that Sharon was "the greatest field commander the IDF has ever produced or ever will produce." The general still wore his red paratrooper's beret into combat, and sympathized with his colonel being sent behind enemy lines. Lieutenant Dayan observed that among the paratroopers, the general "knew them all by their first names." Sharon had also trained many of them, especially in hand-to-hand combat. In the 1950s, he trained them to avoid

²⁸Pressfield, *Lion's Gate*, 226. See also Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 188-9; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 63; Kennett Love, *Suez: The Twice-Fought War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 516.

²⁹Sharon derives *tachboulah* from Proverbs 24:6 – By a *tachboulah* shalt thou wage war. Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 56; Pressfield, *Lion's Gate*, 230. See also Pressfield, *Lion's Gate*, 229, 231.

flinching in this type of combat by forcing them to bayonet sacks of live cats. This training and personal connection formed a stronger bond between him and his troops, and it also prepared the paratroopers for hand-to-hand combat against Egyptian artillery troops.³⁰

The attack on Abu Aghiela began at 10:30 pm on June 5, 1967 when Sharon ordered his artillery to ““Let everything tremble.”” The paratroopers began to land behind enemy lines two hours before Israeli artillery opened fire. Sharon agreed with Colonel Adam to end the barrage earlier than planned, instilling the psychological distress for the Egyptian troops rather than allowing them to become “accustomed” to the artillery fire. With Colonel Adam attacking the front lines with his infantry, Sharon gave him command over the artillery; he knew that the men closest to the action could best direct it.³¹

While these attacks progressed, the paratroopers approached from five miles behind the enemy, removed the threat of Egyptian artillery, and blocked the supply routes to the Egyptians from the southwest while taking heavy losses. Approximately forty Egyptian artillery gunners died in the attack while another battalion of gunners fled southwest. These gunners had not been trained to defend their positions properly.³²

Meanwhile, among the tank forces, Colonel Zippori’s Centurions and Super-Shermans entered into Abu Aghiela’s defenses and destroyed at least forty of the Egyptian’s ninety Soviet-made tanks including the new T-55 tanks. Here, proper training

³⁰Pressfield, *Lion’s Gate*, 204. See also Pressfield, *Lion’s Gate*, 204; Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 63; Love, *Suez*, 517.

³¹Oren, *Six Days of War*, 201. See also Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 64-6.

³²Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 71, 73; Dayan, *Strike First*, 56; Pressfield, *Lion’s Gate*, 234.

influenced the battle. Twice Zippori ordered for one column of his tanks to stop shooting while a second column of tanks located enemy fire, and this difficult operation allowed for the avoidance of friendly fire. After intense fighting began against T-34/85 tanks, a shell hit Lieutenant Colonel Nir's halftrack, the officer who commanded the Centurion tanks from the north. The shell critically wounded him, and his second in command took charge of the situation. Eleven Israeli tank troops were killed, and in addition, three half-tracks and nineteen Israeli tanks were destroyed. Meanwhile, Egyptians lost two or three times this number of tanks.³³

Apart from problems with Israelis, Egyptian forces at Abu Aghiela-Um Qataf endured other obstacles. The Egyptians field marshal 'Amer appointed his drinking buddy, Major General Sa'di Naguib to command their 2nd Division, but Naguib was not even present for the battle against Sharon. This left the troops without a main commander. Remaining Egyptian forces of the 2nd Division were concentrated in Quseima nearby, but the General there did not receive a direct order to relocate troops to reinforce Abu Aghiela. As an answer to this inflexibility, an Israeli lieutenant claimed, the Egyptian soldier "relied too much on his officer, on the artillery, on the mortars, on his anti-tank platoon, on somebody or something outside himself." In another area, high command ordered the Egyptian 14th Brigade at Bir Hasana to counter-attack the Israelis at Abu Aghiela, but they mobilized too slowly; General Yoffe's armor – from another Israeli division – reached and blocked them before a counter-attack began. To reach and to form this roadblock, these Israelis used a wadi that Sharon's paratroopers had discovered as traversable by tanks in 1956. As Egyptians fled from Abu Aghiela, other

³³Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 76-8; Dayan, *Strike First*, 58, 62.

Egyptian artillery from further west also mistakenly fired on them. All these factors put Egyptian troops – fighting General Sharon – at a greater disadvantage.³⁴

The outcome of Sharon's nighttime battle plan combined with pre-war Israeli advantages was an unprecedented victory for his weary troops. Only fourteen Israeli infantry were killed as opposed to approximately three hundred Egyptians, along with their loss of "sixty tanks, one hundred ten guns, sixty mortars, and many half-tracks." After the twenty hours of battle, Lieutenant Dayan reflected, "the place looked as though a hurricane had hit it." One cause of this victory was that Egyptian tank soldiers did not receive the same, extensive training as Israeli tank soldiers. For example, once during the war, an Egyptian tank accidentally joined an Israeli tank column or purposely tried to appear as an Israeli tank; the Egyptian tank was shot after driving five miles with the Israeli column. One Israeli major reported, the Egyptians "are not tank soldiers. They are just drivers of tanks."³⁵

The testimony of Brigadier Ahmed E. Abd el Naby provided the Egyptian perspective on the first loss against the Israeli general. General Naby led the 125th armored Brigade behind Abu Aghiela, protecting it from Israeli armor. After losing five men to an air strike, he received an order to withdraw to the west, but he left twenty-four unharmed tanks at the battlefield. The general's reasoning was that he did not receive orders to destroy the tanks, and the noise of destruction would reveal his position. His brigade changed their route to the Mitla pass when they approached an Israeli roadblock

³⁴Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 70. See also Kandil, *Soldiers*, 82-3; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 80; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 202, 213.

³⁵Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 61; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 69; *New York Times*, June 18, 1967. See also Oren, *Six Days of War*, 212; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 69, 74; *New York Times*, June 19, 1967.

of only light arms on the way to Bir Hasana. At a second ambush at the Mitla pass, his troops scattered, leaving helmets and rifles, and General Naby forgot to bring water or food with him into the desert for his escape. Without any supplies, the general resorted to drinking gasoline-tainted water for three days, until one of Sharon's patrols found him. General Naby blamed the loss on poor Egyptian tank quality, Israeli air superiority – which he claimed broke Egyptian supply routes, and poor administration from his high command.³⁶

After the battle, Sharon's troops advanced and captured Egyptian territory while waiting for new orders from General Gavish of Southern Command. On the night of June 6th, 1967, many of Sharon's soldiers slept for the first time in over sixty hours, but by the next day, his troops moved forward and captured the Jebel Libni junction west of Um Qataf. The same day, the general received orders to move to Sharm el-Sheikh near the southern tip of the Sinai, via the town of Nakhl. On the way south, some of his forces traveled to Quseima and found no resistance; the Egyptian troops – who had not helped their comrades at Abu Aghiela – evacuated before the arrival of Israeli troops. This validated Sharon's choice to bypass Quseima to attack Abu Aghiela.³⁷

In between Sharon's first battle and his next battle at Nakhl, Egyptian leaders made poor choices which formed greater Egyptian disadvantages. On June 6th, at 6:00 am, Egyptian high command made a terrible mistake when the Egyptian field marshal, Abdel Hakim 'Amer, ordered a general withdrawal of all troops in the Sinai to the west bank of the Suez Canal. Historian Hazem Kandil claims this "decision to withdraw was

³⁶*New York Times*, June 20, 1967.

³⁷Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 88-90; *New York Times*, June 7, 1967; Dayan, *Strike First*, 87.

doubtlessly the single most important reason for the defeat.” At 7:37 am, Cairo Radio created more fear among the Egyptian soldiers by falsely claiming that the United States and Great Britain were helping Israel. The Egyptian government also shut off the water supply to the Sinai during the few days of fighting in an attempt to slow the Israelis due to a lack of water, but Egyptian soldiers became the victims of thirst while evading the Israeli enemy. When Egyptian forces moved from well-protected positions to retreat, they lost their defensive advantages and exposed their forces to air attacks.³⁸

Nearing Nakhl, Sharon’s division reaped the benefits of poor Egyptian leadership. At an abandoned Egyptian radio station, his troops stopped while waiting for fuel and supplies to arrive, and an officer found a Soviet tank left undamaged by the fleeing Egyptians. This was a common event in the Sinai, and by the end of the war, the IDF captured more than one hundred working Egyptian tanks. Through these same events, Israel became the first “western” country to capture a newly-designed, unharmed T-55 tank. Later, another instance of poor Egyptian training aided Sharon’s force. On the trip, his troops were stopped at a minefield, but Egyptians had left empty crates, which originally contained the mines. This obvious mistake signaled the Israelis of the danger beforehand.³⁹

At this minefield, the morale of Sharon’s troops further rose due to news from the Jordanian front. While engineers were clearing a path, soldiers learned about the capture of the Old City of Jerusalem. Soldiers cried joyfully and sang the war’s new anthem for

³⁸Kandil, *Soldiers*, 82. See also Stephens, *Nasser*, 497; Associated Press, *Lightning out of Israel*, 85-7; *New York Times*, June 15, 1967.

³⁹Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 94, 96-7; *New York Times*, June 18, 1967.

Israelis: “Jerusalem the Golden” by Naomi Shemer. When Sharon informed his troops of the coming battle at Nakhl, his troops cheered as they began to move further south.⁴⁰

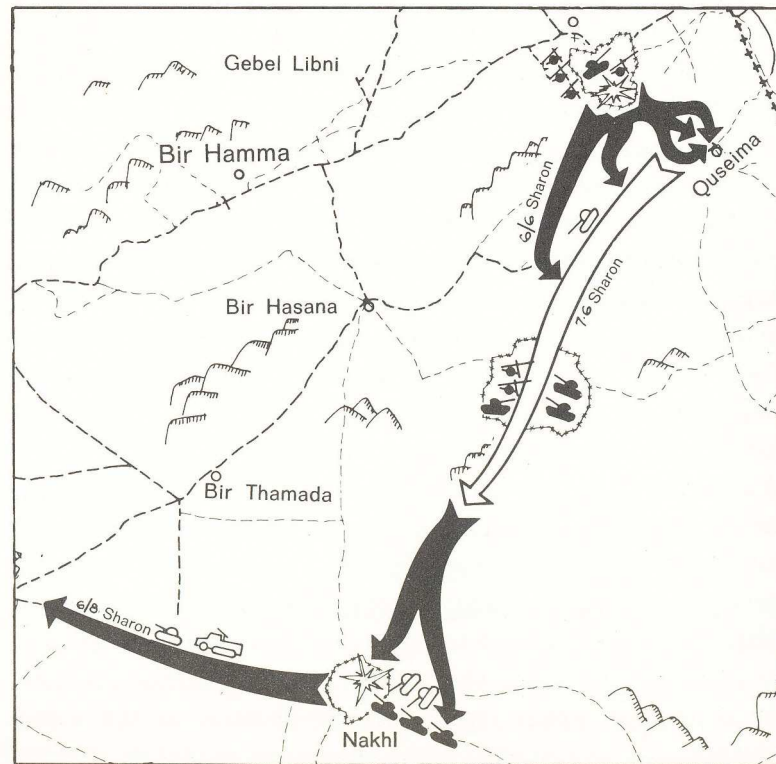


Figure 2.2. Sharon’s division moves south to the battle at Nakhl, while Egyptian armor retreats from Quntilla into the Nakhl ambush.⁴¹

On June 8, 1967, the Israeli troops prepared for battle, and skirmishes began. General Sharon received intelligence that morning stating the 125th Egyptian armor brigade, part of the Egyptian 6th Division, was located on the road near Nakhl and moving toward Bir Gifgafa. The 8th Armored Brigade under Albert Mandler joined Sharon’s troops that morning from the east in Kuntilla, and he ordered them to attack the rearguard of the Egyptian 6th Division, who had recently retreated from there. While

⁴⁰Dayan, *Soldier’s Diary*, 97; Dayan, *Strike First*, 92.

⁴¹Dayan, *Strike First*, 88.

moving toward Nakhl, this new brigade attacked fifteen T-34/85 tanks, but the Egyptians fled on foot from their working tanks after the destruction of only two of them. With Egyptian tanks retreating from their defenses, the flat desert terrain gave the Israelis an advantage in tank warfare. From the 1956 Sinai Campaign, Sharon also remembered an area by Nakhl to set an ambush for the coming Egyptian tanks. His tanks moved into position, and the trap was set for the unsuspecting Egyptians.⁴²

When Egyptian troops funneled into Sharon's trap, the battle began with fire falling from the skies. Israeli, French-made super-Mystères and Ouragans opened the fighting by strafing the Egyptian column two or three times and dropping napalm. Meanwhile, Colonel Zippori ordered his tanks to "open fire only from two hundred yards." An Egyptian driver named Mahmud al-Suwarqa of the 6th Division recalled, "...on June 7th, both the company and battalion commanders disappeared. Later I found out that they fled over the Canal. I abandoned my jeep and joined a column retreating to Nakhl, where we were exposed to aerial attack." For two hours, Sharon's tanks shelled the coming Egyptians as the separate Israeli brigade pushed the Egyptian rearguard further into the trap. Lieutenant Dayan reported, "Hundreds of Egyptian soldiers were fleeing in the direction of Nakhl. Later they told us [after their capture] that they had thought the area was still theirs." As these Egyptians fled, many left their helmets, guns, and even their shoes, because their boots made traversing the dunes difficult. Israeli armored-infantry used small arms to capture or kill the remaining Egyptian troops. After she witnessed Egyptian soldiers scattering from the napalm inferno, Lieutenant Dayan wrote, "I could not free myself from the idea that this was a hunt rather than a fight."

⁴²Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 99-100; Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank*, 163; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 194; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 259; Dayan, *Strike First*, 85-6, 92.

This slaughter produced up to 150 destroyed or abandoned Egyptian tanks on the road from Themed to Nakhl, at least forty tanks were destroyed. Israelis captured the most usable equipment out of any Sinai battle here: sixty tanks, about sixty half-tracks, two hundred trucks, and thousands of guns.⁴³

Devoid of good leadership, Egyptian troops scattered into the desert. Some members of the 6th Division like Corporal Kamal Mahrous survived days in the desert before capture, resorting to drinking urine for survival. An Israeli officer named Dov admitted that “he had been almost crying for the fate of those Egyptian soldiers. What a miserable fate they had, having to depend on such bastards for leaders and officers.” Sharon also reflected on the situation by bluntly saying, “the Egyptian is a good soldier, a disciplined soldier. I think the commanders are very poor.”⁴⁴

The war was over for the general and his troops. News later reached Sharon that Sharm el-Sheikh fell to Israeli paratroopers with no resistance, thus ending his drive southward. His troops then captured remaining Egyptian forces as his troops advanced to the Mitla Pass. For Israel, the total losses for the whole Sinai were 275 Israelis dead and eight hundred soldiers wounded, and no Israeli army personnel were taken prisoner. The entire campaign lasted only ninety-six hours. After these events, Egypt accepted a

⁴³Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 101, 103; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 249. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 102-4; Dayan, *Strike First*, 90, 93; Marshall, *Swift Sword*, 64; *New York Times*, June 18, 1967.

⁴⁴Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 104; Byford-Jones, *Lightning War*, 123-4. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 103; Associated Press, *Lightning out of Israel*, 130, 133.

ceasefire at 9:35 pm on June 8th, 1967, and Sharon's troops splintered as some relocated to the battlefield against Syria in the north.⁴⁵

With Sharon's battles analyzed, the last missing piece was Israel's overall strategy, which also attributed to the negation of Egyptian advantages. The Israeli battle strategy for this war quickly ended fighting with Egyptian troops through the tactic of encirclement. Before the war, Moshe Dayan altered existing attack plans for new ones of trapping the entire Egyptian army. The overall strategy to eventually trap fleeing troops created a clear difference between Sharon's two battles; in the first, Israelis fought against orderly Egyptian troops in secure positions, but by the second encounter, Egyptians had become a "fleeing mob[,] lacking discipline or the means to defend itself." Dayan gave credit for the victory to his new strategy and the "skill and spirit of men in the field."⁴⁶

Also, the Egyptian media added to the troubles of its soldiers. An Egyptian major named George blamed the quick loss on radio reports from Cairo of false victories that misled his fellow soldiers. Egyptian radio had reported false claims such as: Egyptians shot down forty-two Israeli planes on the first day of war and Egyptians annihilated Israeli paratroopers at the secondary line of Egyptian defenses. Meanwhile, Egyptian newspapers also reported false claims that the combined Arab armies shot down 147 Israeli planes on the first day of war or that Israeli fortifications were "collapsing" from

⁴⁵*New York Times*, June 13 and 15, 1967; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 201; Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: The Story of my Life* (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 365; Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 109-10; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 647.

⁴⁶*New York Times*, June 9 and 18, 1967.

the attacks of the Syrian air force. This would understandably cause a surprise for the Egyptians when Israeli troops approached them from deep within the Sinai.⁴⁷

The Israelis purposely planned for some mistakes from Egyptian commanders. Hoping that Egypt would report false military victories, Moshe Dayan ordered a blackout of war bulletins from Israel during the first day of war. This move worked to the benefit of generals like Sharon, who with the help of Egypt's false reports, could surprise the Egyptians. Due to the confusion from the media blackout, he also had more time to fight before anyone enforced a ceasefire.⁴⁸

Out of Israeli pre-war advantages and other advantages created during the war, Sharon and his troops held a resounding victory in the Sinai. Sharon trained his men well, and this training combined with other advantages of the IDF, nullified Egyptian advantages. Sharon claimed, ““We were fewer in number than the enemy, that is certain. The enemy had the most modern equipment, the most modern tanks and artillery,”” but the IDF and Sharon created Israeli advantages and effectively used Egyptian mistakes. Through two separate battle plans during the war, Sharon negated Egyptian military advantages through better-trained, diverse troops, encirclement, misdirection, confusion, and relying on planned reactions of Egyptian leaders. Sharon proved he could create advantages for his troops in war against Egypt when military advantages generally favored Israel. However, his legacy as an officer would still not reach its pinnacle until

⁴⁷*Egyptian Gazette*, June 6. See also Dayan, *Soldier's Diary*, 109; *New York Times*, June 5 and 8, 1967; *Egyptian Gazette*, June 8, 1967.

⁴⁸Sachar, *History of Israel*, 636.

the Yom Kippur War in 1973, when Sharon overcame extensive Egyptian-made disadvantages against Israel and against his troops.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Dayan, *Strike First*, 93.

CHAPTER IV

WAR IN THE SINAI, 1973: ARIEL SHARON'S AIDES IN FORMING A BRIDGEHEAD AND ENCIRCLING THE EGYPTIAN THIRD ARMY

On the west bank of the Suez Canal, among eucalyptus trees and palms stood two Israeli generals: Ariel Sharon and Moshe Dayan. By October 1973, the two generals had known each other for twenty-five years throughout war and peace. Sharon had captured a bridgehead across the canal the previous day, and this meeting almost symbolized the changing of the guard for Israel. Moshe Dayan, the hero of the Six-Day War, had his reputation tarnished by the surprise attack on the Day of Atonement, 1973. Meanwhile, Sharon, who had just survived his toughest battle, would be honored with the messianic title, “King of the Jews.” His bridgehead and the subsequent encirclement of an Egyptian army made the general a hero.¹

Of course, Sharon did not act alone in completing these astounding achievements. After Egypt crossed into the Sinai, Ariel Sharon had help in forming a bridgehead across the Suez Canal and encircling the Egyptian Third Army from fellow generals, Israeli

¹The west bank of the Suez Canal should not be confused with the Palestinian West Bank next to the Jordan River. *New York Times*, November 4, 1973. See also Ariel Sharon and David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (1989; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 317; *New York Times*, October 20, 1973; Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: The Story of my Life* (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 523.

political leaders, and from President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Among the division commanders in the Sinai, General Albert Mandler, General Avraham Adan, and General Kalman Magen all supported Sharon in these feats. Chief of staff David “Dado” Elazar, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and even Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir also aided Sharon in other ways. Outside of Israel, President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger both helped Sharon through supplying arms, providing time for the Israelis to encircle the Egyptians, and preventing Soviet troop deployment within Egypt and the Sinai. This was a drastic change in American foreign policy compared to the Six-Day War, where President Johnson had declined to help Israel open its right to shipping in the Red Sea, despite that President Eisenhower had claimed the United States would support this right in 1956. With this unprecedented amount of aid to Sharon and Israel, the victory in the Sinai complemented the creation of one of America’s strongest alliances in the Middle East, the alliance between the United States and Israel. To understand how these men and women aided Sharon, this work will examine Sharon’s actions during the war with acknowledgement to the actions of individuals who helped Sharon at that time.

The historiography on Sharon’s bridgehead and the encirclement of the Third Army varies between perspectives. Abraham Rabinovich’s work, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*, includes detailed actions of Israelis during the war for the sake of historical transparency. These actions include Israeli General Mandler’s lone defense of the Sinai at the outbreak of the war as well as the failed ceasefire on October 22. There is also an account gathered by the retired United States Foreign Service worker Richard B. Parker, a work that provides insight

into how the United States' State Department viewed and interpreted the airlift and the canal crossing. For the Egyptian perspective, English works on the war are not plentiful, but to counteract the lack of an "Arab" view, Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy wrote *The Ramadan War, 1973*. Their work covers the Egyptian canal crossing, the second attack on October 14, and the Israeli counterattack across the canal. No particular work is written solely on who helped Sharon form the bridgehead, but there are overviews of the whole war covering many of these occasions.²

Ariel "Arik" Sharon was a complex officer. He was forty-five during the Yom Kippur War, but had been a soldier since age fourteen. During his retirement before the war, Sharon had helped to unite right-wing political groups into a large opposition party known as the *Likud*, translated Unity. Henry Standhope, a reporter for *The Times*, described him as "a swashbuckling figure, ruggedly handsome with great charm and an instinctive grasp of public relations." *The Jerusalem Post* reporter Abraham Rabinovich acknowledged that "the body language even of the other generals in the war room changed when Sharon entered – a big man, with a heavy walk and a smile that exuded confidence and a forceful personality. No one ignored him."³

Sharon's troops beloved their general. He smoked cigars, drank cognac, and ate non-kosher smoked oysters. By the Yom Kippur War, Sharon carried Vodka and caviar into battle within his armored personnel carrier (APC). He spoke in a "faint, husky

²Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 116, 459; Richard B. Parker, ed., *The October War: A Retrospective*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2001), 11-2; Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, *The Ramadan War, 1973*, (Dunn Loring, VA: T. N. Dupuy Associates, 1978), vii-viii.

³*The Times*, December 27, 1973; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 406. See also *New York Times*, November 4, 1973.

voice” and he did not display “bluster or mock toughness.” He was an excellent map and terrain reader. Sharon could study a map of unfamiliar territory for fifteen minutes and then lead men throughout the land in operations without referencing the map a second time. He was a risk-taker who believed Israel would always have enemies, but that time worked in Israel’s favor in the conflict with the Arabs. This belief was that bordering states would eventually reach peace with Israel as time passed. The general liked officers who could adjust to the changing situations on the battlefield rather than an officer who acted on orders alone. He did not mind disobeying orders if the situation seemed to require this disobedience, and he believed compromise translated as weakness to the Arabs. Furthermore, Sharon believed generals should be at the front with their troops and said, “One minute you are a general and another minute a soldier shooting a machinegun at Arabs and throwing grenades and climbing on bulldozers to convince men they can work under shell fire.”⁴

The general had time to prepare himself before the war. Intelligence officer Yohoshua Saguy showed photos of the Suez to him the day before the war, and Sharon had successfully predicted war was imminent. He reported these beliefs to Southern Commander General Gonen. However, no mobilization occurred until around 8:00 am on October 6, when Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, and David Elazar agreed to mobilize between 100,000 and 120,000 troops. Dayan had promised to Sharon the control of a

⁴*New York Times*, November 9 and 12, 1973. See also *New York Times*, November 9 and 12, 1973; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 132; Yael S. Aronoff, “Warfare to Withdrawal: The Legacy of Ariel Sharon,” *Israel Studies* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 149-50, 156, 158, 166., accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/I.SR.2010.15.2.149>.

reserve division when he retired prior to the war, and Dayan kept his word when war began.⁵

On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in the Golan Heights and in the Sinai Peninsula at 2:00 pm during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur and during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The Israelis on the Egyptian front only had 276 tanks, forty-eight artillery pieces, twelve missile batteries, and one division of 8,500 men at the outbreak of war, facing 100,000 Egyptian troops. The Egyptians, under the command of Major General Gamal Mohamed Aly, moved approximately 300 tanks across the canal on the first day with 1900 more on the western bank, and 1,848 Egyptian artillery pieces covered their crossing. In total, nine Egyptian divisions and many independent infantry and armored brigades moved to both sides of the Sinai Canal. After twenty-four hours, approximately 100,000 Egyptians were east of the canal with 1,020 tanks, and their army lost less than expected, about 280 dead. Two Egyptian armies crossed the canal: the Second army in the north and the Third Army in the south.⁶

The battle lines for most of the war formed on the first day. During the initial barrage, shells fell at the rate of 175 per second on the Bar-Lev line – defenses that were 123 kilometers wide along the canal consisting of several strongholds. Trenches and a single road connected these fortifications, while a secondary road, called the artillery road, existed parallel to the Bar-Lev line further east. The Israelis under General Mandler

⁵Gilad Sharon, *Sharon: The Life of a Leader*, Trans. Mitch Ginsburg. (New York: Harper Collins, 2011) 172-3; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 461.

⁶Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 461, 473-5; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 19, 1973; Mordechai Bar-On, ed., *Never-ending Conflict: Israeli Military History*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 162; Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement: The Inside Story of the Yom Kippur War*, (London: Greenhill Books, 1975), 150; Lieutenant General Saad el Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980), 232, 234.

held this artillery road as their front line, while the Egyptians fought from the Bar-Lev line.⁷

At this point Mandler was the only division leader stopping the Egyptians. He had fled from Austria to the British Mandate of Palestine in 1940 and was known as a disciplined officer who had broken the Syrian defenses while commanding an armored brigade in the Six-Day War. The lone general divided his tanks almost equally between three brigades. He sent a brigade under Colonel Gaby Amir to the north, a brigade under Colonel Amnon Reshef to the center, and a brigade under Colonel Dan Shomron to the south region of the canal. He commanded his brigades from a helicopter, flying along the artillery road, and the general and his troops provided Southern Command with the first clear understanding of the battlefield. Mandler had 294 tanks at the outbreak of war, but his brigades at the front lost between half and three quarters of them to the Egyptian fire. Egypt had a new tank destroying weapon for its infantry which caused this loss, the Sagger. This new wire-guided missile could hit a tank from three thousand yards, ten times the range of a Rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). Israel's forces also stopped Egypt's paratroopers and commando units who had been dropped behind enemy lines on the first day of war. If Egyptian forces had passed Mandler to junctions like the Gidi or

⁷*Egyptian Gazette*, October 19, 1973; Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East – from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 136; Elizabeth Monroe and A. H. Farrar-Hockley, "The Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Background and Events," *Adelphi Papers*, no. 111 (Winter 1974/5): 19.

Mitla passes, Israel's mobilization would have been greatly complicated. This general performed the first step in helping Sharon form a bridgehead by holding the line.⁸

The Egyptian plan only required a small foothold on the east bank of the canal, because the troops needed to stay under Egyptian missile protection. Within six to nine hours, they had built ten bridges and had fifty ferries crossing the canal with fresh troops and equipment. They broke through Israel's forty-foot-tall sand dune defenses with high-powered water hoses. Thus, Egypt gained more than a small foothold on the eastern bank, creating depth that the Israelis had to overcome.⁹

Egypt and Israel both had more modern tanks since the Six-Day War. The Soviets supplied the Egyptians with the newest Soviet T-62 tank to combat the Israelis' American-made tanks. Egypt received two hundred of these Soviet sluggers. These tanks used a stronger 115mm gun and infrared night vision searchlights. Egyptians also used the older, Soviet T-55 tank in large numbers. Meanwhile, to combat this armor, Israel's best tanks were the British Centurion and the American M48 Patton and M60 Patton – all carrying 105 millimeter cannons. However, the lack of investment in infrared equipment created a disadvantage for Israel and removed Israel's ability to perform its usual night attacks. New Israeli troops at the front had to learn to fight against Egypt's new technologies.¹⁰

⁸*Jerusalem Post*, October 15, 1973; Herzog, *War of Atonement*, 156-7; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 290; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 137; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 107-8; Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, "The Arab-Israeli War," 27.

⁹Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 750; David Hirst and Irene Beeson, *Sadat*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 27; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 136; Uri Dan, *Ariel Sharon: An Intimate Portrait*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 61.

¹⁰Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945-1980*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge

At 9:30 am on October 6, Sharon was mobilized from his home in Beersheba. His close friend, Zeev “Zevale” Amit, met with him as news arrived concerning Israeli losses. Amit was a Mossad agent whose best known mission was the assassination of Herberts Cukurs, a Nazi war criminal known as “the Butcher of Riga.” Sharon addressed his division and left for the front in a requisitioned pick-up truck at 3:00 am on October 7 with Amit and his reporter friend from the Suez Crisis, Uri Dan. His division consisted of three armored brigades, two paratrooper brigades, some artillery pieces, and a few specialized groups of soldiers such as engineers. His tanks lacked transport equipment and therefore drove over 150 miles through the Sinai on their own tracks. As troops moved to the front, decrepit wrecks of Egyptian armor still littered the sides of the roads as a reminder of the Six-Day War, a stark contrast to Israel’s forces at that point. Sharon ordered them to meet at the central Sinai headquarters in Tasa at noon on that same day. Once arrived, Sharon had the responsibility over the central sector of the Sinai. All the while, Israeli aircraft protected the troops deploying over the Sinai.¹¹

The two new Israeli brigades arrived in the Sinai the following day under the command of General Ariel Sharon and General Avraham Adan. Adan was a general famous for his capture of Israel’s harbor to the Red Sea, Eilat, during the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948. The three Israeli generals stabilized the battlefield on the artillery road – a north-south axis road ten kilometers east of the Suez Canal. By the time Sharon

University, 1985), 129; Shazly, *Crossing*, 156; Kenneth Macksey, *Tank Versus Tank: The Illustrated Story of Armored Battlefield Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, (Topsfield, MA: Salem House Publishers, 1988), 170, 172; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 310; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 745.

¹¹Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 58-61; *New York Times*, November 12, 1973 and October 19, 1973; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 291-2; Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissam Mishal, *Mossad: The Greatest Missions of the Israeli Secret Service*, (New York: Ecco, 2012), 181; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 509.

and Adan arrived, the lone general – Mandler – had already lost 150 tanks. Meanwhile, the new generals waited for orders from Southern Command.¹²

Major General Shmuel Gonen was appointed July 15, 1973 as Southern Commander, replacing Sharon. This commander proved his merit while courageously leading the Seventh Armored Brigade during the Six-Day War in the northern Sinai. Gonen had served under both Sharon and Adan, and because of this, Gonen possibly had leadership issues while commanding the two division generals. In the same manner, Sharon and Adan – especially Sharon – could have dealt poorly with having a former “underling” as a superior. Despite this, Sharon stepped aside for privacy with the new commander during the meeting for the first Israeli counterattack; he wanted to tell the commander that he did not want his position. Sharon said to the commander, “You can win this war . . . You don’t have an enemy in me.”¹³

At this point, Golda Meir helped Sharon on his path to forming a bridgehead. When Israel was surprised with war, the Defense Minister Moshe Dayan became severely troubled that such a loss of Israeli life occurred under his leadership. On the first day, he requested to resign, but Meir would not allow it. As the fighting continued, the Defense Minister regained his confidence. Using his political authority over the military, he would later aid Sharon in solidifying the bridgehead.¹⁴

¹²Avraham Adan, *On the Banks of the Suez*, (Jerusalem: Presidio Press, 1980), 15; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 162; Uri Dan, *Sharon’s Bridgehead*, (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1975), 71; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 161-2, 165; *New York Times*, November 12, 1973.

¹³Gonen’s original last name was Gorodisch, a name still commonly used in place of Gonen. Sharon, *Sharon*, 184. See also Herzog, *War of Atonement*, 146; Sharon, *Sharon*, 175, 184.

¹⁴Elinor Burkett, *Golda*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 324.

While Dayan still panicked, the chief of staff David Elazar also helped Sharon's chances to form the bridgehead. On October 7, Elazar overturned Dayan's decision to withdraw further east in the Sinai. The following day, on October 8, Sharon requested permission from headquarters to cross the canal; he had already prepared three possible crossing locations during his time as Southern Commander. Furthermore, he had trained many of the troops to execute this crossing while he held this position months before.¹⁵

This same day, the first counterattack in the Sinai failed under the poor leadership of General Gonen. The counterattack plan understood by the generals was for Sharon and Adan to recapture some strongholds of the Bar-Lev line at dawn with a possible canal crossing shortly afterward. Without openly rejecting this battle plan, Gonen changed it on the day of the counterattack. In the morning, he switched Sharon's orders to attack sixty miles southward instead of against northern strongholds, and the commander then postponed the time of attack until noon. Gonen then changed plans again by switching Adan's troops from moving south with Sharon to moving west near Sharon's original position to attack the Egyptians and recapture strongholds. The final plan was for the two generals to attack somewhat in each other's sector. Sharon protested against leaving his position of defensive ridges abandoned, but Gonen threatened to dismiss him if he did not leave it. Meanwhile, Adan's division split and attacked as two separate battalions instead of as a whole division. Egyptians repelled these forces, but Gonen did not acknowledge the loss. Adan lost seventy-two tanks in this failed attack. Meanwhile, Sharon was thirty miles into his journey south before a helicopter from

¹⁵Golda Meir, *My Life*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 428; Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 61; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 497; Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book, 1975), 228.

command stopped him with new orders. After Egyptian advances, Gonen ordered Sharon to retake the positions thirty miles to the north that his division had left hours earlier. One of the only positive outcomes was that his tanks managed to evacuate two outposts of the Bar-Lev line – named Lakekan and Purkan – before and after the failed counterattack. Dayan concluded the counterattack to be “a total failure” and blamed Gonen’s ignorance of the battlefield for the loss.¹⁶

Losses this great changed the mood and leadership of Southern Command. The night after the attack, Adan and Sharon were “fatigue[d], red-eyed, hoarse, unshaven, and drained.” That morning, Egypt had broadcast the first pictures of captured Israeli troops from the Bar-Lev line. Despite this, Sharon did not settle with disappointment; rather he turned this loss into constructive anger. He claimed that October 8 was his “breaking point” in accepting decisions from High Command. From then on, he scrutinized everything about an order from headquarters. Dayan and the other military leaders decided to replace Gonen with a new southern command “overseer:” Sharon or Chaim Bar-Lev, the former chief of staff for whom the unsuccessful defensive line was named. Dayan requested Sharon, but in the end, Golda Meir approved Bar-Lev, one of her cabinet members.¹⁷

On October 10, they appointed General Bar-Lev. Sharon’s son, Gilad, still believes politics kept his father from retaking command of the southern front, because his

¹⁶Freeing the Israeli troops surrounded within the strongholds was a priority of Sharon’s. Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 497. See also Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 497-8; Sharon, *Sharon*, 184, 186-8; Dan, *Sharon’s Bridgehead*, 56, 67; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 241, 271-4.

¹⁷Gonen still held his title as Southern Commander, but Bar-Lev oversaw and could overrule his actions. Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 499; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 304. See also *Egyptian Gazette*, October 9, 1973; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 499-500; Sharon, *Sharon*, 190, 304.

father had recently formed a unified opposition party – the Likud – to counteract the leading political party. After all, Meir over-ruled the Defense Minister’s choice (Sharon) by appointing a general from her own political party. But while party politics seemed insidiously to develop, Sharon stayed focused on beating the Egyptians.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had given Sharon and the Israeli generals more time to prepare for a counterattack. On October 9, he halted the offensive. Upon receiving word that Israel would direct its attention to the Syrian front first, the Egyptian president did not change his mind. Historian Hazem Kandil argues that Sadat only wanted a “spark” to force the U.S. to resolve the situation of Israel holding the Sinai territory. Why waste extra Egyptian lives in an unnecessary offensive when Israel was already territorially weaker?¹⁹

On the international scene, the United States and Soviet Union were acting in support of their allies in the Middle East. The Soviet Union had begun a military airlift to Egypt and Syria on October 9, and three days later, Soviet airborne divisions prepared to deploy against Israelis in Syria while Soviet military staff was inside the Syrian military headquarters. To block Soviet intervention, the United States mobilized ships to join the Sixth Fleet off the coast of Israel. By then, the Syrian attack was repelled, and Soviet forces did not actively participate. Nevertheless, détente between the United States and Soviet Union had ended. With this American aid, the Israeli high command began to

¹⁸Sharon, *Sharon*, 171-2.

¹⁹Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt’s Road to Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012), 129. See also Kandil, *Soldiers*, 127-8.

focus on the Sinai by sending another armored brigade from the Syrian front to the Suez Canal.²⁰

The Egyptian army shelled Israelis on October 13. That day, General Albert Mandler was killed at the age of forty-five by a direct hit from the Egyptian artillery barrage. Afterward, General Kalman Magen – who would help encircle the Egyptian Third Army – replaced Mandler as the division commander.²¹

After the death of Mandler, the Egyptian attack on October 14 switched the war's momentum into Israel's favor. By this time, Sadat had sent the 21st and 4th armored divisions – his two reserve divisions on the west bank – into the Sinai. To lessen Israeli pressure against the Syrians, Egypt attacked at 6:20 am to draw away Israeli forces. The Egyptian battle plan was to advance about fifteen miles and to capture the Gidi and Mitla passes. However, with new opposing tanks from Sharon and Adan's divisions, the Egyptian tanks only outnumbered the Israelis' by two to one – not the proper 3 to 1 ratio for an attacking force. With the additional reserve armor, almost one thousand tanks attacked. Egyptians only advanced six miles into Sharon's sector – and outside of the cover of their missile defense system – before retreating. That day, the Egyptian 21st Armored Division and the 16th Infantry Division attacked Sharon's position. Despite the overwhelming numbers against his troops, Israelis repelled the enemy and destroyed approximately 110 tanks. In the afternoon, Israeli armor broke through Egyptian lines and attacked the rearguard of Egyptian tanks moving toward the Gidi pass. These tanks scattered with heavy losses. The Israeli air force was effective against the tanks outside

²⁰Sachar, *History of Israel*, 771; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 149; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 170, 174.

²¹Adan, *On the Banks*, 231; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 172; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 309.

of the protection of Egypt's surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and some dogfights ended with flaming Egyptian MiGs, which crashed in front of Sharon's troops. It was the first victory for Israel in the Sinai, and the Israelis capitalized on it.²²

Egyptian chief of staff Saad Hussein el-Shazly blamed the disastrous attack on President Sadat's authority. In this attack, the Egyptians lost about 260 tanks while the Israelis lost approximately ten. Sharon's troops managed to destroy about 110 Egyptian tanks with the loss of only five armored vehicles, and Magen and Adan reported similar numbers from their sectors.²³

Reports on a possible crossing location began to arrive from Sharon's troops and from Americans. On October 9, Sharon's patrols noticed a "seam" in between the two Egyptian armies at the north section of the Great Bitter Lake. Gonen, with Elazar's support, ordered him not to cross at that time. On October 15, the United States helped Israelis further when an American SR-71 Blackbird reconnaissance plane flew over the canal; this flight provided Israel with the proper intelligence to mount a canal crossing. With the Egyptian tank reserves now east of the canal, there was little resistance to fight the coming Israelis on the west bank. With a fresh victory, Sharon was ready to form a

²²MiGs are Soviet-made aircraft named after their design bureau's prefix. Kandil, *Soldiers*, 133; Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, "The Arab-Israeli War," 27; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 310; Ray Maghroori and Stephen M. Gorman, *The Yom Kippur War: A Case Study in Crisis Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy*, (Washington: University of America, 1981), 10; Dan, *Sharon's Bridgehead*, 123-5; *New York Times*, November 12, 1973.

²³Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 159; *New York Times*, November 18, 1973; Kandil, *Soldiers*, 133; Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 62.

bridgehead, a crossing that would raise Israeli morale and symbolize Egypt's vulnerability to an "undefeatable" Israeli might.²⁴

Before the war in May 1973, Sharon had constructed a staging area for the canal crossing; it was about 400 yards by 150 yards, surrounded by earthen embankments. Sharon purposely thinned the embankment in a distinct area marked by red bricks, because this area would be bulldozed to form a crossing station if the need arose. The plan to cross the canal during such an emergency had been developed in 1970 by Sharon, although his commander, General Chaim Bar-Lev, claimed after the war that the plan had been developed in late 1967 by no particular individual. Sharon used his previous military experience to plan and prepare for the next conflict before it arrived. His planning served him well while fighting then.²⁵

Unfortunately, Sharon had to wait for an order for which no one in high command wanted to take responsibility. Dayan passed on the decision to cross the canal down to chief of staff Elazar, but he wanted Golda Meir's cabinet to vote on the idea. With Elazar in favor of crossing after Egypt's failed attack, Meir and her cabinet finally approved the attack, aiding Sharon's efforts again.²⁶

²⁴Sharon, *Sharon*, 191. See also Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 283; Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 159; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 154-6.

²⁵*New York Times*, November 4 and 12, 1973; Sharon, *Sharon*, 191; Aronoff, "Warfare to Withdrawal," 158.

²⁶Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 343, 358.

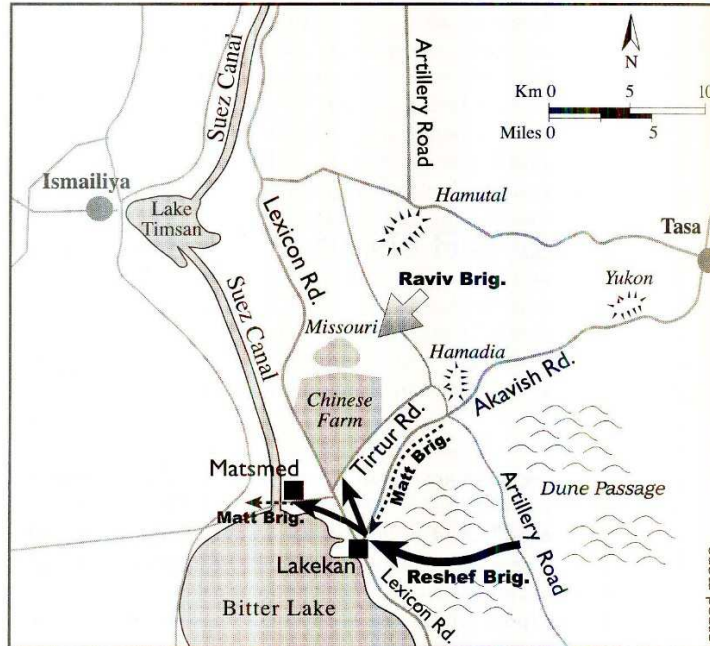


Figure 3.1. The map depicts the creation of the bridgehead and the initial battle of the Chinese Farm, where Adan’s division reconnected with Sharon’s division to supply bridging equipment. Note the positions of the Tirtur, Akavish, and Lexicon roads.²⁷

The night of October 15 tested Sharon’s ability to command as he directed his divisions in the fight for the Israeli bridgehead. He recalled the night of the crossing “made operations like taking the Egyptian strongpoint of Abu Aweigila [sic] in 1967 seem simple.” Sharon commanded best at night, he had excelled in night attacks during retaliation raids and during the Six-Day War, and now, the general planned within his element again. Around 5:00 pm, one of his armored divisions led by Tuvia Raviv attacked as a decoy, heading west from the north of the Great Bitter Lake. By 6:00 pm, a second armored division led by Colonel Amnon Reshef rode south over sand dunes to the northern end of the lake without resistance. Reshef’s division then followed the

²⁷Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 368.

lakeshore as a secure flank northwest to the canal, and while most of these tanks pushed north into a large battle against the Egyptian 21st Armored Division, a smaller group secured the canal yard to the west. A third part of Reshef's brigade fought northeast to attack the rearguard of the Egyptian 16th Armored Division, the same division facing Raviv's decoy brigade from the west. Sharon's third armored brigade, led by Chaim Erez, accompanied Danny Matt's paratrooper brigade and Sharon's battlefield headquarters to the canal. Some of its battalions also towed bridging equipment for the crossing. Fighting south along the canal, Egyptian forces stopped Reshef's armored brigade further south than anticipated. The plan had called for four of Reshef's brigades to sneak into the heart of Egyptian positions north of the Tirtur road at the "Chinese" Farm and then erupt with fire in all directions. Rockets, shells, and mortars lit up the battlefield, and the light also illuminated the general's headquarters and paratrooper crossing force, causing heavy fire against these forces until they reached the crossing yard. During this maneuver, the general was behind the third tank of Erez's crossing force and fighting alongside his soldiers from the halftracks. One Lieutenant Colonel reported Sharon mounted a .50-caliber machine gun during the push for the canal. Everyone in the division shared a role in creating the bridgehead.²⁸

To Sharon, the battle for the bridgehead was almost a thing of beauty, and he described the scene as "moving tanks silhouetted against the brilliant flashes of shells exploding in giant fireworks across the surface of the Great Bitter Lake." Perhaps this

²⁸The canal yard was also known as the court of death. The Chinese Farm was an erroneous name. Israelis incorrectly named it after the Japanese agricultural equipment there, which the Egyptians had bought for that location before the Six-Day War. *New York Times*, November 12, 1973. See also *New York Times*, November 12, 1973; Sharon, *Sharon*, 195-6; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 297; Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, "The Arab-Israeli War," 28; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 367, 377.

idealistic view arose from the general finally getting to prove that Israel could defeat its strongest neighbor, regardless of how outnumbered his forces were. Meanwhile, Moshe Dayan believed that Sharon idealized the battlefield to smother his tension. The historians David Hirst and Irene Beeson claim, “To cross into ‘Africa’... was certainly keeping with the Israeli *blitzkrieg* tradition, but to achieve it Sharon had by all orthodox criteria taken almost suicidal risks.” To Sharon, the fate of Israel as a nation relied on these risks being taken.²⁹

Three of Sharon’s brigade commanders, Amnon Reshef, Danny Matt, and Chaim Erez aided Sharon in reaching the canal. The three spearheaded the battle for the Israeli bridgehead. Reshef had defended the Sinai with Mandler during the outbreak of hostilities, and now, his tanks held open the Akavish road and the Tirtur-Lexicon axis. Sharon chose his friend, the Paratrooper Commander Danny Matt who had fought together with the general in the 1956 Suez Crisis and in the 1967 Six-Day War, to lead the crossing of the Suez. Behind the paratrooper crossing came two of Erez’s tank battalions, the first under Giora Lev, then Ben-Shoshan’s battalion.³⁰

Before this crossing could happen, Sharon had to open a hole in a wall of the crossing yard toward the canal. Sharon had no tractors to break through the red brick wall at the yard, but a lost driver drove his tractor down Akavish road – where Sharon’s men requisitioned him. Sharon drove the bulldozer and tore the wall to the canal down himself. At 1:20 am, Matt’s men arrived at the western bank on small dinghies with no resistance. At the command center, Dayan proposed that the paratroopers be called back

²⁹Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 525; Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 157. See also Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 525.

³⁰Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 63; Sharon, *Sharon*, 194; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 531; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 379, 388-9.

to the east bank, because a bridge had not yet been constructed. However, command rejected this idea, and Sharon enjoyed the first fruits of his military victory. Sharon formed the bridgehead from Matzmed, north of the Great Bitter Lake, to the village and abandoned airfield at Deversoir in the west. By chance, a heavy fog covered the canal on the morning of October 16, giving crossing troops extra cover. The first tanks traveled across the canal on inflatable rubber rafts. Only seventeen tanks had crossed the canal by the morning of the sixteenth to support 750 paratroopers on the west side. In his “toehold” beachhead, Sharon disobeyed orders by sending raiding parties out rather than solely digging defenses. By 11:00 am, another eleven Israeli tanks arrived on the west bank. These tanks destroyed the surface-to-air missile batteries which allowed the Israeli Air Force (IAF) to help the canal crossing. The IAF could now knock out SAMs as well, but the armor thrust into Egypt’s interior allowed for this to happen. This crossing, though excruciatingly bloody to the north, acted “as a tonic to flagging Israeli morale.”³¹

Sharon wanted to use barges and rafts to transport tanks, because a bridge could be destroyed too easily by shelling, but high command disagreed and wanted a bridge to be built early into the crossing. The general waited at the canal for a new pontoon bridge, because all his pontoon bridge pieces had been damaged by Egyptian artillery during the battle for the bridgehead. However, Egyptian troops still blocked the Tirtur road behind Sharon to the east – this blocked the arrival of Israeli bridges. By 9:45 am, Israelis held

³¹Israelis could not have used a captured Egyptian bridge, because these bridges could only support lighter Soviet tanks. Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 158; Heikal, *Ramadan*, 229. See also Dan, *Sharon’s Bridgehead*, 154; Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 63-6; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 525; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 302; Badri, Magdoub, and Zohdy, *Ramadan War*, 103; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 172-3; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 388; Adan, *On the Banks*, 267; Shlomo Aloni, *Arab-Israeli Air Wars, 1947-82*, Osprey Combat Aircraft, ed. Tony Holmes, vol. 23, (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2001), 84.

the Tirtur-Lexicon axis and the parallel Akivish road (though still under fire), but not the Tirtur road.³²

While waiting for bridging equipment, the battle raged. During the following day, Sharon lost over 200 men and within Reshef's brigade, all the company commanders and deputy commanders were killed. These Israelis had attacked Egyptians with LAW antitank missiles, which they recently received from the U.S. airlift. Egyptian losses were also high – Sharon's troops destroyed twenty tanks and two missile batteries alone. In his autobiography, Sharon recalled the time after the battle:

As the sky brightened, I looked around and saw hundreds and hundreds of burned and twisted vehicles. Fifty Israeli tanks lay shattered on the field. Around them were the hulks of 150 Egyptian tanks plus hundreds of APC's, jeeps, and trucks. Wreckage littered the desert. Here and there Israeli and Egyptian tanks had destroyed each other at a distance of a few meters, barrel to barrel . . . And inside those tanks and next to them lay their dead crews. Coming close, you could see Egyptian and Jewish dead lying side by side, soldiers who had jumped from their burning tanks and had died together.

In his words, one can sense the disdain for these never-ending wars.³³

While Sharon held the bridgehead, General Adan commanded troops to open fully the Tirtur road to the bridgehead. Egyptians blocked Sharon from the east, and General Adan attacked them in three directions from the west. He attacked north to further open the corridor, he attacked south to block troops from the Egyptian Third Army, and he fought west to open the road to reconnect with the bridgehead. This continuous battle to open the Tirtur road is known as the battle of the Chinese Farm. In Sharon's opinion, the

³²*New York Times*, November 9, 1973; Monroe and Farrar-Hockley, "The Arab-Israeli War," 28; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 525-6; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 316; Sharon, *Sharon*, 198.

³³Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 316. See also Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 530; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 388, 531.

other road to the south – Akavish – was not blocked, but merely “under Egyptian pressure and fire.” The Egyptians made it within a range of one thousand yards from this road, within range of Saggars. The general admitted after the war that “it did not seem secure to be there personally, but it was secure *enough* militarily.” Nevertheless, Bar-Lev and Elazar did not visit the bridgehead nor allow new tanks across the canal until Adan opened the road.³⁴

Throughout October 16, Adan could not capture the Chinese Farm, an important position in opening the road to Sharon. That night, a paratroop brigade led by Colonel Uzi Ya’iri flew north to aid in the battle. By October 17, Ya’iri’s men attacked the Egyptians and captured the first line of defense, but had to be extracted by 4:30 am due to heavy losses. Adan’s tanks rolled straight into the Egyptian lines to rescue the paratroopers, and defeated Egyptian tanks in the process. The Israeli tanks withdrew an hour later due to heavy losses, but more tanks had to re-enter the battle to save remaining troops. While Egyptians were preoccupied with the fighting, Adan had sent bridging equipment on the Akavish access road to the canal. The Egyptians lost fifty tanks, while the Israelis lost two company commanders and a third wounded during this battle. Reopening this road greatly helped Sharon, because capturing the road eventually convinced high command that troops could cross the canal.³⁵

Historians Ahron Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri note that Sharon’s bridgehead “paralyzed the Egyptian army.” Upon learning of the increasing threat of Israeli troops on the west bank, Sadat ordered no man to be withdrawn from the east bank of the canal

³⁴The author added the emphasis. *New York Times*, November 9, 1973. See also Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 526-7; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 316; *New York Times*, November 9, 1973; Sharon, *Sharon*, 200.

³⁵Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 527-9, 531, 534.

to combat this threat. The day after Egypt's failed counterattack, the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, Alexei Kosygin had arrived in Egypt asking President Sadat unsuccessfully to agree to a ceasefire. On October 18, Kosygin showed Sadat photographs of the bridgehead taken by a MiG-25 spy plane. The same day, the president finally agreed to withdraw the 4th Armored Division to stop the crossing, but it was too late to combat Israel's growing troop numbers within Egypt proper.³⁶

On October 17, Egyptians shot a barrage of 160mm shells into the lot, and Israelis returned fire with 155mm howitzers. Shells whistled and exploded like thunder. Sharon mounted the machine gun on his APC to fire at strafing MiGs, but had to move his vehicle to a safer location. As he moved his forward headquarters further back, a shell hit in front of his halftrack. The driver accelerated into the crater, and a second shell hit beside the car, sending shrapnel into Sharon's head. Fortunately for the Israelis, the wound was only minor, and the unrelenting general quickly bandaged himself. Sharon then ordered his APCs to fire at an Egyptian tank attack while enemy MiGs strafed the area until other Israeli tanks arrived to repel the attack. Unfortunately, Sharon's friend Zeev Amit was also struck in the head during this barrage, a mortal wound. As Egypt attacked the bridgehead, Sharon was desperate for an order to send more troops to the western bank.³⁷

Dayan helped Sharon's bridgehead after Adan reopened roads to the staging yard. After being wounded, Sharon and Uri Dan met with Adan, Bar-Lev, Elazar, Gonen, and

³⁶Aharon Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years' War: Israel and the Arabs* (New York: TV Books, 1998), 149. See also Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 161; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 174; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 777; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 414; Shazly, *Crossing*, 262.

³⁷Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 67-8; *New York Times*, October 19, 1973; Sharon, *Sharon*, 200; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 323-4.

Dayan, the first meeting since Sharon formed the bridgehead. No one congratulated him or shook his hand, but Dayan at least greeted the worn general. The result of the meeting supported the bridgehead offensive, and Dayan left for Africa proper with Sharon upon its adjournment. His son, Gilad Sharon believes that Dayan's visit to the bridgehead "sent a message" to Bar-Lev and Elazar. Because Dayan held the political position of Defense Minister, he did not usually give orders, but that day, he ordered his generals to move forces across the canal "immediately." The two generals (Elazar and Bar-Lev) finally sent troops over the canal that same day, seven hours after engineers finished assembling the pontoon bridge. Sharon upheld the bridgehead for thirty-six hours while waiting for a second division to cross the canal. Adan's tanks had arrived previously at the yard, but were unable to cross due to Bar-Lev and Gonen's orders. Command decided to send Adan and Magen across the canal to encircle the Egyptian Third Army to the south. During this time, the injured Sharon, dealing with the death of his close friend, held the bridgehead and moved north toward Ismalia on the western bank. The plan to encircle Egypt's southern army had finally begun.³⁸

³⁸Sharon, *Sharon*, 205; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 328. See also Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 69; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 409; Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, 319, 328; *New York Times*, November 12, 1973.

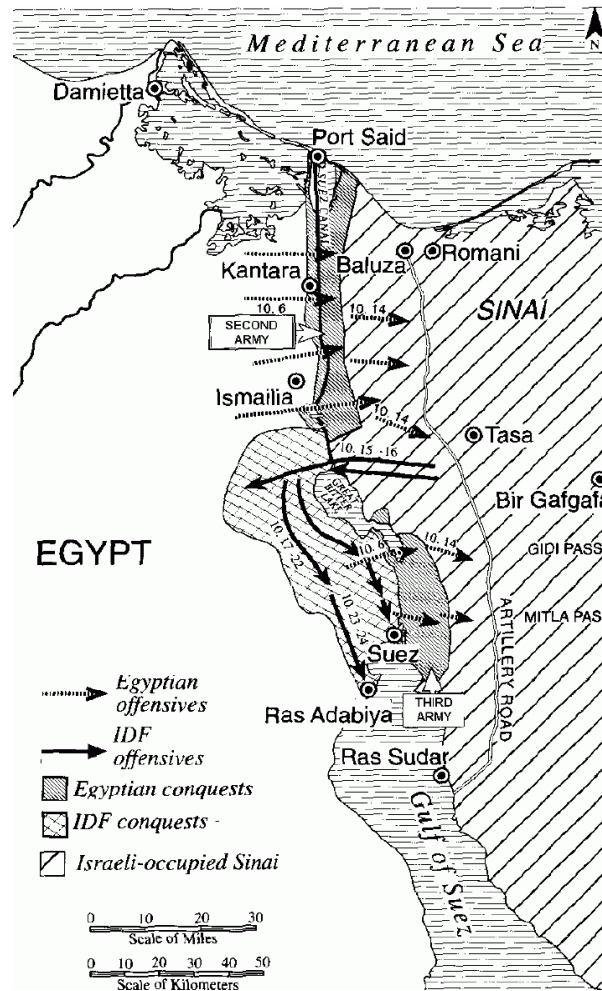


Figure 3.2. After Israelis constructed a bridge, General Magen and General Adan attacked southward to encircle the Egyptian Third Army.³⁹

After other troops were crossing the canal, Sharon defended and expanded the bridgehead while attacking the Egyptians. On October 19, engineers built a second bridge across the canal, one that had to be hauled over the Tirtur road due to its size. On October 17 and 18, Sharon's troops defended the bridgehead from enemy helicopters dropping napalm. In all, his troops destroyed six of these and approximately twenty more

³⁹“1973 October War (Yom Kippur War) - Egyptian Front.” Mideastweb, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.mideastweb.org/octoberwarmapegypt.htm>.

Egyptian planes during the same two days. By October 19, his troops had widened the bridgehead another eight kilometers to the north. After other divisions were heading south on the west bank, his men moved north to Ismailia. Sharon made sure to raise a large Israeli flag on every Egyptian rampart captured on the west bank. His goal was to demoralize the Egyptian troops on the east bank, who could see the land behind them being captured.⁴⁰

On October 19, Israel had the forces to surround the Third Army, because three hundred Israeli tanks operated on the west bank. By the next day, more than ten thousand Israeli troops were there also. By this time, Israeli planes frequently crossed the canal without many losses, because ground troops had destroyed many of the Egyptian missile batteries. Israel also received electronic jamming equipment from the United States' military airlift to protect their planes. Meanwhile, Egyptian forces became more active on the west bank. Their air force flew 1,050 sorties against the Israelis after the creation of the bridgehead.⁴¹

With the newly arrived troops, Magen's division travelled southwest to encircle the Egyptian Second Army, trying to "beat" the ceasefire. On October 20, Sadat requested a Soviet sponsored ceasefire from Ambassador Vladimir Vinogradov. The next day, Kissinger formed an agreement with the Soviets for a ceasefire. The United

⁴⁰Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 426; Dan, *Sharon's Bridgehead*, 162; Badri, Magdoub, and Zohdy, *Ramadan War*, 103; *New York Times*, November 12, 1973.

⁴¹Herbert Jay Laub, "The Development of the Israeli-Egyptian-American Relationship from the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in September 1970 to the Camp David Agreements in September 1978" (PhD diss., State University of New York, 1996), 60; *New York Times*, October 21, 1973; Badri, Magdoub, and Zohdy, *Ramadan War*, 101, 107.

Nations passed this as Resolution 338, and it began at 5:52 pm Israeli time on October 22, 1973.⁴²

Before fighting stopped, Israelis attacked Suez City while the Israeli Navy attacked the city from the south. Magen's division almost encircled General Abdel Wasel's Egyptian Third Army by capturing part of the Suez-Cairo road, but the Israelis were still outside of the city at the time of the ceasefire. A single road beyond Israeli control went southwest from Suez City to join the main roads to Cairo. This road was the only escape route for the Egyptian troops.⁴³

The ceasefire was broken, and there are multiple explanations given for who broke the agreement. Both armies claim the other broke the ceasefire. Perhaps the best explanation is given by Abraham Rabinovich in his work, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*. In it, he claims one of Adan's battalions reached the canal before the ceasefire, but as one of its units patrolled for possible escape routes, Egyptians fired upon it. Simultaneously, Adan ordered some of his units to steal ground without firing, which was also a violation of the ceasefire. With Egyptians firing on his canal battalion, Adan decided to resume fighting the next morning, ending any chance for either side to keep the ceasefire. Magen and Adan fought again for the encirclement before another ceasefire, which began on October 24. By then, Adan's division had encircled Suez City and the Egyptian Third Army, and Israelis controlled the port city of Adabiya. To free the trapped Egyptian army, United Nations Resolution 339 requested both nations to return to their original ceasefire fronts

⁴²Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 534; Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, 164; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 174.

⁴³Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 536; *New York Times*, October 29, 1973.

prior to the encirclement, but both countries did not meet until October 27 to end the siege. Within the encirclement were approximately 45,000 Egyptians with 250 tanks. Although Sharon did not capture the Third Army, he played a crucial role for Israeli troops to cross behind Egypt's rearguard.⁴⁴

One of the strongest aides to Sharon's crossing of the Suez was the United States military airlift from President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger, but some explanation must be given to understand their reasoning for such a feat. The President believed that he could support Israel and strengthen ties to Egypt simultaneously. He wanted to support Israel, but worried about displeasing the Arab oil-rich nations. He knew that Egypt had expelled the Soviets in 1972, and if he could prove American military might without displaying anti-Arab sentiment, the United States could gain diplomatic favor in Egypt over the Soviets. For this reason, Washington kept communications open with Egypt from the first day of the war. On October 6, Egypt's Foreign Minister Mohammed Zayyet informed Kissinger that the reason for the war was a need to form mutual respect between Egypt and Israel and that Washington could use the war toward creating a "solution" to the Egyptian-Israeli conflict.⁴⁵

The airlift originally began as a trickle of supplies, but it eventually expanded. On October 9, Nixon wanted secretly to resupply by ship everything except tanks to Israel. He only wanted to resupply Israel's tanks and planes after the war and to send just two planes to Israel per day. With some arms being shipped, Egyptians discovered the transportation of U. S. ammunition to Israel as early as October 11. After a week of war,

⁴⁴Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 459, 461-3; Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, 536; *New York Times*, October 25, 1973; Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 175-6; Shazly, *Crossing*, 270.

⁴⁵Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 140, 146; Laub, "The Development" 64-5.

President Nixon gave the actual order to the Pentagon to airlift military aid to Israel on October 12. Meanwhile, Kissinger waited to supply arms at first, and originally, he refused Israeli El Al planes from retrieving supplies from American military bases. He blamed the lack of supplies to Israel on American Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. Between Schlesinger and Kissinger, a new American foreign policy developed during the first days of war: the United States would support Israel, but not necessarily Israel's claims on the 1967 disputed territories. Another reason for the delay in sending arms was that Nixon did not hold a formal meeting on the war during the first week of fighting.⁴⁶

There are many reasons that the U. S. airlift began on a massive scale on October 14, the day before Israeli Southern Command allowed Sharon to fight for a bridgehead. Nixon wanted to use the arms supply to Israel as leverage to push the Israelis into peace negotiations. Kissinger claimed "Russian treachery on negotiations" to be the pretext for the airlift to Israel. For him, this treachery [of the Soviets beginning an airlift on October 9] and Israel's lack of a victory in the Sinai required the U.S. to send the airlift. Kissinger expected Israel to repel the Egyptians quickly and decisively, but this victory evaded the Israelis until after the United States airlift began. The airlift could also positively affect America. This show of power could change international opinions about America, who had appeared "weak" after the Vietnam War. On the morning of October 14, Nixon reasoned with Kissinger, "We are going to get blamed just as much [for sending Israel] three planes as for 300." Indeed, Egyptian newspapers had been blaming

⁴⁶El Al is Israel's national commercial airline. Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 142, 144; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 12, 1973; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 769; Stephen E Ambrose, *Nixon: Volume Three, 1973-1990*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 234-5.

the United States for helping Israel since the beginning of hostilities. They falsely reported that the United States of America sent Phantom pilots to aid Israel and that American troops fought for the Israelis. Nixon also recalled when Egypt blamed the U. S. for collusion with Israel in 1967, despite Johnson's lack of aid. Nasser's lie had backfired six years later.⁴⁷

With all these reasons, Nixon personally called Schlesinger with the order to “get [the planes] in the air, *now*.” After the airlift began, Nixon even appealed to Congress on October 19 for an additional \$2.2 billion in aid to Israel. The airlift consisted of ammunition, missiles, artillery, weapons for individuals, crew-operated weapons, fighter aircraft, tanks, and radios. The U. S. also supplied Israel with electronic jamming equipment and television-guided Maverick missiles and Walleye bombs, which allowed the Israeli air force to destroy more SAM batteries, opening the skies for Israeli air support above Sharon. The United States could also supply Israel with tanks and artillery pieces from within the Sinai at al-Arish airport, behind Sharon's lines.⁴⁸

The first C-5 Galaxies and C-141 Starlifters of the airlift landed in Israel on October 14. Five hundred sixty-six flights brought equipment to Israel between that day

⁴⁷The Egyptian media's claims about U. S. troops are false to the best of the author's knowledge. Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 151; Parker, *October War*, 160; *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969 – 1976*, 25 vols. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2011) 25: 495, 498. See also Ambrose, *Nixon*, 231; Matti Golan, *The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger: Step-by-Step Diplomacy in the Middle East*, Translated by Ruth Geyra Stern and Sol Stern. (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book, 1976), 64; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 7 and 20-1, 1973; Heikal, *Ramadan*, 233.

⁴⁸The original emphasis is used. Ambrose, *Nixon*, 240. See also *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1973*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1975), 884-5; *Jerusalem Post*, October 23, 1973; Kandil, *Soldiers*, 132; Heikal, *Ramadan*, 226; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 253.

and November 14 from the United States. Nixon's airlift challenged the Soviet airlift to the Arab states. While, the Soviet airlift supplied roughly 12,500 tons of military equipment between October 10 and October 23, the United States sent 50,000 tons of equipment during its airlift. The U.S. also outshined the Soviets by traveling roundtrips of seven thousand miles as opposed to Soviet roundtrips of only two thousand miles.⁴⁹

Nixon and Kissinger had opposing views on how to use the airlift toward American interests, and one of these views benefitted Israel's military push in the south. The President wanted to work with Russia for this peace, but Kissinger wanted to leave Russia and Egypt powerless. He even encouraged Israel to keep fighting through the ceasefire whether the Egyptians complied with it or not. For this reason, the American airlift had to outshine the Soviet airlift to show the dominance of American power within the region.⁵⁰

Kissinger aided the Israelis by providing time to surround the Egyptians. On October 20, Kissinger arrived in Moscow to begin ceasefire talks with the General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, Prime Minister Kosygin, and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. That morning, Brezhnev had requested that Kissinger immediately fly to Moscow for talks or that Foreign Minister Gromyko fly to Washington. Kissinger stalled his flight until that evening, and the trip provided Israel with a couple more days to surround the Egyptian Third Army. The Secretary of State explained his stalling tactics to Israeli Ambassador Dinitz before the flight to Moscow. Kissinger wanted to stall the

⁴⁹Meir, *My Life*, 431; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 151; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 770; Porter, *USSR in Third World Conflicts*, 132; Jon D. Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and War in the Middle East*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University, 1975), 130; Shazly, *Crossing*, 276.

⁵⁰Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 156, 164.

Soviets until the next day with claims of fatigue, but talks began only two hours after he landed in Moscow. He even claimed the whole trip was a “delaying move.” After talks began, Kissinger lost another opportunity to delay the meeting. Nixon had sent a message to Brezhnev giving Kissinger “full powers,” and the Secretary of State no longer could stall through needing approval from Washington during the talks. Both sides agreed to a ceasefire agreement the following day.⁵¹

The quick agreement on a ceasefire surprised Golda Meir, who remained outside of negotiations. Kissinger flew from there to Jerusalem and asked the Prime Minister to accept the October 22 ceasefire, and the United Nations passed it as Resolution 338. In Israel, Kissinger claimed that Soviets would not let him stall further. The Israelis originally followed Kissinger’s advice and UN Resolution 338 when chief of staff Elazar ordered troops to cease fire at 5:52 pm on October 22.⁵²

The last aid to Sharon’s bridgehead and the Israeli siege of the third army was Kissinger and Nixon’s decision to switch to Defcon 3 (Defense Condition III) to keep Soviets away from the battlefield. The fighting continued after the ceasefire, and the UN passed another resolution to return to the October 22 ceasefire lines. On October 24, the Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin called Kissinger and threatened Israeli troops with consequences for the breach of the ceasefire. Brezhnev called on October 23 for immediate entry of American and Soviet forces to uphold the ceasefire. Without U. S. troops to help stop the fighting, the Soviets threatened to act in the region “unilaterally.”

⁵¹Henry Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crisis*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 300, 303. See also *Egyptian Gazette*, October 21, 1973; Golan, *Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger*, 74-6; Kissinger, *Crisis*, 303, 305.

⁵²Golan, *Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger*, 77, 83; Meir, *My Life*, 439; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 23, 1973.

By pushing for the October 22 ceasefire, Soviet intervention would break the Israeli siege. In response to this, leaders in the situation room – including Kissinger but not Nixon, who was asleep – ordered the United States military alert to Defcon 3 at 11:41 pm on October 24, 1973. President Nixon ratified this decision at 3:00 am the following morning.⁵³

Tensions rose. The new security level put the American 82nd Airborne Division on stand-by for international deployment, and B-52 bombers returned from Guam to the continental United States to prepare for performing nuclear attacks if necessary. In response to the military alert, Moscow added thirty-six new ships to the sixty Soviet vessels already in the Mediterranean Sea. This was only the second time that the United States alerted its forces to Defcon 3, the first occasion was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After the alert order, Kissinger contacted Israeli ambassador Dinitz asking for a time table on when Israel could fully encircle the Egyptian Third Army and if the encirclement could be accomplished before Soviet interference. On October 25, the Soviets yielded to forming a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) group – with the condition of excluding Soviet troops – to monitor the situation in the Sinai. This ended America's need to deter Soviet intervention. Afterward, Egyptians and Israelis met at kilometer 101 on the road to Cairo and eventually signed an agreement to open the Suez

⁵³Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 165. See also *Egyptian Gazette*, October 19, 1973; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 783; *Foreign Relations*, 25: 684-5, 741; Meir, *My Life*, 441; Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 169; Porter, *USSR in Third World Conflicts*, 139.

Canal and exchange prisoners. After the war, historian Shimon Golan wrote, “Only American intervention saved [Israel] from destruction.”⁵⁴

Despite help from Israeli leaders, other generals in the field, and the unprecedented support of the United States, Sharon became the idealized hero after the Yom Kippur War. Israeli troops honored Sharon with the titles, “King of the Jews” and “King of Israel.” In the eyes of some Israelis, he had “saved” Israel in the Sinai against an attack unforeseen by the ruling government. Perhaps no American president or Secretary of State has aided Israel to such an extent as Nixon and Kissinger. Their aid eventually had positive outcomes toward peace but also caused a terrible oil crisis until March 1974, due to an oil embargo from Arab states. As hoped, Egypt became allies with the United States and made peace with Israel within five years. Despite being criticized domestically for the Watergate scandal, Nixon’s aid to Israel was one of the first steps in reviving America’s international military image after the Vietnam War. This step – through the strong airlift to an ally – helped Sharon and Israel achieve victories which led to the first peace between Israel and an Arab nation.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Bar-On, *Never-ending Conflict*, 177. See also Tyler, *World of Trouble*, 170; Porter, *USSR in Third World Conflicts*, 133, 170-1; Sachar, *History of Israel*, 784; *New York Times*, November 18, 1973.

⁵⁵Dan, *Ariel Sharon*, 71; *New York Times*, November 4, 1973.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This work has discussed Sharon's formative years as an officer from the First Arab-Israeli War to the Suez Crisis, advantages and disadvantages between the Israeli and Egyptian militaries during the Six-day War, and those who aided Sharon during the Yom Kippur War. All of these factors combined led to the general's greatest achievement of his military career, the canal crossing with Israel's subsequent siege of an Egyptian army. Sharon's formative years affected his later decisions during the Yom Kippur War. Although some Israeli and Egyptian advantages changed in between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, Sharon still managed to neutralize Egyptian advantages through his experience from 1967. Through aid in his crossing, Egypt and Israel were both affected domestically and internationally, resulting in the Arab oil embargo, the U. S.-Saudi Arabian alliance, and eventual peace between Egypt and Israel, mediated by the U. S. under President Carter.

First, Sharon's formative years affected his actions during the Yom Kippur War. Recalling his oath from the battle of Latrun in 1948, Sharon stressed not to leave a man behind enemy lines once the Egyptians crossed the canal. In addition to saving two Bar-Lev forts against orders, Sharon's troops saved a stranded tank crew on October 9. From experience during the Qibya raid in the early 1950s, Sharon began working outside of

proper military channels. This can be recalled from Sharon bonding with Ben-Gurion, the highest authority in Israel's military at the time. In the 1950s, Sharon had met with Ben-Gurion to overrule his commander's decisions, and by the Yom Kippur War, Sharon acted in the same manner, making military requests to Dayan, who outranked Sharon's commanders. Aside from Dayan's visit to the canal, Sharon also used the improper military channel to save lives. After Sharon had two bridges laid in the war, he had the ultimate test of resistance. Bar-Lev ordered for Sharon's troops to attack an unnecessary position *east* of the canal shortly before the war ended. Not only did Sharon refuse the order, he called Dayan to cancel it. Dayan, seemingly realizing that Sharon was in the right, made Elazar allow Sharon to not complete this unnecessary attack. Sharon's lessons had paid off through saving many Israeli and Egyptian lives. As for military differences that arose after Qalqilya, the third chapter is self-evident of the conflict reaching its apex, especially in the delayed advance across the canal. Lastly, Sharon had learned his lesson from being absent from his subordinates at the Mitla Pass in 1956. Now Sharon constantly fought alongside his troops. He had bulldozed the crossing yard wall, fought from his APC, and received a wound. Sharon's formative years clearly affected his performance during the Yom Kippur War.¹

Second, the advantages and disadvantages of the Egyptian and Israeli militaries also affected Sharon in this war. They obviously changed some between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. The element of surprise was on Egypt's side in October 1973, and Egypt originally blocked Israeli air superiority with their SAMs. Before the

¹Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 281, 446, 451; Ariel Sharon and David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (1989; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 128-9.

Yom Kippur War, Egyptian chief of staff Shazly acted to close the training gap between Egypt and Israel's soldiers. He began monthly meetings with divisional commanders to connect the field and staff officers, instituted adventure training for young officers to learn responsibility and initiative, and created the Egyptian amphibious brigade. Even Israeli soldiers noticed that Egyptian infantry and artillery performed much better in this war, although Egyptian tank soldiers remained poorly trained. Israelis also noticed that more Egyptian officers knew Hebrew in this war, closing the language gap. Against this stronger Egyptian military, Sharon needed to overcome Israel's new disadvantages in 1973.²

Sharon was able to overcome these disadvantages and create new advantages during the Yom Kippur War in similar ways to his actions in the Six-Day War. Upon mobilizing, Sharon provided binoculars for his troops by requesting a shipment of them from a wealthy friend in the United States, similar to overcoming the supply shortages from the Six-Day War. When Israelis lacked other supplies later in the war, they took captured RPGs and AK-47s. One soldier even gave Sharon an AK-47 for shooting at Egyptian artillery observers. When Sharon initially transferred to leading armor, Adan and other tank leaders were skeptical of his new leadership role due to his history of leading infantry. However, historian Amos Perlmutter praises Sharon for utilizing combined paratrooper-armored forces to break Egyptian lines. Other generals relied too heavily on tanks alone, which Egyptians more easily repelled with Saggars. In contrast, Sharon's history as an infantry and paratroop leader enabled him to interlace successfully

²Lieutenant General Saad el Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980), 44, 48, 51; *Jerusalem Post*, October 19, 1973; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 439.

infantry and armor within his attacks around the bridgehead. There is one more similarity between the Six-Day War and Yom Kippur War. After Israelis rebuffed Egypt's attack on October 14, the Egyptian Second Army commander Saad Mamoun had a mental breakdown, losing command of his forces. In addition, Sharon's planned attack at the Tirtur road killed the commander of Egypt's 14th Armored Brigade. Similar to 1967, it was now the Egyptians who were losing commanders, although in a more lethal way. All these factors put Israelis in a better position to defeat Egyptians and to secure a bridgehead.³

Third, Sharon's crossing had political consequences throughout Israel. Upon Labor's failure to recognize the coming of war, they worried about the rising of a war hero from their political opposition party, the Likud. Through legislation, Israel's Labor government banned Sharon from simultaneously serving in both the army reserve and the Knesset (Israel's parliament). Sharon chose to remain in the reserves through this election, but eventually returned to politics. He later became Defense Minister during the First Lebanon War and Prime Minister in 2001. It should be noted that Israelis voted toward this soldier/politician amid growing concerns for security during the Second Intifada. Meanwhile, chief of staff David Elazar and others were discharged after an inquiry was made into the poor decision-making during the 1973 war.⁴

Sharon's crossing also affected Egypt domestically from 1973 into the Arab Spring. Out of the Israeli crossing, Air Force commander Hosni Mubarak rose

³Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 129, 131, 372, 419, 429; Amos Perlmutter, *Politics and the Military in Israel, 1967-1977*, (London: Frank Cass, 1978), 87; Shazly, *Crossing*, 249.

⁴*Jerusalem Post*, November 25, 1973; Michael Bar-Zohar and Nissam Mishal, *Mossad: The Greatest Missions of the Israeli Secret Service*, (New York: Ecco, 2012), 228.

politically, because he sent everything at his disposal, even training aircraft, to stall the Israeli advance. Sadat eventually made Mubarak Vice-President of Egypt after this event. Outside of Mubarak, Sharon's crossing affected one Egyptian more than most, the chief of staff Saad Hussein el-Shazly. When he requested some forces to be removed from the Sinai to combat Sharon's breach, Sadat used the Suez crossing against Shazly. The president claimed Shazly wanted to pull all Egyptian forces back, a claim confirmed only by the air force chief, Hosni Mubarak. Because Shazly was a charismatic war hero (and a possible political opponent) from the Second World War, the First Arab-Israeli War, and the Six-Day War, Sadat discredited Shazly and dismissed him. When the former chief of staff wrote his memoirs to clear his name, he was eventually arrested under Mubarak's regime from 1992 until 2005 for "revealing military secrets." His banned memoirs were finally allowed within Egypt after the Arab Spring, but unfortunately, Shazly died a day before Mubarak was ousted from the presidency. The role of soldiers as political figures within Egypt had affected the former chief of staff until his death.⁵

On the international level, Arab states declared an oil embargo against the U. S. after they aided Sharon through the military airlift. Just the threat of an oil production drop partially caused all of Europe except for Portugal to block transit landings of American planes carrying arms to Israel. The countries that actually took part in this oil crisis were Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi and Dubai of the United Arab Emirates. Together, they produced thirty

⁵Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012), 136. See also Anwar el Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 263; Kandil, *Soldiers*, 135-6.

percent of the world's oil. Their ultimatum was for Israel to withdraw to pre-1967 borders and to readmit all refugees back into Israel proper. However, as this did not happen, the embargo finally ended on March 18, 1974.⁶

This embargo started because of pressure from Egypt after the U. S. airlift aided Sharon and Israel. John Perkins, an American consultant for a solution to this oil embargo, claims, "Sadat pressured Saudi Arabia's King Faisal to retaliate against the United States' complicity with Israel by employing . . . 'the oil weapon.'" King Feisal had met with Sadat in August 1973, and they agreed that Egypt could use Saudi Arabia's oil weapon as a political lever if needed. On October 17, Arab Ministers of Petroleum agreed to reduce oil production in their respective countries by five percent for every month that Israel remained in territories gained from the Six-Day War. On October 20, King Faisal also announced an embargo of oil shipments to the United States in response to Nixon's speech before Congress, requesting aid for Israel. By November 5, Arab oil-producing countries claimed a total drop of twenty-five percent in oil production. At this time, Saudi Arabia was the third largest oil exporter to the United States, providing about six percent of the daily used oil there.⁷

In part, this oil embargo created the U. S.-Saudi Arabia alliance. American companies raised prices as they competed less with cheaper foreign oil imports, and in turn, the Arab oil states could raise their prices. Six states raised their prices of crude oil

⁶Elinor Burkett, *Golda*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 331; *Egyptian Gazette*, October 20, 1973; Rabinovich, *Yom Kippur War*, 324; *Jerusalem Post*, November 6 and 9, 1973; *Daily Star*, October 22, 1973.

⁷John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, (New York: Plume, 2004), 93. See also Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book, 1975), 268; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 251; *Daily Star*, October 21, 1973; *Jerusalem Post*, November 6, 1973

by seventeen percent on the same day of the announced oil export reduction. When the embargo ended, the U.S. planned “to funnel petrodollars back into America” by offering technical support, military equipment, military training, and more modern infrastructure to Saudi Arabia. In order to prevent further embargos, negotiations created the United States-Saudi Arabian Joint Economic Commission (JECOR). This commission used Saudi petrodollars to hire American businesses to develop Saudi Arabia, tying the two nations together economically and militarily.⁸

Lastly, out of the Yom Kippur War, Egypt became an opportunity for greater U. S. influence in the Middle East, and both Israel and Egypt eventually looked to the United States as a mediator for peace. For Israel, its citizens suffered a psychological defeat about their ideas of military superiority. This led to desiring peace through more impartial diplomacy rather than peace through militaristic submission of Arab states. Unlike Sharon’s previous wars, the Yom Kippur War also caused Israel to rely more heavily upon the United States. Meanwhile, Sadat viewed the U. S. as a viable partner to replace the Soviet Union. He remembered how Eisenhower had expelled French, British, and Israeli military from Egypt after the Suez Crisis in 1956. Some also believed the oil pressure did cause the U.S. to be less biased toward favoring Israel over Egypt in diplomatic talks. Nixon and Kissinger’s military support for Sharon’s crossing and diplomatic openness to Egypt caused Egypt to accept the U. S. as a country to mediate a lasting peace with Israel. The two Americans had shown that while the U. S. aided Israel militarily, Egypt would not be able to reconquer the Sinai through force. Diplomacy was the only way. After almost six years, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty on March 26,

⁸Perkins, *Confessions*, 95. See also Heikal, *Ramadan*, 274; *Daily Star*, October 18, 1973; Perkins, *Confessions*, 95.

1979, and Israel withdrew from the Sinai by 1982. This was the first peace treaty between Israel and a neighboring Arab state. Unfortunately, President Anwar Sadat was eventually assassinated by his fellow citizens for his progress toward peace. The struggle for peace between Israel and its neighbors will continue.⁹

⁹Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, 3rd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1985), 371; Kandil, *Soldiers*, 121; *Jerusalem Post*, October 10 and 28, 1973.

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VITA

Levi Del Cantrell

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: ARIEL SHARON'S CROSSING OF THE SUEZ CANAL: FACTORS AND PEOPLE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE CROSSING, 1948 - 1973

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in May, 2015.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May, 2012.

Experience: Receptionist, English and Foreign Language Department, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2011-2012; Substitute Teacher, Anderson County School District 5, Anderson, South Carolina, 2012-2013; Server, Charleston's Restaurant, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2013; Customer Service Representative, Walmart, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2014; Teaching Assistant, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2014-2015.

Professional Memberships: Phi Alpha Theta and Sigma Delta Pi.