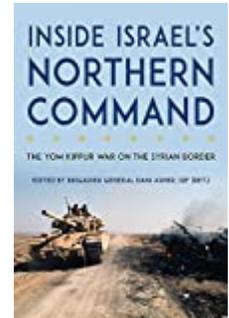


Daniel Asher, ed. *Inside Israel's Northern Command: the Yom Kippur War on the Syrian Border*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. 704 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-6737-4.



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Inside Israel's Northern Command recounts the history of the October 1973 Yom Kippur War on the Syrian front as experienced by the leadership of Israel's Northern Command, the command responsible for Israel's northern borders with Syria and Lebanon. Edited by Dani Asher, a military historian and retired brigadier general in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the book is a narrative based on the testimonies of the senior staff officers of Northern Command who served during the conflict.

Asher and his fellow contributors aim to show that, while the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack caught many Israelis by surprise, the soldiers of Northern Command recovered quickly and fought exceptionally well throughout the entire conflict. This message acts as a counterweight to the conclusions of the Agranat Commission, which was established in November of 1973 to investigate the IDF's performance during the Yom Kippur War and was highly critical of senior IDF commanders. As Yair Golan, a retired IDF major general and former commander of Northern Command, states in the

foreword, in *Northern Command* "a vigorous, logical military operation shines through, not one of negligence" (p. 25). Uri Simchoni, Northern Command's operations officer during the Yom Kippur War, writes that Israel owed its victory to "hundreds of little commanders and soldiers actions at decisive points" (p. 682). To emphasize the importance that the contributors attach to the bravery of individual soldiers and officers, *Inside Israel's Northern Command* includes three sections listing Israelis who were decorated (often posthumously) during the fighting on the Syrian front.

The book begins with a brief introduction describing the history of Northern Command from its foundation in 1948 to the eve of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The remainder of the book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Preparation for War," covers the months leading up to the outbreak of war on October 6. After an initial chapter detailing Syrian preparations for war, the next four chapters describe Northern Command's operations in the

years leading up to the outbreak of war and its preparations for a potential conflict with Syria.

Part 2, “From Desperate Holdings to an Offensive towards Damascus,” recounts the fighting between Israeli and Syrian forces from the Syrian attack on October 6 to the October 22 ceasefire that ended the conflict. These chapters describe in great detail how units of Northern Command were pushed back during the initial Syrian offensive but recovered quickly to halt the Syrian advance after only two days. Northern Command’s ability to quickly deploy its reserve forces was critical to halting the Syrian advance and made possible the Israeli counteroffensive that followed (chapter 8). Subsequent chapters describe how counterattacking IDF units recovered all the territory captured by Syrian forces and advanced as far as they could into Syrian territory before a ceasefire was declared.

Part 3, “Operating the Command Systems at War,” delves into the experiences of individual elements of Northern Command’s staff during the war, including the General Staff, intelligence, artillery, field engineering, the air force, logistics, ordinance, medical services, military police, adjutant branch, and communications. Of these chapters, the chapter on intelligence (chapter 16) should be of great interest. According to the intelligence officers on the northern front, Northern Command was not surprised that war broke out, even if they did not predict the exact moment when Syrian forces began their attack (p. 530). This stands in contrast to Aman, Israel’s independent military intelligence branch, which failed to see the approach of war and was strongly criticized by the Agranat Commission.

The chief strengths of *Israel’s Northern Command* are the contributors’ detailed descriptions of battlefield decision-making during intense combat operations. However, several flaws limit its usefulness to historians of the Yom Kippur War. First, with only a couple of exceptions, the book does not clearly label where one officer’s contribution ends

and another begins, making it difficult to attribute any observation or conclusion to a specific person. The editor and contributors also do not situate the book in the broader literature on the Yom Kippur War, one of the most important moments in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Inside Israel’s Northern Command* is also very narrowly focused, concentrating intensely on the Syrian front with few references to the fighting between Israeli and Egyptian forces to the south and little comparison between the two theaters. While readers can learn a great deal about the inner workings of the IDF at war from this book, it should be read in conjunction with broader studies of this conflict. Still, *Inside Israel’s Northern Command* will be of great interest to readers looking for a detailed operational-level view of the Israeli Defense Forces during one of the most important military campaigns in Israel’s history.

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