



The legacy of Dan Shomron

Revealing new details from the 'generals' wars,' Ze'ev Drory remembers Shomron, the 'forgotten' commander of Operation Entebbe and former IDF chief of staff

• EYAL LEVY

When the Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee asked Col. (res.) Prof. Ze'ev Drory to serve as its executive director, he set two conditions before accepting the offer. He wanted to continue teaching, and he wanted to establish a research institute named after the late IDF chief of staff Dan Shomron.

Drory's book *Quiet Leadership*, about Israel's 13th chief of staff, is scheduled to be published soon in Hebrew.

"Dan Shomron's name is not mentioned often, because he was very modest," Drory explains excitedly. "He was a preeminent Paratroop [Brigade] officer, and if not for him Operation Entebbe would never have gotten under way, according to Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres.

During the Yom Kippur War, Shomron commanded Division 401, whose actions during the war were necessary for us to win the war. During an event in which many of us gathered to talk about Danny, we played a recording of him saying to Emanuel Sakal, one of the regiment commanders, 'The people of Israel need you - don't hurry to the outposts. Turn around and take up positions. We need every tank we have.' He spoke in a softer tone than I'm speaking with you right now."

DAN SHOMRON as chief of staff, 1987. (Sa'ar Ya'acov/GPO)

You met him during the war?

"After I breached the Egyptian tanks, I went up to the war room at military headquarters so I could give my report to the OC Southern Command. When I reached the door, I saw Dan shaving inside the room. I was shocked and said to him, 'Danny, we're in the midst of a war.' I was so dirty after an insane night full of fighting, and he just looked at me and replied, 'Ze'evik, the soldiers need to see us looking strong.' That was Dan Shomron."

Was he hidden by his modesty?

"He would say that history will judge. What he didn't know was that there is no such thing as history, just historians, who all write from their own perspectives. In the Yom Kippur War, his brigade captured Adabiya and reached 'Kilometer 101' with the smallest number of casualties. Unfortunately, we tend to remember those who lost the most soldiers."

And yet he was appointed IDF chief of staff.

"Yes. Claims were made by individuals, including [12th IDF chief of staff] Moshe 'and a half' [Levy], that because Dan was allegedly homosexual, he could not be appointed chief of staff. They started a smear campaign against Dan when he was appointed OC Southern Command, but Rafal [Rafael Eitan] couldn't do anything about it, since he began his term as chief of staff on the very same day.

"Levy was so intent on preventing Dan's appointment that he asked for a meeting with prime minister Yitzhak Shamir. Shamir asked him, 'Do you have any proof?' and Levy replied, 'I've heard rumors.' Shamir told him to leave the room and didn't agree to speak of the issue ever again.

"Dan refused the nomination. He said, 'I want the Shin Bet [Israel Security Agency] to find out who is responsible for starting this rumor.' An investigation was carried out. Dan was the first person to undergo a polygraph test, which he passed, confirming that he was not homosexual. I was supposed to meet with the Shin Bet investigator; but he died a month before our meeting."

Did you know about this story at the time?

"As one of the senior officers, I was privy to this information, and it shocked me deeply. I couldn't believe how low people were willing to go in the battle over the chief of staff appointment. They crossed all ethical lines - I did not expect such low behavior from high-ranking officials."

Nobody really remembers Shomron's involvement in Operation Entebbe either.

"Dan Shomron was the person who presented the Entebbe rescue plan to the prime minister, defense minister and chief of staff. He was commander of the Paratroop Brigade at the time. Even



DAN SHOMRON (left) with Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Levy. (Avi Simhoni, Bamahaneh)

in the midst of an operation, he spoke with a quiet voice, and was always in complete control.

"When Peres, who was defense minister at the time, asked him, 'What are our chances of success?' he replied: 'The most important thing is the element of surprise. If the first plane succeeds in landing without being identified as Israeli, and we don't get delayed, I estimate that the entire operation will take 60 minutes.' Then Peres asked, 'And how many casualties?' Dan replied, 'If the element of surprise works, we might get away with only five or six casualties.' And that's exactly what happened.

"I spoke with Dan about Entebbe a number of times, and he admitted that what he was most worried about as the Israeli planes made the long flight to

'Dan had been a tractor driver on the kibbutz where he grew up - he hadn't even finished high school. But he had a tremendous amount of common sense. Unfortunately, we've completely forgotten about him.'



Africa was, what if it didn't go as planned? Amos Eran, who was director-general of the Prime Minister's Office at the time, recalls that Rabin asked him to have resignation letters ready for himself and his government, in case there were more than 25 casualties. People don't understand that the operation was much more complicated than it looked, and involved a very large number of Israeli soldiers."

What distinguished Shomron from his predecessors?

"One of the chapters in the book focuses on precision-guided munitions. We can shoot a missile from 100 kilometers away and it will hit the window we were aiming at - and only that window. When we began making headway into precision-guided munitions, Dan was the commander of the IDF ground forces. Other IDF generals were not excited about adopting this program, because Dan said it would take 10 years until this technology would become precise, and they said, 'But we won't >>>

OUTGOING CHIEF of staff Moshe Levy (right) and incoming chief of staff Dan Shomron holding the guest book during the ceremony at the President's Residence in Jerusalem. (Harnik Nati/GPO)