Memories of Yom Kippur War

Weapon training begins

VICTOR NEUMAN

In this eight-part series, the author recounts his life in Israel around the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The events and people described are real but, for reasons of privacy, the names are fictitious.

Part 4: Training Day

W e were two or three days into the war and the news was chilling. Egypt had overrun the defences along the Suez Canal and was pouring into the Sinai. Syria had breached the outposts in the Golan and was within striking distance of Tiberias. We were in shock to think that, a scant six years after the pummeling of the Six Day War, these countries were able to go to war again.

I think the nation was in disbelieve as well. Soldiers, in large numbers, had been sent home to observe Yom Kippur. We had set a target in the Golan, and a target set in the Sinai. There was a rise behind the target to stop the bullets from straying. On a table to the side, he had weapons. There was an Uzi, a bipod sniper rifle and three Second World War rifles, a Remington 870, the older guns, saying they were there just to give us the hang of things and he expected us to have better weapons soon. But, first, he addressed us with a sombre face.

As you can see, kibbutz is located on Wadi Ara. This valley connects the West Bank territories to the coast of Israel. The military tells me that, if Jordan enters the war and opens a third front, there is a good chance that the Golan will fall. If that happens, it is believed that the Golan will fall.

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Next day, the four of us and Gidon met in a field behind the kibbutz. Gidon had set up a target that consisted of a plywood board on two metal stands. We held our rifles and aimed for the older guns, saying they were there just to give us the hang of things and he expected us to have better weapons soon. But, first, he addressed us with a sombre face.

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I don’t recall ever being asked if I wanted to join the fight. As a candidate for kibbutz membership, it was a given that I would step up and do anything required to help. And so it was. This was now my home and these people were my family. Not doing everything I could was never a question in my mind. But, truth be told, to me the lighting seemed far away and unreal and I had no real sense of personal danger. More oblivious than brave might be the way to put it.

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