

Jonathan Netanyahu

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Jonathan (Yoni) Netanyahu was born on 13 March 1946 in New York City. His parents, Benzion and Cela were working on the creation of a Jewish state on behalf of the New Zionist Organisation. At the age of two, Yoni's parents returned to Israel where his father worked as the Editor of the first general Hebrew Encyclopedia. The family stayed in Jerusalem. Yoni attended the local school, "Darom" in



Katamon district of Jerusalem. After briefly moving to the United States in 1957, the family moved back to Jerusalem in 1959 where Yoni enrolled in the Hebrew Gymnasium. He was a brilliant student and excelled in sports as well. He was elected President of the Students Council. Yoni and his family left Israel again for his father's continuing historical work. They settled in Elkins Park, a suburb of Philadelphia, where Professor Netanyahu taught at Dropsie College, a school of higher learning for Jewish studies.

After completing his graduation from Cheltenham High School in Philadelphia Yoni returned to Israel and enlisted in 1964. He excelled in training and opted for the Paratroopers. After standing first in his course at the Officers' Training School, Yoni was commissioned as a Platoon Commander in the Paratroopers and saw action in the West Bank. In January 1967, Yoni was accepted at Harvard University where he studied Literature and Philosophy after completing his mandatory enlistment with the Israeli Defence Forces. In May 1967 as war clouds

gathered in the Sinai after Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships, Yoni and other reservists were mobilized and saw action in the Sinai Desert. Yoni participated in the pivotal battle of Um Katef in the Sinai and also saw action in the Golan Heights. He was injured in the arm on the last day of the war. His elbow was permanently disabled due to the injuries received. After the war, Yoni married his long time girlfriend, Tuti and returned to Harvard. They soon came back to Jerusalem where he pursued studies in mathematics and philosophy at the Hebrew University.

But as the country remained engulfed in conflict, Yoni increasingly felt that his real place was in the army. By now, both his brothers, Benjamin (the current Prime Minister of Israel) and Iddo had enlisted in the army. Yoni opted for and was accepted in Sayeret Matkal, Israel's elite commando unit where Benjamin was also serving. He assumed command of a squad in Sayeret Matkal. In recognition of his great skills and special abilities, Yoni was posted as a company commander in another Special Forces unit, Sayeret Haruv in the Jordan valley. In 1972, Yoni returned to Sayeret Matkal as a company commander. For two years all the three Netanyahu brothers served together in the same unit. In 1972, Yoni was promoted as Deputy Commander of Sayeret Matkal. Only two of the operations he took part in, during that period of service in the Unit, can be disclosed. One occurred in the summer of 1972, when Yoni commanded the hijacking from Lebanon of a group of high-ranking Syrian Officers. These officers were subsequently exchanged for Israeli pilots languishing in a Syrian jail. The other was the raid on the PLO leaders in Beirut, in the spring of 1973. During the summer of 1973, Major Jonathan took absence of leave from the army and returned to Harvard.

After the outbreak of the Yom Kippur war on 6 October 1973, Yoni joined his unit in the Golan Heights. In one operation, Yoni and his platoon of 30 men fought against a Syrian Army helicopter with 40 soldiers on board which was attempting to capture an Israeli command post. The Syrians were beaten back. Two soldiers from Sayeret Matkal were martyred in this encounter. In another operation during the war, Yoni was instrumental in the rescue of an Israeli Brigade Commander from behind enemy lines.

After the war, Yoni joined the armoured brigade which had lost a large number of officers and men in the war. He was deployed as a company commander in the heavily bombarded Syrian enclave for two months and later commanded the "Reshef" brigade. The brigade was badly decimated during the war was re-built and emerged as the number one armoured unit in the Golan.

In 1975, Lt Col Jonathan Netanyahu assumed command of the Sayeret Matkal

and participated in many clandestine Special Forces operations. On 4 July 1976, while leading the raid on Entebbe, he was hit by a bullet in the chest and succumbed to his injuries while being evacuated to the Hercules C-130 aircraft. He was the only fatal casualty during the successful hostage rescue operation. In his short but fast-paced life, Yoni achieved extraordinary feats in the service of his motherland which mortals only hope to achieve in a long life. His courage, tenacity, commitment towards excellence in all fields and devotion towards duty continues to inspire generations of Special Forces men all over the world.

Yoni was buried on Mt. Herzl, alongside the grave of David Elazar, Chief of Staff during the Yom Kippur War. Thousands attended Yoni's funeral. Yoni's name, until then virtually unknown beyond the army, became famous throughout Israel overnight. His deeds, and his thoughts and reflections – brought to light in his posthumous and bestselling book of letters – remain a source of inspiration for many in his country and around the globe.

Source: www.yoni.org.il/

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