

“July 24, 2006 – Col. Tzvi Luft, 42, of Moshav Hogla, was killed along with another pilot when their Apache helicopter crashed en route to a mission across the Lebanese border.

Tzvi, who served as an Apache helicopter pilot, and had previously been the Apache squadron commander, had one year left to complete his Air Force obligation... His friends said that “He very much loved his military service and gave a lot to the Air Force.” Col. Tzvi Luft was buried in Moshav Hogla. He is survived by his wife Orna, and three daughters.”

This was the text that appeared in most English media outlets shortly after my friend, Tzivka was killed. He was the highest ranking officer who died during the Second Lebanon War.

It is hard to explain the horrible feeling that traveled through my body when I first heard news that an Apache helicopter had gone down. I thought to myself that there could not be too many Apache pilots... To my horror a few hours later, I received a call from my parents in Israel confirming that my dear friend, Tzivka had died in the crash.

Tzivka and I grew up together in Kibutz Rosh Ha'nikra. Although he was a few years older than me, we established a strong friendship that grew even stronger.

During our teen years, Tzivka and I worked together in the orchard of our Kibutz. I had not yet received my driver's license and Tzivka took it upon himself to teach me how to drive tractors, forklifts, and even the company pickup truck. We used to race, sometimes recklessly on the orchard's dirt roads.

When Tzivka reached the draft age, he told me he was going to try out for the Air Force. I was extremely happy for him, but also knew that the majority of candidates end up dropping out or being

disqualified. But not Tzvika, he stuck with the program and each weekend when he came home still wearing his grey uniform, I began to believe that he would soon become a pilot. During his training, Tzvika was identified as a skilled helicopter combat pilot.

I vividly remember a conversation we had one weekend. I asked him how it felt to fly a combat helicopter to which he smiled and replied "Do you remember Nim how we used to race tractors in the fields? Well, flying a combat helicopter is almost the same, just airborne..."

A few years passed and I too, joined the IDF. During the service, I suffered a severe injury which forced me into lengthy hospitalization. While in the hospital, I was joined by Tzvika who was admitted in with a broken arm. Tzvika had just completed flight school and while on a trip with his wife had an automobile accident. We both were receiving physical therapy for our injuries and we both dreaded our daily visits with the therapist. Our bond grew stronger during this hospital stay.

The loss is even greater when one understands how involved our relationship was. During our childhood, our families were next door neighbors. Tzvika's mother, Talma was my older sister's teacher and his brother, Uri and I were in school together from daycare through High School. The same was the case with Tzvika's youngest brothers, Peleg and Hagai who grew up with my younger sisters.

This was my friend Tzvika.