Ahuva Tomer: Chief who refused to stay in the office

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The death of 53-year-old Haifa police head Asst.-Cmdr. Ahuva Tomer has left the Israel Police and the city of Haifa in mourning.

Those who knew her well say that throughout her police service, Tomer's personal warmth and self-effacing humor, coupled with her professionalism and absolute dedication to the personal security of Haifa's residents, made her one of the most esteemed and popular police commanders in Israeli history. Tomer was modest about her groundbreaking achievements, asking to be judged solely as a police officer. Her determination to manage crises from the field rather than the office, as exemplified in the Second Lebanon War, and most recently and tragically, the Carmel fire disaster, has been held up by her commanders and subordinates alike as model leadership conduct.

Tomer was born in 1957 in the former Soviet Union, and immigrated to Israel with her family when she was two years old. After completing her military service, she joined the police force in 1982, and during her first year on the force, she was recognized by her commanders as being "an exceptional officer," according to Northern District police head Cmdr. Shimon Koren.

She soon successfully completed an officers' training course, and became a supervising officer in the Haifa Traffic Police. Tomer was then promoted to a series of positions, including the post of operations officer in the Haifa police station, and then operations officer for the Northern District. She next served as the head of the patrol and intelligence bureau of Haifa police, before being promoted to head of Nahariya police station, becoming the first female police station head.

Tomer became deputy head of the Haifa police station, and then, in October 2008, she became the first woman to command a major urban police station when she was appointed head of Haifa police. She often downplayed her accomplishments, and shortly after her history-making appointment in 2006, she told The Jerusalem Post that she did not see the promotion as exceptional.

"I have frequently been the first woman to hold the position in almost all of the positions that I have held in the police," she explained. "I don't feel like I'm special. I do function in a predominantly male society, but I am an equal among equals and I try to be the best I can. But women need to understand that this is not just a question of equality of opportunity, but also equality of responsibility."