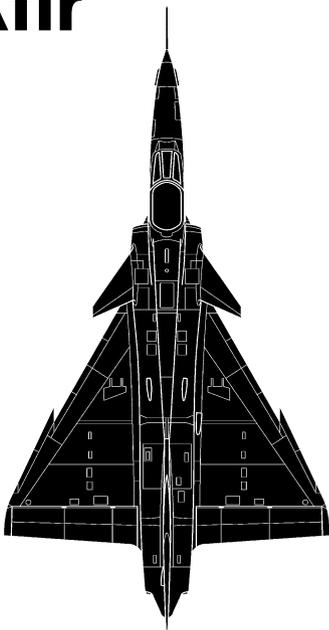


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

Kfir



The Israeli Kfir (Hebrew for “lion cub”) proved itself over more than two decades to be among the world’s most capable multirole fighters. It has been called—without a shred of disrespect—a kind of “frankenplane,” featuring a modified French airframe, US engine, Israeli electronics, and bits and pieces from other sources. This odd confluence of technology—and a bit of skullduggery—resulted in a superb combat aircraft, flown by Israel and five other air arms.

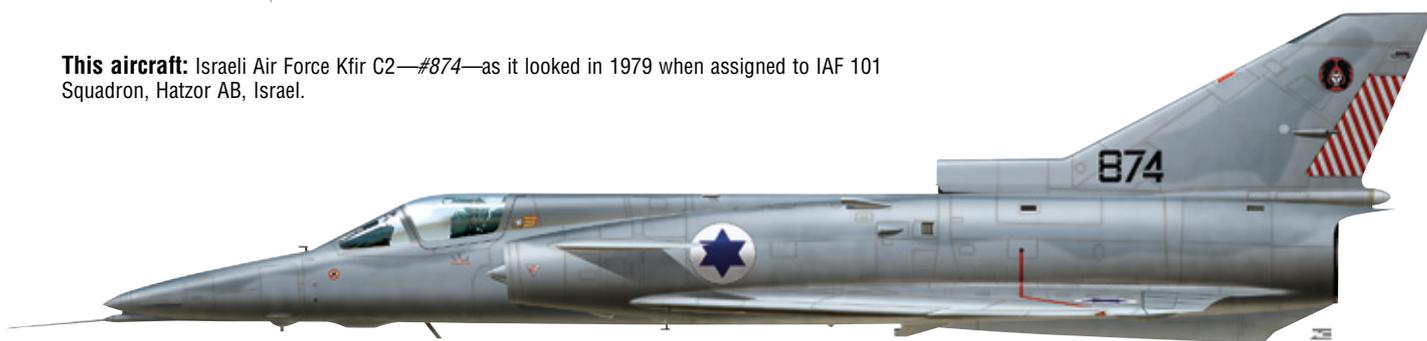
In the first two decades of Israel’s existence, the primary source of its front-line fighters was France. Paris had provided the Dassault Ouragan, Mirage IIICJ, and Mystère IIIC. However, French-Israeli relations foundered in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Though victorious, the Israeli air arm suffered

60 losses and desperately needed new combat aircraft, but France instead imposed an embargo on new shipments. Capitalizing on some covert sympathy within the Dassault organization, Israel mounted a brilliant national effort to adapt the Mirage III design to Israeli needs. The Kfir emerged in 1973.

A subsequent and more ambitious effort led to the Kfir C2 variant. It featured swept canard foreplanes, a revised wing profile, and small strakes under the forward fuselage. These aerodynamic advances improved the Kfir’s short-field performance and maneuverability. After 25 years of service, the Kfir finally was withdrawn from active Israeli service in the late 1990s.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Israeli Air Force Kfir C2—#874—as it looked in 1979 when assigned to IAF 101 Squadron, Hatzor AB, Israel.



DOD photo by PHC Robert L. Lawson, USN (Ret.)



Two US Navy F-21A Kfir aircraft in formation near NAS Fallon, Nev.

In Brief

Designed, built by Israeli Aircraft Industries ★ first flight June 1973 ★ number built 212 ★ crew of one or two (trainer) ★ armament two 30 mm cannons, up to 13,000 lb of ordnance ★ **Specific to Kfir C2:** one General Electric J79 turbojet engine ★ max speed 1,520 mph ★ cruise speed 680 mph ★ combat radius 215 mi ★ weight (loaded) 36,000 lb ★ span 26 ft 11 in ★ length 51 ft 4 in ★ height 14 ft 11 in.

Famous Fliers

Ace: Giora Epstein. **Test pilot:** Dani Shapira. **Other notable:** Carroll LeFon (retired USN captain), died in crash of a Kfir operated by a commercial firm. (Israeli security practice for the most part prevents disclosure of pilot names or activities.)

Interesting Facts

Designed as an interceptor, but used as a CAS aircraft ★ supplanted in air superiority role by F-15 and F-16 ★ flown by US Navy, Marine Corps as aggressor aircraft ★ scored a single aerial victory—the downing of a Syrian MiG-21 in June 1979 ★ operated by the air arms of Colombia, Ecuador, and Sri Lanka ★ produced without a valid airframe license from Dassault ★ flown by Airborne Tactical Advantage Co., US commercial firm contracting with the US military.