

## **The Israeli Army**

**Ira Gutin**

Translated from Russian by Julie Zhuk

As a man who, by the will of fate, served in both the Soviet and Israeli armies, I am often asked what the difference between the two are. I usually answer with only one sentence: "In the Israeli army, everyone needs you; in the Soviet army, no one needed me." In fact, the difference is the details. Do you know why pickles are included in the Israeli soldiers' rations? Because, in the desert, in the heat, you need to drink a lot of water. You can make the soldiers to drink by force, or you can include pickles in rations and the soldier will drink himself.

Officers avoid any reason to yell, suppress a person, cause disrespect and fear to themselves. Dry rations were issued, one for four was not accidental. And in order for every soldier to understand that your comrade should also be left to eat, everything should be equally, honestly. The commander's tent or room is no different from the soldier's, everyone eats in the same dining room.

The weapon is given to the soldier immediately after the oath, and he no longer parted with it throughout the service. At the end of the week, when thousands of soldiers go home, vehicles, buses, and electric trains are filled with soldiers armed to the teeth each with a machine gun. Each with live ammunition horns. And no one is afraid of this, on the contrary, it is a picture of security. Everyone feels protected next to these guys and girls. I don't remember a single case where weapons were used against each other for no reason.

By the way, soldiers are sent home at the end of the week not for merit or as encouragement. For every Israeli, family is the most important thing. The army is also part of the family. Therefore, the army-family connection should never be interrupted.

I will never forget when we were taken out after the operation of the Gaza Strip, we were tanned to blackness, in a sun-bleached uniform, and were met by ordinary people. On the way home, about twenty people tried to feed me in a cafe or restaurant. They tried to buy me something, give me a ride in a car, just pat me on the shoulder, and or shake my hand. It's a very touching feeling, you feel that you are not only your mother's child, but also

the child of this whole country. A child with an M-16 assault rifle, on whose protection everyone hopes.

Do you know what “Masa Kumta” is? This is a “beret trip”. When the soldiers of the young combat unit pass the “young fighter course”, they are in for a grueling, often multi-day forced march, at the end of which, they give you a red beret of a paratrooper. There is also a purple beret of the Givati, that is, a marine or a brown beret of the Golani.

The Golani is an elite infantry unit. Depending on the type of troops in which you serve. By the way, in order to get into combat units, you need to go through a big competition, there are a lot of applicants, and the health profile should be high. Moreover, no one managed to get 100 points, the maximum number is 97.

There is a running joke in the Israeli army, that three percent should be taken away for circumcision. Not everyone can pass a course of a young fighter, either. There are not only physical tests, but psychological ones as well. For each completed standard, a soldier is given an additional piece of equipment as a reward. Guess which one is first? It's an automatic belt, until then he wears his hands.

Do you know how long the forced march lasts at the Egoz special unit? It lasts almost a week. You're dealing with wild heat and off-roading for 260 kilometers. At the same time, it is necessary to carry personal equipment, and this weighs more than thirty kilograms. We are talking about special equipment, machine guns, food, water supplies, ammunition, and conducting mock battles along the way.

When one reaches the final assault that takes place on Mount Hermon - that is the highest point in the country. Everyone must pass. On your feet or on the shoulders of friends, but that's all. This is an indispensable condition. No one should be abandoned, lost, and no one should be left behind. During wars, even the corpses of dead Israeli soldiers must be removed from the battlefield. If a soldier is captured, he is obliged to tell the enemy about all the plans of all the Israelis that are known to him. He must do this, because his main goal is to stay alive and return home again. And because his life is the most important thing for the army.

Plans can be changed, but the most important surprise awaits at the end of the forced march. I have already said that the army and the family in Israel are inseparable. During the last kilometers members of their families can join the soldiers. Family members help carry the soldier weapons and help cheer them on.

I will always remember one soldier who had injured his leg. He was put on a stretcher by his little sister. She hugged him and sat next to him all the way. At the very end, when they reached the finish line old timers joined in. This is the question of whether there is hazing in the IDF (Tswat Ha-Agana le Israel, Israel Defense Forces). The old timers pick up the marchers who have arrived and carry them on their shoulders until they get to the finish line.

After that the young soldiers are given berets, which they all toss into the air together. It's an unforgettable time, and you know the Israeli army is the best not because it is somehow especially armed, nor because it has excellent tanks and planes, but because it is a family. That is the whole answer to the question, when people ask what is the difference between the Israeli army and the Soviet army. I don't have another and I am proud to say that my granddaughter Neta serves in this army.