

# ISRAEL news for kids

The Magazine

#02



## The People's Army

The Israel Defense Forces, known as the IDF, is the army of the State of Israel.

### Did you know?

The IDF is considered the largest army in the Middle East, and one of the strongest, skilled and most professional armies in the world.

The main ones were the Palmach, Haganah, Etzel and Lechi, which operated secretly. In 1948, with the establishment of the State of Israel, the IDF became the unification of all the previous fighting forces.

The IDF insignia (emblem) is a combination of the Haganah's insignia – a sword and an olive branch, which symbolize war and peace – encircled by a Star of David (Magen David).

And indeed, the new country of Israel was born straight into a war – The War of Independence.

### When was the IDF founded?

Two weeks after the establishment of the State of Israel, in May 1948, the young country's new government understood they had to establish one official, central army.

Why were they in such a hurry to set up an army for a country that had only just been officially declared?

Even before the Declaration of Independence for the new Jewish State, the Jews living in the Land were under constant threat from their Arab neighbors. Over many years, they had suffered from pogroms, riots and attacks even when the British were in control of pre-State Israel.

In those times, the Jewish fighters were spread out among different defense forces.



## What is so special about the IDF?

**The IDF is one of the only armies in the world in which all its citizens are expected to serve. It is considered a «People’s Army».**

**This means the People’s Army protects the people.**

- Everyone is expected to enlist.
- The army also performs social and educational functions and is a major partner in the process of building the nation!

## Who can enlist into the IDF?

**Enlistment is compulsory by law for every Israeli citizen, men and women from age 18 (with exceptions, such as Israeli Arabs, whom the Defense Ministry exempts according to law. Until recently Haredi men engaged in Yeshiva studies were exempt from army service. This exemption was not extended and by law these men are now expected to serve in the IDF going forward.).**

**Today, regular service is two years and eight months for men and two and four months for women. There are also non-Jewish soldiers serving in the IDF. For example, members of Israel’s Druze community.**

**There are many different and diverse tracks in the IDF, for example, tracks adapted specially for yeshiva students.**

A variety of non-military functions also add to the IDF’s character, such as military artists, who draw bases and contribute to group pride in the various units, army singing troupes, who raise soldiers’ morale and provide entertainment, the IDF Rabbinate, including a Chief Rabbi, and more.

**Today, there are even young men and women with special needs or disabilities who can contribute their talents and be part of the People’s Army. Their service is voluntary.**



IMG FLICKR // Israel Defense Forces IDF Band Sings 2011

**The IDF is a significant part of Israeli identity, and carries great value in creating connections within the people and bridging gaps between the different Israeli sectors and cultures.**



IMG WIKIPEDIA : Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the first Chief Military Rabbi for the Israel Defense Force



IMG WIKIPEDIA : IDF Military Police

## Unique Story

## Four-Legged Soldiers

There are many different types of soldiers in the IDF (the Israeli Army).  
Some are men, some are women, and some are even... dogs!

Yes, you read that right.

The IDF owns dogs that are not pets, but fighting soldiers like their human handlers.

These special dogs serve in a military unit called Oketz (Sting).

Oketz was established in 1974 by Yossi Labock, an expert in working with animals.

Each Oketz dog has a unique ability and function.

Each dog was chosen individually and trained specifically for its particular task.

Dogs have a well-developed sense of smell and hearing, sharp teeth for attacking, and a flexible body, all of which help them in their various tasks.

Only German, Belgian or Dutch shepherd dogs are accepted into the unit,

so you might be surprised to learn that the unit's emblem is a Doberman

(another type of dog)!



The Oketz emblem

For example, these tasks include:

- **Attacking terrorists.**
- **Locating terrorists – finding terrorists in hiding.**
- **Locating explosives and mines, discovering bombs.**
- **Searching for ammunition, like firearms.**
- **Locating and identifying terrorist tunnels.**
- **Help in hostage situations.**

Dogs were involved in the army and in protecting the country even before the State of Israel was established.

The first canine unit was already launched in 1939 (nine years before the IDF was founded), and belonged to the Haganah organization, which protected Jews in the Land of Israel during the British Mandate.

Each dog has its own handler, a soldier from Oketz. The soldier receives a dog at the beginning of his military service, and it is he or she who gives the dog its name. The relationship between the dog and its handler is very close and personal.

When a dog is killed on duty, it is as if the soldiers have lost a friend.

And the IDF never forgets their dogs killed on active duty. They bury them with honors in a special cemetery for dogs with a special Memorial Day dedicated to them.

And when on a mission, it's the Oketz combat soldiers and their dogs who lead, along with the operation commander.

One reason for using dogs, apart from their useful functions, is to prevent the rest of the soldiers, from getting hurt.

At the entrance to the Oketz Unit Headquarters are the words **Leading from the Front.**

The Oketz Badge,  
Leading from the Front



In the Swords of Iron War, the soldiers and dogs of Oketz are carrying out many missions in the Gaza Envelope and in Gaza itself. There are many stories of these dogs saving soldiers from mines, terrorists and other dangers...Wow!

### Explanation of Words

#### Handlers

the soldiers who train, look after and work with the dogs.

#### Military Unit

a group of soldiers (or soldiers and dogs in this case) in the army.

#### Expert

a person who knows a lot about a subject.

#### Ability

the means or the skill to do something.

**Function :** a role or task.

**Specific :** one thing and not others.

**Locating :** finding where they are.

#### Identifying

recognizing what something is.

**Mission :** a special task.

**Well-Developed :** very good.

**Canine :** connected to dogs.

#### British Mandate

before Israel became a country with its own rule, the British were in charge.

#### Gaza Envelope

the area inside Israel near the border with Gaza.

## « See my example and do the same... « (Judges 7:17) »

In the Book of Judges, we read the story of Gideon, the fourth judge.

In the war against the Midianites, he calls his 300 soldiers to "see my example and do the same."

He doesn't expect his men to go in front of him, but he shows them – and us – what the ideal commander does – "I'll show my soldiers by personal example. I'll do what I expect them to do, and they'll follow me."

The IDF chose to immortalize Gideon's lesson of personal example, and put it on the wall of the Officers' School, where all soldiers destined to become IDF officers study and train. And indeed, the IDF commanders of today learn about these key values of personal example, and leadership, from the commanding officer and judge who led the Jewish people thousands of years ago.



**IMG** «See my example and do the same...» centrally located in the IDF Officers' School Training Base. Credit: Chaim Tzach, GPO.

Do you too lead others by personal example? Your siblings?

Share and tell us how and in what way you can be a personal example to others.

## The IDF Beyond Israel's Borders

**Although the Israeli Army is called the Israel Defense Forces, it also plays a role in missions beyond the country's borders.**



Some of those are security and secret operations for protecting Israel and its citizens, but some are also life-saving and rescue missions, giving help to other countries.

For example, one of the most well-known and heroic missions is Operation Entebbe, in 1976, in which IDF commandos freed 105 hostages, Jewish passengers who had been taken captive on a flight from Israel to France.

Despite the fact they were taken to a hostile country, Uganda, almost all of the hostages were safely released.

Another type of operation was Operation Solomon. In 1991, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) took part in a rescue mission, bringing many Ethiopian Jews to Israel.



### What else?

Over the years, the soldiers of the IDF Home Front have served as a professional body providing aid and assistance to the international Jewish community and to many countries around the world, specifically at times of natural disaster. They are usually part of a wider delegation from a number of countries, and they help save lives in foreign lands.

The members of Israel's delegation are prepared to fly anywhere in the world, wherever their help and knowledge is needed, even if it means leaving their work, families and regular lives behind. In any country they land, however far from home, their knowledge and experience are always crucial in saving lives and in the rehabilitation work after such natural destruction.



IMG [www.idf.il/en](http://www.idf.il/en)

### Some examples of overseas rescue missions:

- An explosion in the Jewish Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, summer 1994.
- Operation Lifeline – after the earthquake in Turkey, August 1999.
- Fires in Cyprus, summer 2007.
- Operation Sound of the Shofar in the Distance, Mexico, September 2015.
- Operation Iron Shield, Brazil, January 2019.

And many more...

## Match the picture to the IDF operation:

**A** Operation Entebbe releasing the hostages, 1976.

**B** Operation Solomo bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel, 1991.

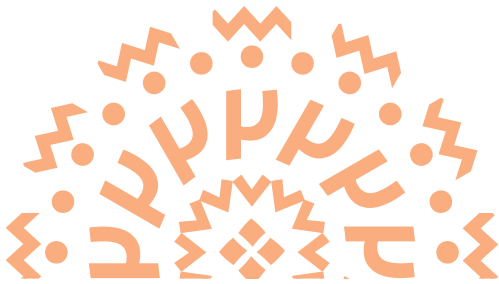
**C** Operation "Sound of the Shofar from a Distance" helping after the earthquake in Mexico, 2015.

**D** After the explosion at the Jewish Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1994.

**E** A delegation from the Home Front helping in the aftermath of the earthquake in Turkey, 1999.



answers : A-5 D-3 C-4 E-2 B-1



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**«Iron Swords» War edition**

