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## Frank Shamrock

The Art of Fighting

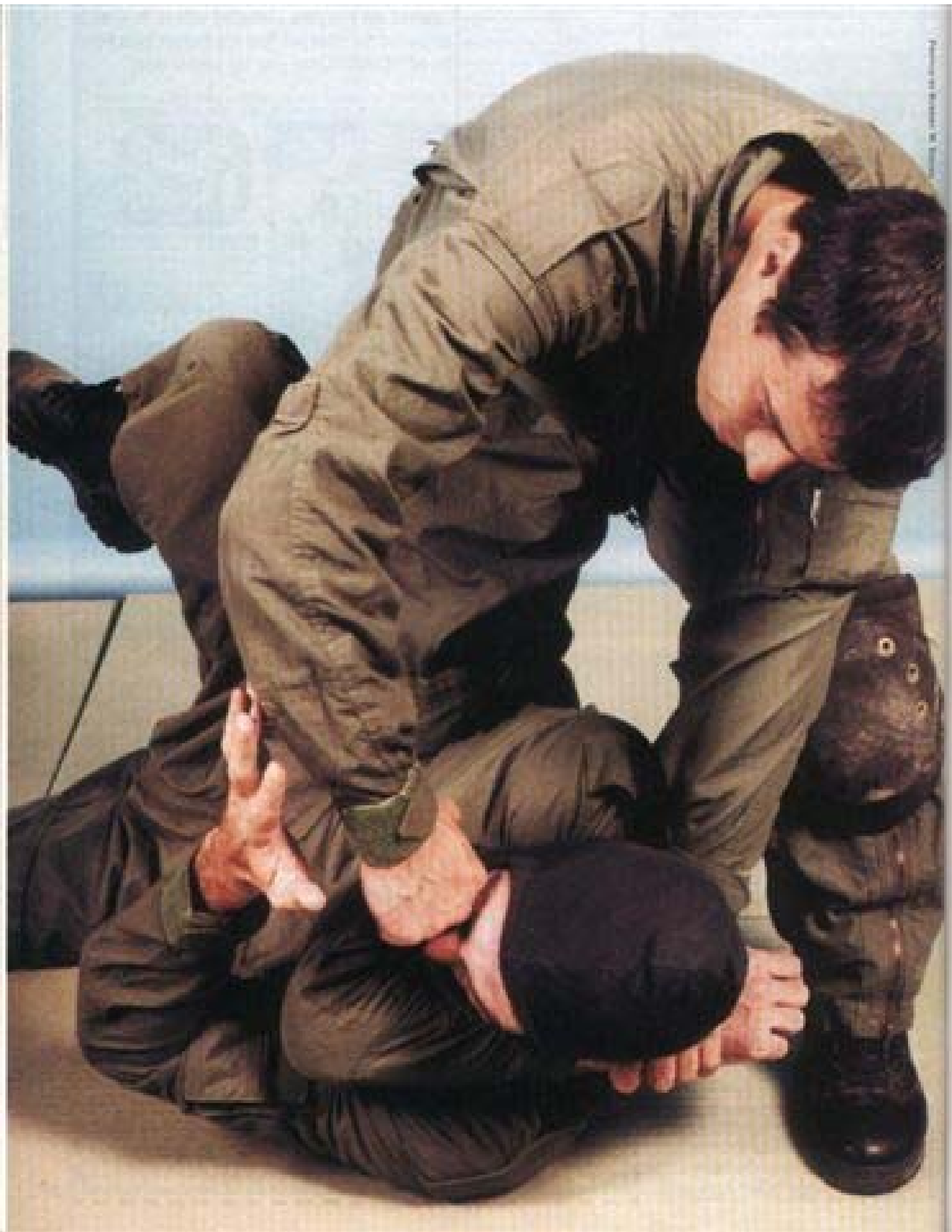
JIM  
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### SPECIAL SECTION MILITARY MARTIAL ARTS

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For the past several months, the world has been exposed to an almost nightly barrage of disturbing images from the Middle East: Israeli forces battling it out with Palestinian gunmen, suicide bombers blowing themselves up in the middle of Jewish crowds, and a host of world leaders who are powerless to stop the carnage.

Jump on a jet and fly halfway around the world to the United States, and in between news reports you will still find that Israeli warriors are in the news. Thousands of Americans are enrolling in schools that teach the Israeli martial arts of Krav Maga and Hahardot, and even pop diva Jennifer Lopez stepped into the dojo to learn Krav Maga for her feature film *Enough*.

Are the fighting arts of Israel just a passing fad, or will they revolutionize the way we train? This article will attempt to answer that question by examining the origins of the Israeli martial arts and taking an in-depth look at the systems now being taught there. Note: The techniques shown in the photos, which were taken

# inside ISRAEL

when two Israeli Special Forces soldiers recently visited the Black Belt studio, have never been seen outside their nation's military training camps.

## The History

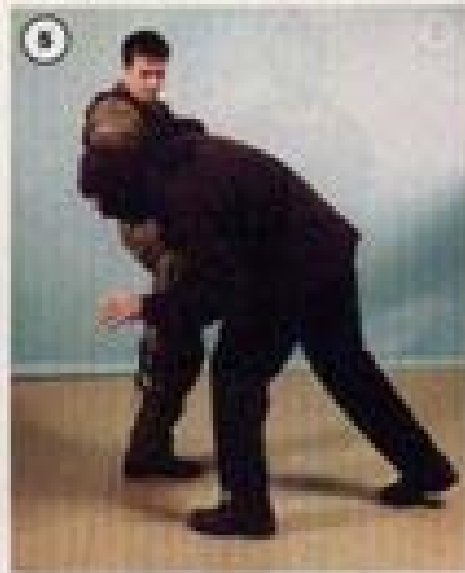
Prior to 1948, the state of Israel did not exist. The last time the world heard anything about Israel was in A.D. 70 when Roman legions under Gen. Titus brutally squashed a Jewish revolt, dispersed the majority of the Jewish population throughout the Roman Empire and renamed the nation Palestina (the Latin word for Israel's ancient enemy, Philistine). Today, that land is the Gaza strip and Tel-Aviv area.

Although Jews have lived in the Holy Land for the past 1,500 years, they have been under constant subjugation by foreign powers: the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Crusaders, again the Arabs and the Ottomans (or Turks). The Ottoman Empire (1500-1918) ruled over both the indigenous Jews and the Arabs in the region until its defeat in World War I and the implementation of the British Mandate of 1919. The same year, the Jews formed an underground army known as the Haganah (Hebrew for "defense") to deal with the ongoing conflict with Arab gangs and in anticipation of the creation of a Jewish state promised to them by the British in the Balfour Declaration. Yet despite the popularity of the Zionist movement and increased Jewish immigration, statehood was slow in the making. Instead, the colonial powers allowed the local police to form an elite unit called the Notrim (guards) to defend isolated Jewish agricultural settlements.

The  
Martial Arts  
of the  
World's  
Most  
Highly  
Trained  
Fighters

by Jim Wagner and Maj. Avi Nardia

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ish fighters and formed the first official Israeli Special Forces unit on May 14, 1941. It was known as Pal'mach, a Hebrew acronym for *Plugot Machatz*, which means "strike platoon."

The original number of personnel sanctioned for Pal'mach training under British supervision was 1,000, but the Hagannah overstepped its bounds and trained roughly 3,000 men in preparation for a future Jewish army to be used after the war.

The training that the Pal'mach commandos received was called *kapap*, an acronym for *krav panim (panim, or*

and the Balkans. When the war ended, so did Jewish-British cooperation. The Jews expected the Brits to hold up their end of the bargain with respect to a Jewish homeland. When it was apparent that the deal would not go through, the Pal'mach used guerrilla tactics against British military and police installations. There were also terrorist attacks carried out by the Jewish-run Stern Gang and Irgun, but they were strongly condemned by the Hagannah.

The newly formed United Nations knew it was only a matter of time before an all-out war between the Jews

#### Knife defense

When the defender faces an armed attacker, he keeps his hands high and turns his body slightly sideways (1). He then uses his lead hand to grab the sleeve of the attacker's weapon hand (2). Next, the defender pulls the knife hand to his shoulder and locks it in place (3). He finishes with a strike to the face (4) and a knee to the ribs (5). Close-up of the knife-immobilizing lock (6).

dence, the Israelis managed to not only survive, but also to form one of the most respected militaries in the world.

In 1949 the Pal'mach was disbanded because of political considerations, but in 1953 the IDF created an elite force

known as Unit 201. Commanded by Maj. Ariel Sharon, the current prime minister of Israel, it was tasked with infiltrating enemy lines and launching raids. Since the unit was closely modeled

***"The original concept of Krav Maga was to absorb any martial art that was useful by taking its most effective techniques and teaching them quickly and efficiently."***

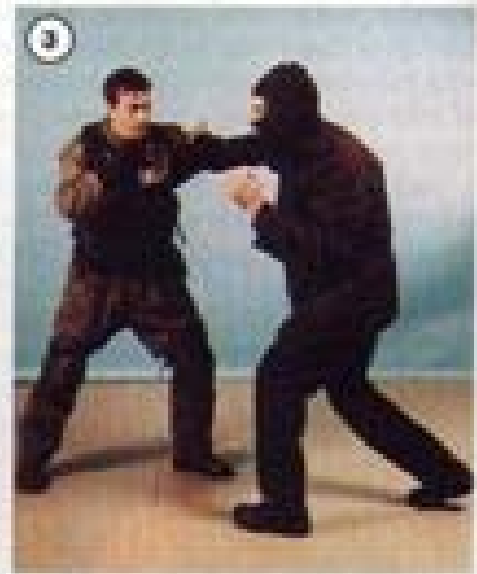
after Pal'mach, its hand-to-hand combat training continued to be referred to as *kapap*. Having achieved great success in its six months of existence, the unit's role expanded and it was merged into the 890th Paratroopers and redesignated Unit 202.

In 1957 an ultra-secret unit named *Sayveet Mat'kal* (Unit 310) was formed by intelligence officer Avraham Aran, who closely modeled it after the British SAS. In the 1970s, the unit gained worldwide fame after a series of spectacular counter-terrorist operations, the most famous of which was Operation Thunderball on July 3-4, 1976 (known

and Arabs broke out when the British vacated, as it tried to intervene by partitioning the region: a Jewish state on the west side of the Jordan River and an Arab state on the east side (today's Jordan). When the British lowered the Union Jack and left the region, the Jews declared their independence on May 14, 1948. Hours later, the forces of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Syria and the Palestinians attacked the newborn nation of Israel. The unofficial-turned-legitimate Hagannah faced its greatest challenge and was officially renamed the *Tzava Hagannah LeYisrael* (literally, "army defense to Israel" or Israeli Defense Forces). In their war of indepen-

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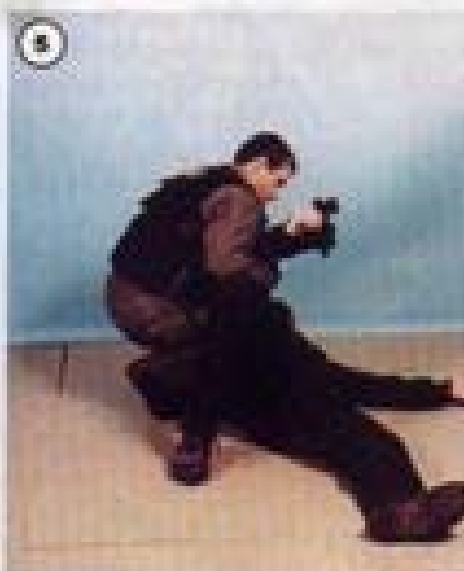
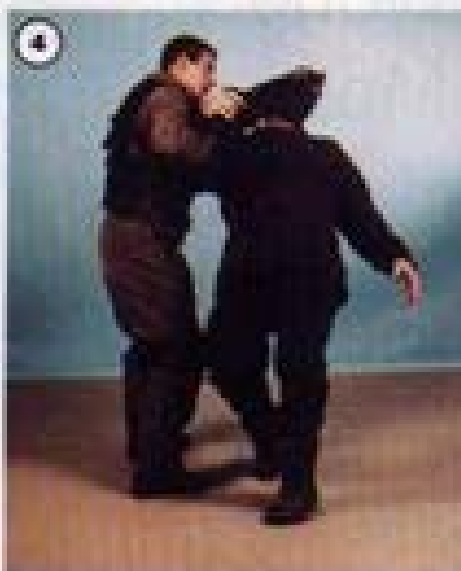
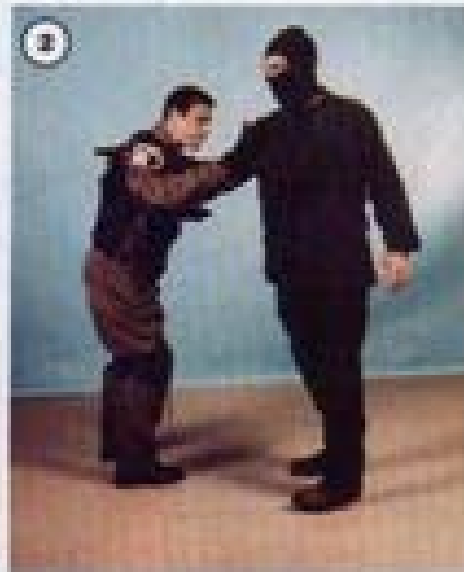
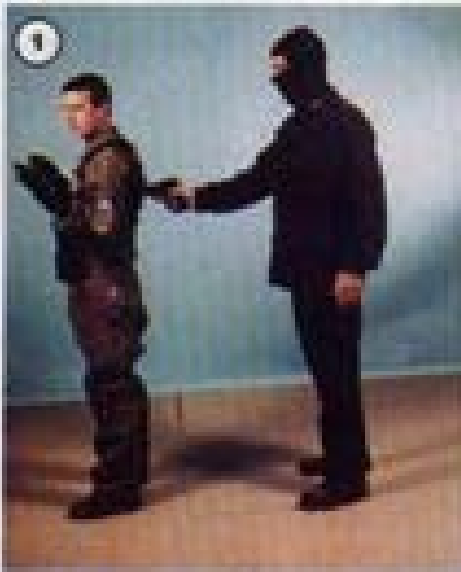
against marauding Arabs and to quell racial riots in the urban centers.

Although the Notrim was successful at protecting the small outposts, it was not as effective in handling the deadly riots or pursuing the enemy behind his own lines. A Haganah officer named

Yitahak Sadeh, who is considered the father of the Israeli Special Forces, understood the police unit's shortcomings and formed a new army unit called the Nodedot (wanderers).

When World War II brought British forces once again into global con-

lict, the need for a reliable supply of oil was deemed paramount. However, the flow was threatened by German troops advancing eastward in North Africa and by many Arab tribes openly siding with the Nazis. Reluctant at first, the British turned once again to Jew-



**Gun defense:** As soon as he feels the weapon against his back, the defender looks over his shoulder to assess the threat (1). He pivots to his left and slips the weapon hand with his left hand before locking the arm with his right hand (2). He finishes the lock and steps forward to break the attacker's balance (3). Next, the defender grabs the other man's face and forces his head backward (4). After slamming him into the ground, he strikes the gun from his hand (5).



in the United States as the Raid on Entebbe). In it, Israeli operators flew into the African nation of Uganda and rescued 103 hostages who had been hijacked by German and Palestinian terrorists.

Building upon the successes of Unit 101, Unit 202, Sayeret Mat'kal and other elite commando teams, the Israelis created many other specialized units to deal with the ongoing state of war:

basic no-nonsense system.

### Birth of Krav Maga

To prepare soldiers for combat and to instill a warrior spirit, in the 1980s the IDF created a boot-camp-style hand-to-hand program called Krav Maga (krav means "combat" or "fight," and maga means "touch" or "contact"). The Israeli Special Forces continued to refer to their own brand of fighting

strikes, Thai-style knee strikes, low kicks, grappling, knife defense, gun and rifle takedowns, and lots of physical conditioning. The original concept of Krav Maga was to absorb any martial art that was useful by taking its most effective techniques and teaching them quickly and efficiently.

### Krav Maga Offshoots

In the late 1980s, Krav Maga was also being taught to the Israeli public. Since almost everyone in that society serves in the military, most of the population had been exposed to it anyway. In fact, the name of the art became so common that it was used as loosely in Israel as the word "karate" is used in America. Variations sprang up everywhere. By the 1990s, everybody was claiming to be a Krav Maga master or a 10th degree black belt.

Some of the original instructors of Krav Maga—men like Dennis Hanover—got so fed up with people claiming that their Krav Maga was the "true version taught to elite units" that they dropped the term Krav Maga from their vocabulary altogether. Hanover ended up calling his art *hazardat* (meaning "survival") and taught Special Forces units under this new name.

Hanover, along with his sons Guy and Yaron, also instructed civilians under the same system name. One of their greatest claims to fame was having taught at the prestigious Israeli Military Counter-Terrorist School (*Lochama Be'Terror*).

## Want to Learn More?

For more information about Krav Maga, visit <http://www.kravmagainc.com>.  
 For more information about Jujutsu, visit <http://www.jujutsu.com>.  
 For more information about Japap, visit <http://www.japap.com> or <http://www.japap.net>.

the Navy's Ha'Komando, Ha'Yamit (SEALs), Mitsta'aravim (a unit disguised as Arabs), Sayeret Tzanhanim (Airborne), Sayeret Golani (Mountain Warfare Unit), Sayeret Egoz (Special Forces), YAMAM (a paramilitary-police counter-terrorist unit) and so on.

In the IDF, the Special Forces units had a monopoly on the martial arts training. Japap became known as *lochama rehira* ("micro-fighting" or "micro-combat") in the 1970s. The system included a variety of military skills, as well as hand-to-hand combat. However, with Israel being under attack by one Arab neighbor after another, regular units also needed some sort of hand-to-hand training. What they got was a

technique as *japap* or *lochama rehira* to distinguish it from Krav Maga.

Jujutsu and judo were the first Asian martial arts introduced into the IDF by *japap* instructors Mosi Arik and Imi Lichtenfeld. Then in the 1970s, the legendary Dennis Hanover, along with other Special Forces instructors such as Lt. Col. Chaim Pe'er, helped lay the foundation for today's Krav Maga. In the 1980s, a Jewish-Frenchman named André Zeitan introduced many Thai to the military, and that influenced many of the kicks used in the system today.

Krav Maga is a well-rounded hybrid system which encourages students to be aggressive and decisive in conflict. It includes hard-hitting hand and elbow



With so many people laying claim to the Krav Maga system, many veteran instructors felt a need to regulate what was, and was not, pure Krav Maga. Several organizations stepped up to the plate: the Krav Maga Association, Krav Maga Federation, Krav Maga Union, Israeli Krav Maga, International Krav Maga Federation, Krav Magen (run by the famous instructor Eli Avikzar) and so on. A few years ago, the Wingate Institute, a respected Israeli sports organization, claimed to have the exclusive rights to Krav Maga for licensing and curriculum purposes. Although it was recently defeated in court, the organization is appealing to the Israeli Supreme Court. Many in the military community are outraged at the Institute's attempt to gain control of the name.

Since the commercialization of Krav Maga and hisardut in Israel, there has been a movement away from using these terms altogether. Many elite military units still refer to their hand-to-hand combat as *kapap*, but a new acronym has also made its way to the counter-terrorism community: *lotar* (derived from the counter-terrorism school *Locharna Be'Terror*). All *kapap*/*lotar* instructors are Krav Maga instructors in the military, but not all Krav Maga instructors are *kapap*/*lotar* instructors. Many teachers now call themselves *madrich le'china* (meaning "combat instructor"). Even the Israeli police are switching; they now call their defensive tactics *haganah atmit*.

In addition to the fighting skills of



**Terrorist defense:** The defender approaches the terrorist from the rear (1). He makes contact at an angle and pins both elbows against his body to prevent him from accessing a concealed weapon (2). Next, the defender pulls with his arms and pushes with his chest (3) to set up a takedown (4). Once the terrorist falls, the defender rolls him onto his stomach (5) and restrains him until he can be handcuffed (6).

Krav Maga, *kapap*/*lotar* includes terrorist-takedown techniques, assassination techniques, pressure-point methods and a new component called "boil-pressure training," which refers to physical and psychological pressure training designed to help students deal with combat stress. One of its exercises has a student being circled by 10 to 20

fellow students who slowly close in on him. The center student must overcome any claustrophobic feelings and keep fighting until he can no longer move.

## Israeli Arts in the USA

So are the martial arts that are taught in the United States genuine Israeli military-based systems or not? It depends on who is teaching.

The organizations that we can touch for are Krav Maga, headed by Durren Levine, and Dennis Hisardut, run by Alon Stivi. Both are based in Southern California.

Levine is credited with having raised Krav Maga to the level of popularity it now enjoys in America. He is an outstanding instructor. If you ever have the chance to train with him, you will be motivated by his energy and straightforward approach to street survival. The techniques he teaches are practical, hard-hitting and reality-based.

Dennis Hisardut's Alon Stivi is a man who teaches his craft based on hard-earned experience. A former Israeli paratrooper and master sergeant, he fought in the Israel-Lebanon War (1982) and has had some hair-raising missions. He is also an expert on corporate security and terrorism awareness, and is often featured in magazines and on TV. Stivi is a superb athlete, and anyone who trains under him cannot help but get in shape because he always adds a healthy dose of Israeli military calisthenics and drills to his fighting techniques.

Dennis Hisardut of America, sanctioned by Dennis Hanover himself, is much smaller in scope than Krav Maga is, but the quality of instruction is just as good.

The only organization authorized by the Israeli government to teach *kapap* in the United States is HSS International. To enroll in a course, you must be in law enforcement, corrections, probation or the military. **PK**

*About the authors: Jim Wagner is a law-enforcement officer and defensive-tactics expert who has served as a guest instructor of the Israeli government. He has trained in Krav Maga, hisardut and kapap. Ari Nardis is a major in the IDF Reserve. He is a defensive-tactics instructor for kapap, lotar and Krav Maga.*