



# SHAPING THE FIGHT IN ISRAEL

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*ABOVE: The Tactical Sniper Bench being employed by an elite IDF sniper.*

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Counter Terror (CT) Warfare School was founded in 1985 as an integral part of the newly formed Mitkan Adam—the IDF Special Training Facility located in Modi'in, Israel.

The Israeli Special Forces have always placed a considerable training focus on counterterrorism. In this respect, the establishment of a Counter Terrorism School was the climax of a massive reorganization process that took place in the Israeli Special Forces community. The Israeli Counter Terrorism reorganization began as result of the Ma'alot High School incident in 1974, where more than 20 civilian hostages were killed in a failed rescue attempt carried out by Sayeret Matkal.

Following the Ma'alot High School incident, the Israeli Special Forces leadership began an intense counterterrorism training progression to combat future threats that could bring harm to Israeli citizens. The formation of the school ensured that all units would receive the same unified training, which in turn would allow them to cooperate in a large-scale crisis that required the involvement of more than one unit. Moreover, the existence of the school prevented operational lessons from being kept within the units. Instead, such lessons would be shared to all units via the school staff.

Fast-forward to today and the Counter-Terrorism Branch continuously monitors tactics used by lone-wolf terrorists, as well as incidents along the Israeli border and abroad. The Special Forces that are trained by the Counter Terrorism Branch range from commando units to covert elite units. They also include reconnaissance units that are part of IDF Infantry brigades. After completing their lengthy, grueling training, the units go on standby, ready to move into action in several areas if called upon.



An IDF sniper team in position. The ease of use of the TSB and S.P.O.T. allows the sniper team to set up on a target and engage quickly.

### **IDF Sniper Department**

The sniper department of the IDF serves as the leading professional body in the sniping community. The department benefits from continuous knowledge and operational experience from both the department and combat units from the field. The sniper department also networks with various allied nations to advance their training. The department certifies over 600 infantry snipers annually, maintains their professional abilities and leads and guides them throughout their operational service.

The IDF Sniper Branch conducts three sniper courses: the Basic Sniper Course, the Sniper Commanders Course and the Counter Terrorism Sniper course. All sniper training is conducted at Camp Adam and recertification training is conducted at regular intervals throughout the year. The Commander of the Sniper Branch is responsible for all snipers throughout the IDF and therefore conducts regular evaluations of the snipers in the field. In addition, all sniper instructors are active snipers themselves and work at Camp Adam, and they conduct combat operations if called upon. These practices allow for immediate feedback of lessons learned and take the burden off the Combatant Commanders in relation to sustainment training of their snipers.





The S.P.O.T. is a tactical spotter device aimed at simplifying the technical work at the designated position. Here you can see the spotter using a Leupold spotting scope and Vector in tandem.

### **IDF Sniper Course**

For the IDF Infantry Sniper Course, most of the instructors are female soldiers. Females are drafted to be Infantry Instructors and complete a two-month training course which prepares them for service in an Infantry Unit. At the end of the course, based on performance and test results, females are embedded into various departments, one being the Sniper Department. From there, the females will complete a two-and-a-half-month-long course, in which they will become certified Infantry snipers and train to be Infantry Sniper Instructors. In addition to the female instructors, there are male combat soldiers who are also Infantry Sniper Instructors. For the male soldiers, these are soldiers who left their combat path for one reason or another and chose to become instructors in the Sniper Department. The instructors who are certified combat soldiers also participate in the department's operational activity, which has been especially active in the past few months on the Gaza border.

As for the instructors' daily routine, the courses are conducted year-round. Before a course begins, the team of instructors typically has one week to prepare. During this preparation week, the instructors will review course material, prepare lesson plans and evaluation tests and finalize the course schedule.

A sniper course consists of 12–21 soldiers, and the instructing team is typically made up of 2–6 instructors. Throughout the course, the instructors are with the soldiers at the shooting range from around 8 a.m. to 9:30–10 p.m. The instructors must teach all the material both theoretically and then practically. Some theoretical lessons are taught at the shooting range and in a classroom. The course also includes 4–6 mock operations, often involving the soldiers from the other two sniper courses, which allows representation of an enemy and a more realistic exercise for the snipers.

Once a sniper course is completed, the instructors either begin preparing for the next course or join existing sniper teams that have arrived at Adam Camp to train them and help them to maintain their professional readiness.

### **Counter Terror Sniper Course**

The Counter Terror Sniper Course is three weeks long and must be successfully passed by all snipers who wish to serve in IDF CT units. The course is an advanced sniping course, and its students are all graduates of the IDF Snipers School's Basic Sniper Course, which is seven weeks long. The Counter Terror Sniper Course covers:

- Urban camouflage techniques
- Surgical acquiring and elimination of targets
- Real-time intelligence gathering, which will assist the entry elements to plan and later conduct their rescue raid.

The CT role of IDF units usually falls within the responsibility of the IDF Special Forces. In a CT formation, the sniper is part of an intervention team. This team comprises one commander, two to three marksmen, two breachers, one machine gunner, one dog handler, one medic, one sergeant, three riflemen and two snipers. The goal of the intervention team is to respond to a terror attack or high-profile situation and then isolate the area. The CT sniper is trained to take highly accurate incapacitation shots in order to free hostages or eliminate embedded hostiles. They carry an additional mission of protecting the borders in areas such as the West Bank. To accomplish that mission, they employ the Ruger 10/22, which is a .22 caliber rifle. This accurized "less lethal" weapon is designed for taking knee cap and below shots. The West Bank is a place of high contention, and taking lethal shots is less than desirable.



The Barrett MRAD is the IDF's new sniper weapon system. Here it is being employed on a TSB. The stability of the TSB allows the IDF sniper to engage targets with relative ease in any position.

### **Critical Equipment Used by IDF Snipers**

To gain a first-hand account of the equipment being used by IDF Infantry, Reconnaissance and Counter Terrorism snipers, I reached out to Vova, who operates Zikitec Ltd., an Israel-based company comprising IDF Special Forces veterans. With their rich operational experience, they understand the needs of operators. Their products are derived from years of training and combat operations.

**Author:** *When was Zikitec Ltd. formed and what drove you to create your own company and design gear that was specific to sniper applications?*

**Vova:** Zikitec Ltd. was founded in 2012, when I was discharged from my Army service.

The main motive was to produce equipment that will be suitable for challenges I faced and didn't have a proper solution for when I was serving. Most of my activity in the Army involved sniping and military operations in areas like Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank. We were very busy, using equipment from different suppliers, both military equipment and equipment we got from the private sector, which asked us to field-test it. Some of this equipment was better than the military offerings and some wasn't as good, but we always tested it and learned what worked, what didn't work and why.

**Vova:** The conclusions were quite simple: Every piece of equipment has its purpose—if you try to use something for alternative purposes it will not work as well, and you would have to make compromises. If you need to walk 500 meters to an ambush point, you can carry the best and most comfortable equipment, even if it is big and heavy. But if your mission is going to be a long operation that includes long walks every night, then the equipment requirement will be different, and it must be small and lightweight. There is no such thing as equipment that suits every purpose. Each piece of equipment will help you to be the best at different situations.

The principles are always the same: efficiency, weight, capacity, simplicity of use and maintenance. However, as simple as it sounds, it may take years to develop a product. You can design a basic product in a few months, then take it to the field, learn new things, make adjustments, take it to the field again and learn more things. It is a fascinating process. A great example is the TSB (Tactical Sniper Bench). There were eight versions of the TSB by the time it was ready. You always aspire to make it better. Each final product is an outcome of many insights of highly experienced field operatives who provide us with the feedback that we need to make them the best product available. Such is the case with the Tactical Sniper Bench and Tactical Spotter Device.

## **Tactical Sniper Bench**

The TSB is a combat-proven, comfortable and portable shooting bench that enables shooting in sitting and standing positions. The TSB facilitates a long stay, with support for the elbows, convenient arrangement of equipment and the use of rear bags and bipods for support and maximum stability, so that single shot will hit the mark. The TSB is manufactured in Israel by FAB-Defense.

Weight including tripod (Carbon / Aluminum): 5.1 / 6.4kg

Bench folded size: 7x 45x 28cm

Bench open size: 3.5 x 80 x 28cm

Assembly time: 1-2 minutes

Height (Min – Max): 50 – 180cm

## Tactical Spotter Device

The S.P.O.T. is a tactical spotter device aimed at simplifying the technical work at the designated position. By allowing the coupling and calibration of the various devices used by the spotter, it reduces the target acquisition time, and simplifies the overall operation of the sniper team.

The product is suited for any spotter scope that have 1/4-inch screw in his base, mounting a laser RF, laser pointer, night vision devices, thermal devices etc. In addition, a ballistic calculator, camouflage, and additional devices have a designated compartment.

Weight: 0.5kg

Size: 23 X 10 x 28cm

Height: 50 – 180cm (affixed to tripod)

Assembly time: 1-2 minutes

**Author:** *From your experiences as a Special Forces IDF Sniper, what is the greatest challenge that current IDF snipers face today on the battlefield?*

**Vova:** Lately, IDF snipers have faced a new complex challenge that, as far as I know, we never had to deal with before. Everything is documented today, as everyone has some type of access to social media. Enemy combatants have been creating propaganda media to support their interests. In various incidents, they have taken footage and manipulated it to serve their purpose. This creates a situation in which the sniper must hit their target and must also be able to have the means to document their engagement to prove that it was justified. Our enemy uses morality in a cynical way, as they will send children to perform terrorism acts or dress up as women and try to hide weapons under their clothes. As a worst-case scenario, they will use civilians as human shields.

Our snipers need to hit the enemy with accurate shots as well as be able to document the incident, so they can later prove that they acted in the most ethical way. We equip our snipers with military sight cameras that we developed for these kinds of incidents. There have been incidents in which the enemy published propaganda videos, but we had the actual unedited documentation footage. Having this capability provided the military legal authorities with the necessary evidence to prove that the sniper acted in an ethical way.

The training and tools being employed by Israel's elite will help the IDF soldier maintain the tactical advantage against those who wish to cause harm to the citizens of Israel. Vova and his team at Zikitec Ltd. will continue to push the boundaries in advancing the IDF's greatest, all-weather, day and night firing platform: the sniper.