

'42 Knees in One Day': Israeli Snipers Open Up About Shooting Gaza Protesters

Over 200 Palestinians were killed and nearly 8,000 were injured during almost two years of weekly protests at the Israel-Gaza border. Israeli army snipers tell their stories

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Israeli snipers on the Gaza border. Credit: Eliyahu Hershkovitz



Hilo Glazer
Mar 6, 2020

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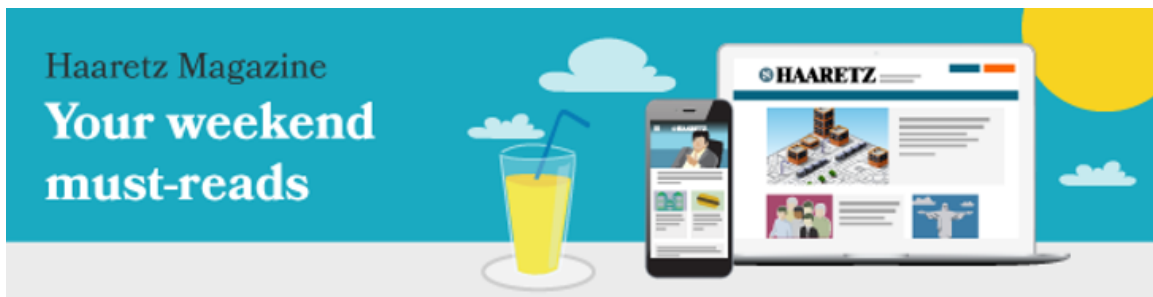
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I know exactly how many knees I've hit, says Eden, who completed his service in the Israel Defense Forces as a sniper in its Golani infantry brigade six months ago. For much of the time, he was stationed along the border with the Gaza Strip. His assignment: to repel Palestinian demonstrators who approached the fence.

“I kept the casing of every round I fired,” he says. “I have them in my room. So I don't have to make an estimate – I know: 52 definite hits.”



But there are also “non-definite” hits, right?



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[REDACTED]

Of the dozens of snipers that we approached, six (all of them discharged from the IDF) agreed to be interviewed and to describe what reality looks like through their gun sights. Five are from infantry brigades – two each from Golani and Givati, one from Kfir – plus one from the Duvdevan counter-terrorism unit. The names of all of them have been changed. [REDACTED]

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Eden says he broke the “knee record” in the demonstration that took place on the day the new U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem was inaugurated, on May 14, 2018. He did it jointly: Snipers usually work in pairs – together with a locator, who is also a sniper by training, and whose task is to give his partner precise data (distance from the target, wind direction, etc.).

Eden: “On that day, our pair had the largest number of hits, 42 in all. My locator wasn’t supposed to shoot, but I gave him a break, because we were getting close to the end of our stint, and he didn’t have knees. In the end you want to leave with the feeling that you did something, that you weren’t a sniper during exercises only. So, after I had a few hits, I suggested to him that we switch. He got around 28 knees there, I’d say.”

[REDACTED]

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Snipers burdened with experiences like that are the minority. For his part, Amir says the kind of feelings most snipers have are completely different, reminiscent of the world of sports. “The arena of the disturbances is like a sports arena, a situation you can sell tickets for,” he says. “Group versus group, with a line down the middle and an audience of fans on both sides. You can totally tell a story of a sports encounter here.”

On the front line, he continues, “are the inciters: They mark the starting line from which people burst out in sprints, alone or in groups. Everything is coordinated and planned in advance. There are these pits in the terrain [for hiding], and this lets them play with us. They can run 100 meters without my being able to take off their foot. They are also skilled at zigzagging. Two of them pop up, they hide, one throws a stone so the other one can move forward. They use diversionary tactics on you. It’s a kind of game, you know.”

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