

History and Concepts of Krav Maga

In the 1930's, Imi Lichtenfeld (1910-1998) was a leading athlete in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. His father Samuel was a Detective with the police department, and specialized in capturing the most dangerous criminals. He was also skilled in martial arts, and owned the local gym, *Hercules*, where Imi and his friends worked out. Imi was an accomplished boxer, wrestler, martial artist, and gymnast. He was forced to help defend the residents of the Jewish community from the fascist gangs that would increasingly attack in the era when the nazis were coming to power. It was during this time that he began developing his own techniques, which he found were more effective in the street than the rules-dominated, "sports" oriented systems he was familiar with. Because of his renowned fighting ability, he was targeted by the local police, and forced to flee with a group of other young Jewish men and women on a ship. He is the only member of his entire family to survive the Holocaust. He eventually found his way to pre-state Israel, where he joined the Haganah, the underground Jewish army. He is one of the main characters in a book written about the ship's voyage: Odyssey, by John Bierman (1984, Simon and Schuster). Prohibited from having weapons, the underground Jewish leadership found his skill at instruction in streetfighting invaluable. After the 1948 War of Independence, he was absorbed into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), where he remained for a long career as Chief Instructor of Physical Fitness and Hand-to-Hand Combat (Krav Maga). Today, because of the history of conflict in the region, all citizens (male and female) are required to serve in the military. Israel has needed a simple, instinctive-based self-defense and fighting system, quickly and easily learned. Krav Maga fits this description perfectly. It became the official system of self-defense for the IDF, and eventually spread to all security/police units in Israel. After retiring in the 1960's, Imi adapted Krav Maga for civilians, as well as other groups. It is now taught around the world to the general public, military, and law enforcement units.

There is only one rule in Krav Maga: Don't Get Hurt!