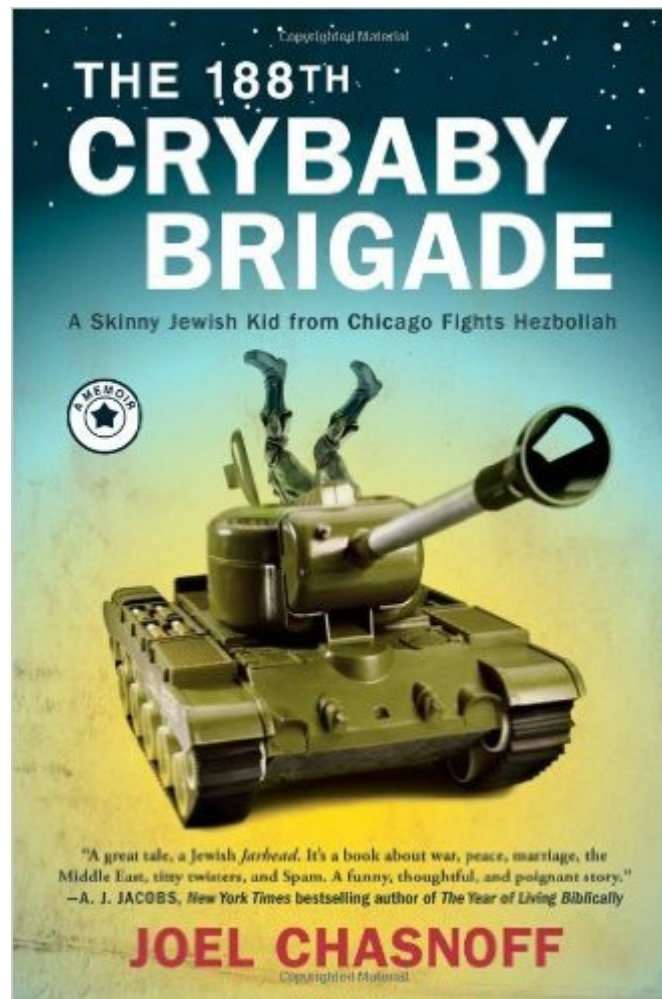


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The 188th Crybaby Brigade: A Skinny Jewish Kid From Chicago Fights Hezbollah--A Memoir



Synopsis

Look at me. Do you see me? Do you see me in my olive-green uniform, beret, and shiny black boots? Do you see the assault rifle slung across my chest? Finally! I am the badass Israeli soldier at the side of the road, in sunglasses, forearms like bricks. And honestly -- have you ever seen anything quite like me? Joel Chasnoff is twenty-four years old, an American, and the graduate of an Ivy League university. But when his career as a stand-up comic fails to get off the ground, Chasnoff decides it's time for a serious change of pace. Leaving behind his amenity-laden Brooklyn apartment for a plane ticket to Israel, Joel trades in the comforts of being a stereotypical American Jewish male for an Uzi, dog tags (with his name misspelled), and serious mental and physical abuse at the hands of the Israeli Army. The 188th Crybaby Brigade is a hilarious and poignant account of Chasnoff's year in the Israel Defense Forces -- a year that he volunteered for, and that he'll never get back. As a member of the 188th Armored Brigade, a unit trained on the Merkava tanks that make up the backbone of Israeli ground forces, Chasnoff finds himself caught in a twilight zone-like world of mandatory snack breaks, battalion sing-alongs, and eighteen-year-old Israeli mama's boys who feign injuries to get out of guard duty and claim diarrhea to avoid kitchen work. More time is spent arguing over how to roll a sleeve cuff than studying the mechanics of the Merkava tanks. The platoon sergeants are barely older than the soldiers and are younger than Chasnoff himself. By the time he's sent to Lebanon for a tour of duty against Hezbollah, Chasnoff knows everything about why snot dries out in the desert, yet has never been trained in firing the MAG. And all this while his relationship with his tough-as-nails Israeli girlfriend (herself a former drill sergeant) crumbles before his very eyes. The lone American in a platoon of eighteen-year-old Israelis, Chasnoff takes readers into the barracks; over, under, and through political fences; and face-to-face with the absurd reality of life in the Israeli Army. It is a brash and gritty depiction of combat, rife with ego clashes, breakdowns in morale, training mishaps that almost cost lives, and the barely containable sexual urges of a group of teenagers. What's more, it's an on-the-ground account of life in one of the most embattled armies on earth -- an occupying force in a hostile land, surrounded by enemy governments and terrorists, reviled by much of the world. With equal parts irreverence and vulnerability, irony and intimacy, Chasnoff narrates a new kind of coming-of-age story -- one that teaches us, moves us, and makes us laugh.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a pretty good book, not as great as some reviewers make out, and only one of many by foreigners who served in the IDF. Indeed, it seems like every other American who did this has written a memoir. This book differs from most in that it paints a fairly grim picture of the modern IDF as is clear from the title. If you are really, really interested in the IDF then it is a must read. For more general readers, the book really is mediocre. The best parts deal with the modern reality of the IDF. The most telling point is when the author, paraphrasing Groucho Marx posits that he wouldn't want to be in any army in which he is the best soldier. Chasnoff is not by any normal measure a particularly good soldier. He joins the IDF like many American (and other foreign Jews) out of a desire to live out a childhood fantasy of defending the Jewish homeland. He does this as a full grown man--24 when he joins the IDF, so he is not some babe in arms. He, again like many others, wants to join the legendary IDF paratroop brigade, but clearly lacks the physical and psychological qualifications to do so. He doesn't even qualify for a lesser combat unit, but by his account lies, and gets into the 188th Armored Brigade. For those with a good knowledge of Israeli military history, which Chasnoff clearly does not have, the 188th was a storied unit that in 1973 fought almost to the last man to defend the Golan Heights. It appears not to be anything like that now, according to Chasnoff and this is where the book shines.

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