

‘Pray that the Lord will watch over us’ – Messianic Soldier Talks About Fighting in Gaza

Messianic Jews serving in the Israel Defense Forces is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, they’ve been around ever since Israel’s War of Independence in 1948.

Currently, there are hundreds of Messianic Jews serving in many positions throughout the IDF, both in regular and reservist service. When Netivah Youth Ministries arranged a conference for soldiers back in January 2024, over 350 people attended – and those were only the ones who were available that weekend.

M. is a believer who immigrated to Israel alone from Canada and served in the Kfir Brigade from 2010 to 2013. After completing his active service, he was added to the 551st Reserve Brigade, where he served in Battalion 697. He was among the first set of troops to enter Gaza after the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attack, and he served for 88 days straight.

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“On Oct. 7th, I was at home in Herzliya, watching a movie with friends,” he told ALL ISRAEL NEWS during a recent interview. The group became aware of the surprise invasion of Hamas terrorists by air, land and sea.

“When we saw what happened, we grabbed our equipment and went to our base as soon as we could. First, they kept us in training, and then we entered Gaza. We entered at Beit Hanoun, then Beit Lahia, Jabaliya and Gaza City itself,” he explained.

At each stage, M.'s brigade encountered a variety of unfamiliar situations and faced many new challenges, hardships and deaths.

"My brigade suffered a number of losses and injuries, but we did a good job, and we're very proud over what we accomplished," he told ALL ISRAEL NEWS.

While M. is not at liberty to share what he personally was involved in, the IDF website published an update in December 2023 that the soldiers of the 551st Brigade had "located and destroyed operational tunnel shafts of the Hamas terrorist organization."

According to the IDF report: "One tunnel shaft, located in the courtyard of a school complex had a depth of dozens of meters. Another operational tunnel shaft was located in the home of an operative from Hamas' naval force," and they also "worked to neutralize the underground infrastructure and they secured and isolated the areas to the north of Jabalya."

A soldier named Aviv from the same battalion (697) kept a diary while serving in the field. He was interviewed in January 2024 in "Israel Hayom" (or Israel Today). The article describes the activity of IDF Battalion 697 in more detail.

An excerpt from the article read: "They were among the first to enter the strip. For many weeks, they fought in Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia, al-Atatra, and the neighborhood Sheikh Radwan in Gaza City. They killed Hamas terrorists, took prisoners, destroyed tunnel shafts and rocket launchers and destroyed terror infrastructure. They also played chess and cards, read books, listened to radio, played music, prayed, sang Shabbat songs, lit Hanukka candles, cooked and ate. Sometimes they were hungry, often they thought about what they were even doing there, and all the time they longed to go home to their parents, wives, children, girlfriends, and even their exes."

After 88 days, M. was released home for a few months. And then, he was called up to serve again.

He spoke to ALL ISRAEL NEWS from an undisclosed location, over an unstable phone line. While he is now allowed to share his experience during the first 88 days of service, he is not at liberty to speak about his current whereabouts or activities.

“No one in my direct vicinity was hurt or killed,” M. said, speaking about his first months of service. “An RPG exploded right above a friend of mine. We’ve been shot at many times, and I’m still wondering how I came through it all unscathed. It feels like a miracle.”

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M. also confessed he had expected to be traumatized by what happened – but somehow he evaded this, too.

“I went in with an open mentality for anything I might see. I saw dead bodies, and things that might be catastrophic for others to see, but I had a mentality that was just ready to accept it and keep going. I had expected to be traumatized, but I wasn’t. I knew I needed to be at peace, accomplish our mission, and help my comrades. It’s not me alone, it’s the team, the comrades. We’re doing this together.”

In the news, we see more and more question marks being raised about the war in Gaza, even among the Israeli public. As the war carries on, month after month, and the international pressure amounts, many wonder whether the war effort is worth it, or if Israel needs to put a halt on its operations in order to bring the hostages safely home and to save face internationally.

When asked whether any of these emotions affect the situation on the ground, M. was adamant that the IDF is there to fulfill

a mission, and that is what they're doing.

"When in the field, we're soldiers and only soldiers," he said. "Give us a mission, and we'll accomplish it. Our missions are not always dictated from above either, they are sometimes improvised based on the situation on the ground. You have to understand, the soldier is in a different headspace. He has lost his sense of time. There are no cell phones, no distractions. He's just there."

Regarding his encounters with civilians in Gaza, his response was straightforward.

"When the ceasefire started [during the days when Israeli hostages were released from Nov 24-30, 2023] we were pretty stressed because we didn't want to kill people. We were told not to shoot at children or women, which is, of course, obvious, but you know, they are walking around in the area and you need to be alert, see what they are carrying, and what's going on," M. explained.

"It happened several times that we entered a building where you usually shoot at anything, and there's a family there, and of course, we evacuate them and make sure they're safe. I was very happy and proud that we're following the IDF code of ethics," M. added.

"You can really trust that we're an army that does things in a worthy manner. You hear a lot about what we shoot at, but you hear less about the many times we didn't pull the trigger."

When asked how ALL ISRAEL NEWS readers can pray for him, M. responded: "Pray for our security, our alertness, the logistics. Pray we'll have the inner strength to keep going. It's not easy here, it's a strange atmosphere. Pray we'll have joy among ourselves, and that the Lord will watch over us. Which He already is."

Please keep M. and all the brave Israeli soldiers serving in

Gaza in your prayers.

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Tuvia Pollack is a Jewish history nerd who lives in Jerusalem and believes in Jesus. He writes articles and stories about Jewish and Christian history. His website is .

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