

The IDF Sword Battalion

by Norman Berdichevsky (July 2015)



Bedouin IDF soldiers in 1949

Two non-Jewish minority communities in Israel, the Druze (a deviant Shi'a Muslim group) and Circassians (Sunni Muslims whose ancestors were exiled to Palestine from the Caucasus), are subject to mandatory conscription to the IDF. Additionally, members of several Bedouin tribes volunteer as well as individual Muslim and Christian Arabs. The decision of the first two groups to accept obligatory service in the Israeli military forces was made at their own request. As early as the summer of 1948, after years of intense pressure by the Palestinian Higher Arab committee to join in the fight to prevent a Jewish state, units of the three groups defected and switched sides to fight with the Jews.

The designated unit for them was attached to the Oded Brigade and fought in Operation Hiram in October 1948. Since then, it has fought with distinction in every war. Today, the unit is also the natural choice for a growing number of Christian and Muslim Arab volunteers.

Originally, a special minority unit, known since 1987 as The IDF Sword Battalion (Hebrew: ????, Gdud Herev, Arabic: ????? ?????), was formerly called Unit 300 or The IDF Minorities Unit. Since the 1980s however, Druze, Circassian and individual Arab and Bedouin soldiers at their own request have joined regular combat units, attaining high ranks and commendations for distinguished service.

Those who are familiar with other historical conflicts should know better than to accept simplistic versions of the past that are corroborated only by hindsight. Most historians today agree that roughly one third of the American population favored independence, another third was steadfastly loyal to the crown and in between were those hoping to maintain neutrality and avoid any decision until the outcome was determined. In Palestine during the period of the Mandate, Arab support and aid to the Jews was always carefully hidden but not insubstantial.

Before examining the distinguished record of non-Jewish volunteers in Israel's military annals who have added another chapter to that of the Christian volunteers in MAHAL (see [Berdichevsky, NER, September, 2012.](#))

2. *Army of Shadows; Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* by Hillel Cohen ([The](#)

[Left is Seldom Right](#) and [here](#).

To help New English Review continue to publish interesting and informative articles such as this one, please click [here](#).

If you enjoyed this article and want to read more by Norman Berdichevsky, click [here](#).

Norman Berdichevsky contributes regularly to The Iconoclast, our Community Blog. Click [here](#) to see all his contributions on which comments are welcome.