

Founder of Krav Maga

The information and pictures below are from the Headquarters of the International Krav Maga Federation - the source of Krav Maga. You may also like to research places such as Wikipedia for information on Imi Sde-Or (Lichtenfeld).

1910 - 1998 "So that one may walk in peace" Early Days

Imrich ("Imi") Lichtenfeld (Sde-Or: Hebrew for "Light Field") was born in 1910 in Budapest. He grew up in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. He was brought up in a home where sports, law, and Central European education were equally respected.

Samuel Lichtenfeld, Imi's father, was undoubtedly an interesting figure. At age 13, Samuel joined a travelling circus, and for the next 20 years performed in wrestling, weightlifting, and various demonstrations of strength.

With his father's encouragement, Imi became active in a wide range of sports. He first excelled in swimming, and subsequently in gymnastics, wrestling, and boxing. Imi won the Slovakian Youth Wrestling Championship in 1928. The following year (1929) he won the adult championship in both the light and middle weight divisions. Also that year he won both national boxing and international gymnastics championships! He continued focusing on his athletic abilities for the next decade focusing mainly on wrestling as both a competitor and trainer.

World War II

In Bratislava in the mid 1930's, fascist and anti-Semitic groups began to rise, determined to upset public order and harm the city's Jewish community. In response, young Jews began banding together with Imi becoming their unofficial leader. Most of Imi's group had backgrounds in weightlifting, boxing, and wrestling, and were determined to prevent the fascist mobs from entering the Jewish quarter and causing any destruction. Imi continued in his underground movements against the anti-Semitic inclined authorities until leaving Slovakia.

In 1940, Imi left everything behind and boarded the immigrant ship 'Pentcho' heading for Israel (then called Palestine). Imi's ship was the last immigrant ship to successfully escape the advancing Nazi's charge through central Europe.

The Birth and Development of Krav Maga

Now in his new home, in 1944 Imi began to train fighters. His areas of expertise were physical fitness, swimming, wrestling, use of the knife, and defending against knife attacks. Many of these skills were initially honed in real life encounters while he was a resistance fighter in Slovakia. During this period in the mid 1940's, Imi trained several elite units of the Hagana and Palmach (precursors to the special units of the Israeli Defence Force - IDF), as well as groups of police officers.

In 1948, when the State of Israel was established and the IDF was formed, Imi became Chief Instructor for Physical Fitness and Krav Maga at the IDF School of Combat Fitness. He continued to serve in the IDF until 1968, when he retired from active duty. During his 20-years of active service he developed and refined his unique method for self-defence and hand-to-hand combat.

Spreading Krav Maga

After leaving active duty, Imi decided to adapt and modify Krav Maga to meet civilian needs. He began to develop Krav Maga to suit everyone regardless of gender, size, strength, and fitness. Imi wanted people to be able to use his system to save their life or survive an attack, all the while reducing their own chance of injury. Krav Maga had to work, regardless of the motive for the attack.

To achieve this goal and to help spread his training methods, Imi opened two training centres, one in Tel Aviv and one in Netanya.

In 1981 Imi (now over 70-years old) travelled to the USA with a group of his highest ranked instructors for a series of demonstrations. As a result of this trip, the first group of instructors from the USA were trained in Israel later that year. Mr Eyal Yanilov (Imi's closest friend and student) instructed this course and was assisted by Mr Reuven Maimon.

Final Years

Even during his final years, Imi continued to personally supervise the ongoing training of his highest ranked Krav-Maga students and instructors. He spent a lot of time with instructors in Israel and abroad, continually developing his system. Imi continued to monitor his trainees' progress and achievements, all the while captivating them with his personality and imparting upon them his knowledge and unique character.

Imi Sde-Or, a teacher, a fighter and a great human being, passed away early in the morning on the 9th of January 1998. He died merely 5 hours after arriving at the hospital. Eyal Yanilov, his closest student, confidante, and friend, was with him at his bed-side.

"So that one may walk in peace"

Imi Sde-Or (Lichtenfeld) 1910 - 1998: Founder of Krav Maga