

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **BULLETS TO BANDAGES**

Mark Terris

XlibrisUS (442 pp.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

A debut memoir that chronicles three grueling years in the Israel Defense Forces.

When Terris was 11 years old, he and his mother moved from New York City to Israel. In 1977, during his senior year of high school, he was confronted with a momentous decision: move back to the United States and attend college, or stay and join the Israeli military. Impressed by youthful lessons in Zionism and inspired to patriotism by the account of IDF's defense of the country during the Six-Day War in 1967, he enlisted. But he wasn't physically prepared for the challenges of basic training—an inadequacy exacerbated by the fact that, as a result of an administrative error, he was assigned to a paratrooper unit famed for its toughness. Terris, dogged by injuries and sickness, was finally offered a transfer to combat-medical training, which he accepted. At the Military School of Medicine, he met fellow soldiers Asaf, Dennis, and Otto, and the four became quick friends; much of this remembrance reads like a loving homage to their camaraderie. The training was still punishingly difficult, and Terris writes that it often felt like a conspiracy to deny him sleep and dignity. However, he hung on, and he astutely describes the sources of his persistence: "We all hated the army. We all looked forward to our discharge day. We dreamed of freedom. Our resentment, however, was tempered by Israeli idealism and pragmatic patriotism." The whole group was invited to stay on after graduation and become combat-medical instructors—one of the best assignments they could have hoped for. Overall, this is an edifying and delightfully droll look at military culture. Terris' prose is not only lucid, but also comically sharp. His accounts of the group's entertaining high jinks, in particular, help to compensate for the memoir's length of more than 400 pages. Terris' friend Dennis is shown to be hilariously hapless—one drunken night, he inexplicably left plastic plates and mugs in a hot oven, filling the mess hall with an acrid stench. (The author saved the day by burying the damning evidence in a grave.)

An insightful anatomy of the heights and depths of military life.