

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Soldiers' Testimonies From Hebron

2005-2007

Anything else you remember from Hebron?

It's a place that for many soldiers, life there - they can all sense they're doing something wrong, let's put it that way. They can all point it out and feel desperate. I can safely say that the power you wield there is incredible. Because you walk around armed through a place where so many people hate you, as well as into their homes. You enter homes.

It's the kind of provocation you're sensing all the time. You enter a home to conduct a search, you go into their building, just like that. Kicking people out. That's it, that's my main recollection from there.

“Breaking the Silence” is an organization of veterans who served in the Israeli army during the Second Intifada (since September 2000), and have taken upon themselves to expose the Israeli public to everyday life in the Occupied Territories, a routine situation that is never reflected in the media. An alternative information-conduit thus becomes accessible to the public at large about what the daily goings-on in Israel’s back yard. **“Breaking the Silence”** came into being in March 2004, and has since acquired a special standing for both the public and the media, bringing forth the voices of soldiers who had previously remained silent. The ultimate goal of **“Breaking the Silence”** is to stimulate public debate about the moral price that Israeli society as a whole has been paying for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on an everyday basis and control its life. All the testimonies we publish undergo meticulous research, including cross-checking facts with additional eye-witnesses and/or archives of other human rights organizations who are also active in the field. True to our journalistic effort, the identity of our sources is not exposed and remains confidential. The testimonies published here are unedited and presented in their original form, except for details that are withheld in order to conceal the identity of specific testimony-bearers, and/or clarifications of military jargon.

“Breaking the Silence” would like to take this opportunity and thank all the activists and volunteers that have contributed their time and energies and have made the publication of this booklet possible along side all the activities of the organization. In addition we wish to thank “B’tselem” for their assistance with the research and confirmation of the contents that are published in this booklet.

Breaking the silence activities are made possible through the generous support of individuals and foundations including: **The Moriah Foundation, The New Israel Fund, ICCO, SIVMO, The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the EU.**

This testimonial booklet was produced thanks to EU funding



The content and opinions expressed in this booklet do not represent the EU position and are solely the responsibility of **Breaking The Silence.**

This booklet is an anthology of testimonies collected by “Breaking the Silence” in the past few years from over thirty enlisted men – officers, commanders and soldiers – who served in the city of Hebron in the years 2005-2007.

Hebron – located forty minutes by car from Jerusalem – bears cultural, national, historical and religious importance for both Muslims and Jews. This city contains the Tomb of the Patriarchs where, according to both the Jewish and Muslim traditions, the Biblical Fathers were interred. Nowadays, Hebron is the second largest Palestinian city in the West Bank, and the only one that harbors a Jewish settlement in its midst. This is the only city where Jewish and Palestinian families share adjacent house walls.

For Israeli soldiers, especially those who have served in combat units, Hebron is also notorious for being one of the most difficult, complex areas in the Occupied Territories. “Breaking the Silence” – beginning its activity as an organization in June 2004 with an exhibition of testimonies and photographs taken by soldiers who served in Hebron – is now publishing the present booklet after four years of activity. Now, as then, the present booklet aims to hold up a mirror to Israeli society, reflecting reality in Hebron as it emerges from the testimonies of those who served there.

Roughly 166,000 Palestinians and 800 Jewish settlers now reside in Hebron. In 1997, the city was divided into two parts, under the Hebron Accord:

H1 – falling under full Palestinian jurisdiction, including security control, populated by most of the city’s Palestinian residents;

H2 – consisting of about 18% of the city’s area, hardly larger than four square kilometers, subject to full Israeli control through military rule. The “Hebron Accord” gave the Palestinian Authority administrative responsibility for the Palestinian residents living in this area as well.

During the Second Intifada, the Israeli army invaded - often also occupying vast parts of the Palestinian part of Hebron, H1. The Israeli colonies in Hebron – the neighborhoods of Avraham Avinu, Beit Romano, Beit Hadassa and Tel Rumeida – are all included in the area subject to Israeli control. Alongside the 800 settlers living there at present, this part of the city was also inhabited by about 35,000 Palestinians. In 2007 ACRI (Association for Civil Rights in Israel) and B’tselem (human rights organization) published a joint report presenting data on the closing of H2 to Palestinians, and the rate of Palestinian evacuation of this area following army and

settler activity in the past decade. Many streets in this part of town are out of bounds for commerce and movement of Palestinian residents. The economic and social erosion of the Palestinian population, together with ongoing violence on the part of Jewish settlers in this area, have caused many – about 40% of the Palestinians according to the said report – to give up their homes and move to the other part of the city, or out altogether.

This anthology of testimonies offers Israeli society a brief glance at the world of soldiers serving in Hebron, and at the city itself. The testimony-bearers cited in this booklet represent various field units that have served in the city in 2005-2007 – years during which the Second Intifada had supposedly receded. But the essence of the army's activity in the Occupied Territories, as it was prior to the Intifada, during the Intifada and as it is still today, even after the 'official' end of the Intifada – that essence has not changed in the least. Service in the Occupied Territories requires Israeli soldiers to control the Palestinian population in a total, absolute and daily manner. The soldier's determination to fulfill their mission yields tragic results: the proper-normative becomes despicable, the inconceivable becomes routine. Soldiers whose testimonies are recorded in this booklet illustrate the manner in which they are swept into the brutal reality reigning on the ground, a reality whereby the lives of many thousands of Palestinian families are at the questionable mercy of youths. Hebron turns a focused, flagrant lens at the reality to which Israel's young representatives are constantly sent.

Testimony 1, Hebron

Anything else you remember from Hebron?

It's a place that for many soldiers, life there - they can all sense they're doing something wrong, let's put it that way. They can all point it out and feel desperate. I can safely say that the power you wield there is incredible. Because you walk around armed through a place where so many people hate you, as well as into their homes. You enter homes.

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Testimony 2, Hebron

Do you recall your first shift at the outpost?

Of course. Miserable. At first it's minor, until you start feeling burnout, as they say.

What do you mean?

You start finding interesting things to do, estimating range and stuff, especially in the daytime. Just nonsense, all kinds of horsing around, playing around with our weapons. I was a sharpshooter so all day we'd observe children and stuff. A little. At first it's just nothing. Later, when we moved up to senior company we started really fooling around.

Like what?

Patrols with lots of rubber-coated ammo.

Eight-hour shifts at... just static positions?

In Hebron? Nearly. My platoon had the static ones. For about a month, then patrols.

30?

Yes, 30-patrol. Then I went up to senior company, and we sent out patrols. You know where ***(name of position) is located? We'd send all the patrols out from there. By that time we were, you know, a little less nice, let's say. We'd beat up Arabs a lot, and so on.

Testimony 3, Hebron

The worst testimonies of operation-orders to kill Palestinian policemen and the like are very exceptional. They exist, they are awful, but it's not an everyday occurrence. I chose to bring something mundane, out of dozens of daily incidents where the lack of any consideration or comprehension of the reactions, of the consequences literally cries out, but they happen on a daily basis and never enter the mind of commanders at all, because there's this phenomenon... I don't know if it's a general phenomenon, but this is what things are like for the combat units in the Occupied Territories during my years there.

A mission is received with no critical judgment whatsoever. I mean, obviously a mission is a mission and must be carried out unless it is a flagrant breach of the law. But not a thought is given to how it is carried out, how to minimize unwanted damage, things like that.

As soon as a mission-order comes in, whoever is in charge – battallion, company or platoon commander – receives it and carries it out religiously. I went through this myself, it took me a while to catch myself and begin to think twice about the missions. I mean, I didn't doubt their importance and that I would carry them out regardless, but thinking more about how to do it. And this happens dozens of times a day, from the simplest ID check, how to make it more efficient for most of the people being checked. The great majority are innocent, after all, so how does one avoid making them wait for hours on end, how to minimize unnecessary friction with the population, reduce violations of their freedom of movement, freedom of employment, their right to livelihood. These terms are never taken in consideration. It took me a while to realize this. I'll testify about something really routine... We were on duty in Hebron and were required, I mean the batallion was sent on a mapping mission. Mapping is when we're assigned a neighborhood or several streets we're not too familiar with. Hebron is a very clannish city, everyone knows everyone else in the clans, the 'hamulahs', and it's very difficult to penetrate, intelligence-wise. The battallion's mission was to go from house to house, knock on the door, get the owner's ID, write down his name, telephone number, cell phone numer, register all this children who live at home. Proceed from door to door, all the apartments in the building, building by building, the whole street, the entire neighborhood, as many neighborhoods as the *** assigned us. I don't doubt the mission, I suppose it's very important. The battallion commander received the assignment, passed it on to the company commander, as usual. I was in the platoon that was assigned

special projects – namely, projects assigned higher up, not routine activity of guard duty and patrols – so I was assigned such a mission. It seemed pretty urgent, and the battalion commander told the company commander: this should be done within – I don't remember in how many days he wanted it done. And there were lots of... about three whole neighborhoods, lots and lots of houses to go through. We were sent there directly with the maps. With everything we needed, after some very brief planning, to go ahead and check the houses. At some point it was already nighttime. Ten, eleven p.m. – say that's still okay – and then midnight, one, two a.m. You're already waking people up, flashing lights in their faces, people the vast majority if not all of whom are perfectly innocent, I mean they have not been involved in terrorist activity. And maybe they know of someone here or there, I don't doubt the need to get their particulars. The question is whether it really must be done at two o'clock in the morning. I mean waking up entire households one by one, all those children crying, the women not understanding what's going on, flash lights in their eyes, guns pointed at them for them to present their IDs. And what can you do, got to watch out for yourself too. So I get on radio and ask permission to conclude the action and proceed the next day. No, no, no – finish another street or two, must get through as many as possible right now. I explained my reasons to my superiors, that I didn't think it's... that I'd get up two hours earlier and do another two hours tomorrow. I mean, we'd eventually get through all the assigned houses.

You suggested this?

I suggested this. Yes, I mean, I was sure this would be okayed. Why now? I know exactly where I finished, no one is going to run away, they live here.

I'll get here tomorrow two hours earlier, we'll start in the morning and finish whatever needs to be done on time. It wasn't even considered an option. I got a flat "no" on radio, even when I gave them my second reasoning, the operational one.

Who were "they"?

The company commander, through the war-room. I mean, the company commander can decide on his own whether to go through with it or not. He is the one who received the orders, he is responsible enough to carry them out as he sees fit. Even when I brought up my other reasoning, the operational aspect - I think it's crazy to keep going from house to house in the middle of the night in an unfamiliar location, not knowing what's inside the house, which way the door opens, who expects me inside, at night, first time I'm in the neighborhood. Suppose I just woke up people in one house, banged on their door, flashed my lights, the next house already knows and is waiting for me, if someone there is out to get me. I mean, even the operational

consideration was not taken and we kept at it until two o'clock in the morning. Apparently my talk with the company commander through the war-room made its way up the grapevine and the next day orders arrived from our own (Nahal rather than regional) brigade commander NOT to continue mapping missions after ten o'clock in the evening, unless some emergency calls for it etc. etc. But on principle no more mappings later than ten o'clock at night...

Two o'clock in the morning was pre-planned?

Essentially action cycles during that time in Hebron were eight to ten hours at a time. You have no business getting back unless your eight hours are up. Absolutely no judgment here. Now, I relate all of this to what I opened with here, the lack of any serious consideration the moment you're assigned your mission... If the values, or say moral considerations are not a part of your mission, as soon as orders reach battalion level and down – a level I'm very familiar with – such things are almost never taken in consideration, for the mission is as good as 'sacred' in this situation.

There's quite a bit of 'gray area' about such missions. Checkpoints for example. You are often called upon to exercise your own judgment.

Judgment is within given limitations. Exercising your own judgment as the platoon commander in the field means deciding from which direction you want to be covered, and how to talk to the homeowner who has just opened his door for you at two o'clock in the morning. Whether to bark at him "ID!" or to greet him, "Good evening, sir, would you kindly show us your ID?" etc. The fact that you forced your armed presence on him and summoned him outside to gather the information while you could have collected it just as well the next day during waking hours and still carried out your mission – that is not subject to your own judgment on the ground. You're already there and you're told this is your mission. The company commander has already exercised his own judgment here, or the battalion commander before him. They received their orders for this mission and will stick to the book. Everyday actions that violate human rights are nearly never subject to any calculation how else to carry out orders, because of this idea that a mission is not something you can contest. Naturally you have to perform your mission etc. etc. but the fact that one cannot even consider other ways of doing things, that is really serious.

Testimony 4, Hebron

How do you deal with settlers?

As platoon commander in a relatively veteran company, I experienced relatively little friction with them, for theoretically I had no assigned area. I would get a mission and carry it out. Not actually maintain a permanent line with positions and all. I did, but nothing like routine garrison companies who literally sat inside the Jewish settlement, especially standby duty on Saturdays etc. In fact, I had some routine stuff there. I had to do patrols in the area that was right next to... Listen, the violence was horrifying while I was there. It was just when the High Court of Justice okayed the Sharhabati house or whatever it was called, a Palestinian family home right on the verge of the settlement. During my last month there soldiers had to make a human-chain every day around this house so the Jewish settlers there wouldn't take it apart. And it didn't help.

Was that a mission?

That was our mission, to prevent the Jews from approaching the Sharhabati house. And it failed.

I'm a soldier in your company. I get up in the morning, and I am assigned to create a human-chain around the Sharhabati home?

It was a young company. I don't know whether human-chain was the literal depiction in the orders themselves, but in actual fact that was what happened. But it didn't work because inside the Jewish settlement they can move everywhere on the roofs. The children simply move along the roofs and there's nothing you can do. You're not going to point guns at them to get them down, and if you chase them, they run away.

What about civilian police?

It doesn't have too much say there either...

You summon them?

Yes. We do. I didn't deal with it personally, I saw it done on my patrols, I'd see it...

A new squad-commander replaced me once, taking out the patrol, it was his first time, and on that same patrol a Palestinian tried to stab him and he opened fire. He turned around and the moment he looked away the guy was already facing him with the knife, and he pushed him away and shot him to death. There was a debriefing, normal army procedure in such cases, and our operational routine just took it up from there. The Jewish settlers in Hebron decided that it was that Arab's purpose to stab any Jew.

I think they even said "a Jewish child". I don't remember. They decided that this was what he was after.

That was the talk on the street?

Yes. Later they demonstrated, and part of the time in those demonstrations they run into the Abu Sneina casbah and do whatever they please. My mission there was literally to stop them, not to let them in. I had to fight some Jewish boys, really, and later they wouldn't let us through with our jeep and all hell broke loose. But that was an exception. I mean, I don't justify it, it was extreme and violent and as far as I am concerned they should sit in jail, the people who bring this on. Certainly the mothers who put their babies on the road so that the army jeep can't move.

That actually happened?

That actually happened.

What age was the baby?

No more than one-year old. They should go to jail, but that was an exceptional incident. The usual incidents are when Palestinian children finish school and they have to be protected, because otherwise they get beaten up by the Jewish kids. Rough beatings-to-kill are not an everyday occurrence, but definitely throwing small stones. That happens literally everyday. Things that after you spend some months in Hebron don't seem exceptional to you. To me personally they do.

Shock.

Sure. But the situation there is so surreal, so eccentric, that you realize you're in this kind of twilight-zone, with altogether different rules. The place really forces itself on you.

Testimony 5, Hebron

I remember the first time I was really screwed up in Hebron, opening some street corner or house on one of my first patrols, you know you really are in shock. I was sure that any moment now I'd be shot. So you stare at every window, turn every corner really stressed out. Then you become indifferent. Yes. But in the beginning... I remember I took a corner and my rifle was pointing at this little child. I had a really hard time with this one. He burst out crying and ran away. Things like that. Or say I remember once, you know the patrol moves in two lines, so these two children passed along in between, an older and a younger brother. The older brother held the younger close and they hurried along. This picture won't leave me. Later, after becoming indifferent, I remember I took a corner once and saw some Arab looking at me through the window. Then just like

that, I have no idea why I did this – I pointed my gun at him, and he closed the door and ran. And I went – “Wow, I’m really losing it. Really.” That’s how we all felt, it was like - feels like talking to a shrink now – but you just say, “man, I’ve really been screwed.” You keep talking about burnout all the time, all this shit and stuff. But it’s a real horror. You keep getting under their skin. At first you’re really scared, then you allow yourself some humane feelings, and then you just don’t give a damn. It’s like that everywhere in the Occupied Territories, but particularly so in Hebron.

After how long?

Next to nothing. Two weeks maybe. Think about it. Eight-hour patrol shifts. You get into this routine right away. Never fails... I remember some commander who’s actually a really nice guy, heart of gold. I remember some Arab child suddenly gave him this strange look. I was shocked, this was at an army post with commander and soldier, and another soldier above. Suddenly he gripped the kid, pushed him against the wall, picked him up and yelled at him. The whole street was silent. And I was... What just happened here now? Trying to cover him, I don’t even know what. I was in shock. And then I talked to him about this: Sir, why do we do this, actually? “No, you gotta understand, it’s called deterrence” and all that crap. I understood him, really. I’m not here to blame anyone.

No one blames anyone.

Not true. It’s what I told you about some of the things I read in the booklet. Sometimes this is really very target-oriented. I think that reality there is really problematic. Not because of the soldiers, see? Especially not in our unit, okay? No one there’s bad. The soldiers don’t try to be mean. Really not. That commander, too, the one who picked up that Arab kid against the wall, he wasn’t being vicious. He’s no Arab-hater. Really not. It’s burnout, and because – you no longer know what you’re supposed to do there, see? You stand at that post all day, suddenly something happens and some little Arab stares at you and says something, and you snap...

Snap?

Yes. Snap.

Do you think your fuse got shorter since you were in Hebron?

Towards Arabs, yes. I’m sad to say this, but I always said that sometimes – it’s a terrible thing to say but sometimes the way to treat Arabs is like rookies, new recruits. Because you know, that’s discipline. If you don’t – this is after I was in Hebron for a long time and as a commander and all – this is discipline. Not only in Hebron, in the Occupied Territories in general. If someone comes to you and he wants to cross the line and you’re nice and you argue don’t cross, cross, don’t... then eventually he

does cross. And then “you failed your mission”. So you start yelling and all that. Then at night suddenly you think about it. Not while you’re actually do doing it.

The next day?

Next day? No way, right after the patrol, suddenly you go, wow...

The next day you carry on as usual?

Business as usual, totally. That’s why it works, the Territories. That’s how you start to change, really. Because you don’t understand what’s happening to you, as a person.

Testimony 6, Hebron

And the cameras inside Hebron itself?

The police has them, as far as I know at *** Just serveillance of what goes on around there. And the army has them, it goes to *** They have monitors there.

Monitors at the war-room?

Yes, incredible stuff.

And the footage, where does that go?

Nowhere, it stays in the computers. In case there’s any incident... There’s closed-circuit television, cameras everywhere... Like in “The Truman Show”, which are controlled by joystick and zoom and... really state-of-the-art. All the films are kept on the computer.

Poor quality. That’s it. So in those films I saw all kinds of assaults. And breaking in to houses and assaulting people.

Breaking into settler homes?

No, settlers breaking into Arab homes.

Okay, what did you see?

You see them... you see really well. Breaking windows and all. Breaking, kicking and...

So what you see is settlers banging on doors, breaking into houses, you see soldiers standing around nearby and not doing a thing?

No. After a while soldiers come along beacuse they are alerted, and usually do nothing. Maybe catch them... Stop the... Cut the power.

What do you mean?

Most of the cameras, if not all of them, get their power from the settlers’ houses.

When they anticipate some rioting, they disconnect the... electricity.

The settlers? Disconnect the cameras, and so...

Yes. Or otherwise disrupt them, yes...

You have witnessed such things sitting at the war-room receiving end?

Sure. It happens. They don't always know there's another camera catching them from another direction.

Who is there actually seeing what happens in real time?

Women-soldiers monitoring screens. They have this monitoring system in which they are trained.

How many cameras are there?

About ***. Not just covering the Jewish settlements. They also cover H1 (The part of Hebron supposedly under full Palestinian control). You see, the cameras are situated inside the area of the Jewish settlement – otherwise they'd be vandalised – and cover H1 as well.

So what do they show? Anyone approaching the Jewish settlement?

Yes, anyone there.

What is done with this material?

You mean in case the settlers attack Palestinians? When I was there I know that it could not be passed on to the police...

Forbidden?

Yes. To avoid friction, perhaps. I don't know. I have no idea what it's like now. If something happens, say, I know that once there was this incident, I don't know how to label it – not criminal, not insurgency, but the other way around – on the part of the settlers.

What happened?

I don't know, *** or someone beat up one of the Arabs. Then, during the police investigation he was shown this film where he was plainly seen. Naturally he called the brigade commander right away and said that these cameras are there to protect the settlers, the Jews. Not to protect the Arabs. And this must not be misunderstood: what happened there was a criminal felony, not insurgent activity. Since then, anytime something like takes place, the army may not hand this material over to the police. And since then, no policeman has been allowed to enter the closed-circuit television monitoring room.

Policemen were not allowed into the war-room?

For a while. Until that was changed. For about a month, no policemen was allowed.

And the army was not supposed to let the police have these tapes?

Yes. I was at the war-room, a policeman came in so this woman-officer said: "I'm sorry, we have our orders from the brigade commander not to let you in here, please leave."

Testimony 7, Hebron

There are few defensive assignments, such as guard-duty and the like. There are offensive assignments, usually carried out by the more special units or the senior companies, like arrests and such.

You took part in arrest missions?

Yes. Lots of them. The main bulk of the assignments is offensive in nature. I mean – never mind, we won't go into this – essentially they are intended to make people (Palestinians) constantly aware of your presence. So they'll never feel comfortable, and realize the army is always around. Get used to having the army there, that there is no such thing for them, routine life without the army. That anywhere they go, the can be inspected.

You mean throughout the Territories or more specifically?

I know Hebron best, I can't vouch for other areas, but the principle is the same all over. Most missions – I mean routine ones – are also intended to make the Palestinians know you're there. That the army's there. That they mustn't relax for a second, normal civilians just as well. I guess it's some kind of strategic concept, that they'll want to ostracize terrorists, anyone involved in insurgency.

These are sociological assumptions.

What are sociological assumptions? This is the working principle in the Occupied Territories since the onset of the Intifada. I guess it has changed a few times, but at officers' training they would lecture us about this, taken for granted. Namely, the objective is to force the Palestinian population into rejecting terrorists. Kick them out of their midst. Not allow them to disrupt their everyday life. In actual fact this has not worked, disruption of routine life has been ongoing for six years now. As far as I'm concerned, any such action is a significant disruption of people's lives. Every sudden stopping of vehicles, delaying people until the GSS clear or block them according to their ID particulars.

What about the soldiers? How do they see it? Let's put it this way, are there any initiatives felt on their part?

I've had all kinds. I've had soldiers who came to me on a mission and said: "Listen, I think we're holding them up too long, why don't we let them go?" I've had soldiers who, as far as they were concerned, were there to do the job, and would do it as best they could and then get back to the post and go to sleep. And I've also had soldiers who made sure to stall as much as possible, and force someone waiting for his ID to squat long enough for his quadriceps to bust. Naturally I had to balance out the extremes.

You were their commander?

Yes.

What were they told about such an event?

I'd order them to stop it right away.

You would supervise the mission?

I would command the operation itself. We'd go out on patrol, stop somewhere to check IDs. This is patrol routine. You and you secure over there, you and you go there, I take IDs. You stand guard over those waiting, you pass the ID numbers on radio. And I don't always see the guys standing guard over those waiting. You move around, trying to get an overview of the scene, perhaps you should change places, check to see that those posted to cover you are really doing that, etc. Meanwhile, someone waiting on the side approaches a soldier, which is perfectly understandable and legitimate, and says: "Listen, will this take long? We're in a hurry to get to work." And the soldier, he's strong, he's armed, and expects this person to cower, not to dare approach him like this, although he poses no actual threat. And this is an everyday situation. The soldier yells back at him, pointing his gun at him, forcing him into physically painful poses. You witness such things, as a platoon commander, and immediately order them to stop it and get back to their normal procedure. Later when the platoon gets back, you talk about it. There were soldiers who would get very upset about our being wimps, and others who justified it, still others who were indifferent.

Did you punish soldiers for this?

Not when it first occurred. I can't punish someone for being brought up at home in a certain way, or a certain belief-system. As soon as I gave an order not to repeat this and they did, punishment would be expected. But it happened very seldom under my command, at least as far as I know. Naturally there were patrols without me, when squad-commanders or sergeants would be in charge.

What was the atmosphere like in the company, your unit?

In what way?

Were such things legitimized?

There's a difference between, I mean, the company commander talks to his men, speaks about the importance of maintaining certain humane standards in action, but that's it. He is not personally present on patrol. There are some junior commanders who are more vicious, others less. There is an invisible competition going on, who is the strongest 'sheriff', in every battallion, in every company, always.

What's a 'sheriff'?

King of the zone.

Among the squad-commanders?

Among the companies. The company commanders and squad-commanders. It was implicit, no one talked about it openly. But if I were on four patrols in a row that had incidents, well – I was working harder, I was 'more of a man' for it. Sacrificing more for the mission. This is a frame of mind that works as an undercurrent, not consciously but quite strong. Some patrols are led by different-ranking commanders for whom such power play is everything.

Testimony 8, Hebron

What about vehicles? Confiscating car keys?

Yes, it's done. Their car-keys are taken away. If Palestinians are detained, their car-keys and IDs are taken from them.

And how do they get them back?

Either they do or they don't, from the next patrol. If they're found, they're found, if not – not.

Can you estimate how many there were?

I don't know. Most of them did get them back, the next patrol would come and give them back their keys. The vehicle stayed at the same spot and they'd wait with it.

And their IDs, how did they get those back? Same way?

From the patrol, too. Or not. If someone was really irritating he would not get them back, because he'd be considered insolent.

Testimony 9, Hebron

Were you ever alerted to the Occupied Territories during basic and advanced training?

Actually we were in Hebron, for some two-three days. My first Hebron experience. I remember doing guard duty, at Tapuz Gross and Sentry posts. These were the first two army posts I ever experienced outside the brigade training camp.

What was it, reinforcements for securing the ‘prayer route’?

It was a Friday-Saturday reinforcement. There were incidents there that really cracked us up, so funny... I was at Tapuz Gross post when it was still manned, a soldier below and a commander. So I remember a vehicle arriving from Mani Road, I mean through the Abu Sneina neighborhood, a Palestinian Municipality vehicle, for they are in charge of infrastructure there. I recall the Palestinian vehicle arriving to repair something in the power lines: the Palestinian municipality services infrastructures in the Jewish settlement, after all. Pretty ironic.

To this day, it’s the Palestinians who collect the garbage there?

Naturally, naturally. Everything. Electricity, water, the works. So this vehicle came, and entered, and then – I’ll never forget this, I couldn’t believe my own ears: a band of little kids, four-five-six-year olds, started yelling: “Palestinian car!” Running down from Avraham Avinu settlement with stones in their hands, running towards us. Meanwhile, the vehicle goes uphill to Tel Rumeida. Then I see my officer sprinting after them. Naturally they smashed his windshield, so cute of them. Well, it was over. I stayed, depressed as I was, at the Tapuz Gross post. A six-hour guard stint.

Anyone arrested there?

No. Five-six-year old children, there’s nothing you can do. It’s like a joke.

Did you try to detain anyone, talk to them?

Whom? I could tell you things that, in retrospect, sound like a sick joke. That time, I saw three mothers coming down from Tel Rumeida, talking among themselves: “It’s so horrible, really sickening! How could they possibly prevent them from doing what they were doing?” So I’m thinking, sure, normal. “How can they (soldiers) stop them (the settlers children)? After all they’re (Palestinians) throwing stones at us!” something in that vein. Suddenly I realized, shocked, that these three mothers walking down with their prams are really saying that it’s not fair to prevent their poor precious children from throwing stones at the Palestinian municipal maintenance truck. I look around me and wonder: What? Where am I?

Testimony 10, Hebron

How's the interaction between Palestinians and Jewish settlers?

Okay, it's really not simple.

Recall any incidents?

Yes. Again, I was stationed at the post but many guys were involved in this, because this was – again – prayers alert. Lots of people (Jews) came from the outside, as they usually visit the settlers inside Hebron, staying over the Sabbath. And again, they went for their Friday prayers. En route, behind 'Jilber', behind the guardpost, there's a grocery store. So these people go in and start trashing the place. I don't exactly know to what extent. A friend of mine was on duty there and he said they went in, started yelling and dropping products off the shelves, I don't know exactly.

A Palestinian grocery store?

Yes.

The one next to Jilber?

Right behind the post there's a grocery store. They went in as I said, and our two guys on guard duty nearby went in and started arguing with the Jews, trying to get them out of there. So the Jews left and on their way, they saw an old woman sitting. They were on their way to the synagogue. So passing this old woman, they started yelling at her, I don't know, kicked her or something. This is just from stories that soldiers told me. I remember this incident particularly because the guys really dwelt on it.

What were you told in your briefing, about your mission at Hebron?

To protect the Jewish settlers.

That's the mission?

Protect residents, all of them, and the Jewish settlers of Hebron. Overall. And the army is there mainly to secure the Jewish settlers. If there were no Jewish settlement, there would be no army. That's how I see it. Now in this context, you are also protecting Palestinians, whether overtly or covertly.

How did you protect Palestinians? What did you do to the settlers who ran wild in that grocery store?

We kicked them out of there.

Testimony 11, Hebron

We conducted fake arrests.

What do you mean?

A fake arrest, that's what we carried out. We did not actually make arrests.

In Hebron?

Yes. It was a major issue, brought up some really hard feelings. At first we didn't really know how to cope with it. We didn't know if it was legal or not.

What was it?

A fake arrest is basically a training move, to practice arrest procedure in order to be able to carry it out. Again, to intimidate, deter Palestinians, to say: This here is army. So that will be the next day's talk around the Palestinian neighborhood. Now, intelligence gives us the name of someone who is in fact okay, no problem at all, nothing on him, and we go and conduct an arrest at his home. A seemingly regular arrest, in every way.

You went with this all the way? You picked up the person?

We picked him up. The commanding mobile unit would pick him up, drive around with him, and then bring him back home.

Testimony 12, Hebron

'Patrol 30' – what are its missions?

'Patrol-30' is actually a security effort. So we get contact first thing before standing duty at the posts.

You walk around for 12 hours in the casbah?

12 hours in the casbah, walking around, that's it. Nothing special.

House mappings?

Again, it all changes. You get to do mappings, and eventually it's up to whoever's in charge. Let's say I and my platoon commander never led a single mapping in the

western casbah, because I can't... I mean I don't believe it's really necessary. On the other hand, there's another platoon commander and sergeant who do this regularly, three-four times a patrol.

What does this mapping involve?

What is it? You get a map sheet, and you enter a home.

Daytime? Nighttime?

Day, night, no difference. Night's preferable. The company commander always preferred nighttime. When whole families are at home. I'll go over the mappings I did. You map the house. You go around with the owner and he lifts this and that, shows you everything. In fact everything that's been caught so far is just bullshit. Found a knife hidden in some spot, a toy knife. A knife that is actually a cigarette-lighter. So I go, yeah sure, that's like a knife that's going to be used – I mean, it's plainly a decoration. Basically if you are a Palestinian living in the western casbah or anywhere around there, I've realized that it's about the shittiest life you can have. You can't have a cap gun, mustn't own a knife. Any kind of knife. I got to the point where my platoon commander confiscated a kitchen knife. I go: "Why? Why pick that up?" "It was lying very strangely in the living room." I'm not taking it. "Take it!" I find myself confiscating this kitchen knife from a person who is, well, a "Fatah supporter". Since he was in the... I got to the point where I had personal contact with residents of the western casbah because, I don't know, I try not to be nice to them, for people treat you the way you treat them and so on. But they're really used to army presence. As soon as we show up they start asking: 'Ah, you're new, you're an officer, you're a sergeant...'. Anyone there already knows enough to ask you for your recruitment date: 'What are you, enlisted March 06? March 05?' Anyone. Even the kids there go, 'Until when are you in, March 06? Until when, November 05?' they ask my men. And then my men answer them: 'We're not November 05, we're March 06.' So the kids go, 'Ah, until when March 06?' Personally I don't let my men do this, teach them such stuff. But companies that have been here before us have already taught them everything. 'Sorry about your time', 'Ohh, that's tough' – I mean four-year old kids come to you...

Back to mappings. You go over the house, look around. The only time I was really stressed – you've got to do mapping because everyone does it, why not you? – I go into someone's house, I knock on the door, call up the whole family. I did this at nine o'clock. I said, if I do this later I'll really feel like shit.

People do it at a later hour as well?

Yes. Just a second. I'll go over the mapping that we actually do, in Abu Sneina where...

I enter his home, go through his living room, see a flower-pot: "Thanks to so-and-so for your contribution to the mediation process between Palestinians and Israelis". I mean this is my first home mapping and this is what I see there, a plant given in homage, a certificate of honor. I proceed, and am really embarrassed. Simply embarrassed. I felt shitty about going through his things.

What does that mean, going through things? Down to cigarette butts?

Depends whom you ask. If you ask my company commander, then it's down to the last cigarette butt. But again, no one, at least in our company, not that I know of, does it just to be nasty. My commander really believes that it's operational and that you can find stuff. I know him, he's not a... he's the opposite of a hater. He would tell us that as a platoon commander, say, he'd wouldn't let his soldiers go into 'straw widow' operations (whereby Israeli army forces take over Palestinian homes and turn them into military posts for hours, days and even longer). They would sleep on the floor, not even sit in an easy chair. It's something he always emphasized in his talks. It was something he really abhorred when he saw it done. But, on the other hand, he would insist on the searches. But, okay, that's already his own conception of operations and how he feels about them. So I went in, went over things, felt I couldn't handle it any more and left. We cleared, all my men felt really shitty about this, I mean in a big way.

Do you have patrols for making your presence felt in the area?

'Patrol-30' is done expressly for making our presence felt. To make the enemy feel hunted down.

Testimony 13, Hebron

The peak was really once when we were on patrol, we had a report of some clan fighting. It was like a chance to take revenge. We were told, you know how it is, every time they have this kind of clan fight, someone comes after us eventually. And everyone was already really sick of it. We were told to go over there and find out what was happening. Our commander was a bit screwed in the head, he said: "We're not really going over there to see what's happening". He sent everyone up on roofs and told them: "Anyone you see holding a knife, take down his knee, I don't care."

In the middle of the night?

No, noon time. Why middle of the night?

People were going around with knives?

There was a clan fight. Guns. He said, "I don't care, I'm not going to be kind about this, the army can do whatever I want. Now I'm taking revenge on anyone throwing stones at us, check them out if they're throwing." He goes: "Anyone identified with a knife, a stone, even a stone is enough – get his knee. Anyone detecting something suspect, shoot to maim."

What's suspect?

Anyone holding a knife is out to assault. Anyone with a molotov cocktail, a rifle, all of that – is out to attack.

Attack whom?

Us.

And he came with a knife where?

To a clan fight. Also with guns.

They're no business of yours?

No.

You weren't in any danger?

Danger? No way, we were 150 meters away, on roofs. We located a house and just fired. What danger? If we had wanted to, we could have ignored it. We just wanted to... We would be on the move with an extra bag of ammo just in case there's an emergency drill, that we'd always have enough. You know, we'd go through cartridge checks to make sure we didn't fire anything by mistake. So even though we weren't checked, just to make sure we had enough.

You always have spare ammo?

Yes. Plenty. Whatever you want. So anyway, we would locate houses, and he'd tell us: "Okay, anyone you see armed with stones or whatever, I don't care what – shoot. Everyone would think it's the clan fight." After five minutes we'd see stones and stuff, and then I'm telling you, we started...

How did Palestinians react to sudden shooting?

I don't know, maybe they thought it was theirs, who knows.

Did you hit them?

Sure. Not just them. Anyone who came close. Anyone else who was around. you know how it is. There's always those who just shoot. I see a suspect, boom.

They went on with their fight?

There was a really bad fight on there. Really strong. It just got worse, I tell you,

hands, legs went flying there. Platoon ***, the really good one in our company, what do I mean by good? Professionally our platoon was the one that got everything. We always caught weapons. And platoon *** were like the goody-goodies, who don't do anything. They did checkpoint duty. You know. People came out of vehicles there without knees. The company commander told them: "No one gets through. Everyone check out vehicles." He didn't really know who gave the order.

The company commander knew nothing about this?

No one knew. Platoon's private initiative, these actions. That's how it was in ours: we would not be the suckers. Yes, that's a bit extreme. It was really bad. I think at some point they realized it was soldiers, but they were not sure. Because they could not believe soldiers would do this, you know.

What other kinds of wounding were there?

Particularly legs, legs and arms. Some people also sustained abdominal hits.

Anyone died?

I don't know if anyone died. Many wounded were reported. Platoon *** kept coming up on the radio: there are wounded here. Seriously wounded. They could not stop the vehicles, we know what it is, so we tell them: "Yes, those clan fights also have armed men." Most of the hits were from our fire. The company commander said: Check out the vehicle, to make sure they're not carrying weapons."

... We weren't really thinking very much at the time, fuck, we'd had it, you know what Hebron is like. And it was really like that, everyone had had it. Some were lefties when they arrived: "I'd never hit an Arab", you know. I have a good friend who would tell me, right after we got out of there: "I can't believe I did these things".

He had a hard time?

A bit. The commander always explained to him: "That is not your job. Your job is to take care of our soldiers..." He accepted that, as it were.

But was uncomfortable?

Yes, but what can you do. Go with the flow. Nothing else you can do.

How many people were there?

Lots. About 150 people. A real clan-fight.

How did children get there?

Children came too. You know, kids stand aside, yelling. There was a big mess. Whole families, I tell you, came out there. You know how it is in a clan fight. I've seen a lot but this was really something awesome. And we only made it worse, when they see them and wounded, and then the clans get even more... We made things a lot worse there. The commander was as happy as if we'd taken down the head of Hamas in Hebron...

Did he reward people?

Reward? "Very good, we're doing our job. Restoring the army's deterring force." They didn't even know it was us. And it was all inside the platoon, no one else knew.

Was that the first time for something like that to happen?

No. We always gave hell. We would always beat Arabs. we'd come, smash mosque windows, throw firecrackers in, and then there'd be some protest and we'd fire rubber-coated ammo. And they'd come out all nervous and we'd disperse them with rubber ammo, concussion grenades, teargas, the works.

Was an investigation held later?

No, we didn't report it. There were wounded. We were asked what happened. "Clan fight." Needn't expound too much. Beatings, shootings, and that's it. We don't elaborate... I remember that once, after the shooting, we stopped some vehicle, we had quit checking, so we stopped some car and someone must have been hit with a bullet here.

Below the shoulder?

Yes. We were told, and we saw, smears of blood. The commander says, "No, I'm checking your car." We said, "Listen, he's going to die on us here, at the checkpoint". "No." Our company commander was screwed up, never mind. So he says:"You're not releasing anyone here until after you check this guy. Nobody." And this commander was really a bit crazy, now really. There were protests, so he'd grip stones and throw at Arabs' cars, breaking up cars.

Let's get back to the checkpoint. You finish dealing with disruptions of public order, you go down, put up a checkpoint. A vehicle arrives.

He claims it's a bullet. He goes, "I was shot, I was shot." We ask, who shot you? "That guy over there, a clan fight." For they don't know who fired at them. In other words, all hell broke loose. You see that people there are on edge, ask them: "Who is this?" They tell us. What's his name? Head of the family, not a sheikh, don't remember the name, but something like the head of the house. I don't remember how they call this person. Anyway, someone important. So we told the commander, "Listen, this is not right".

"No," he says, "no one lets him go. Get everyone out of the car. Him too, as far as I'm concerned."

Who says this?

The commander.

The sergeant? The platoon commander?

Sergeant. Squad-commander. Junior staff.

So what happens?

We got everyone out of the car, took everything apart, didn't find a thing. I tell you we took it apart, I mean we dismantled doors, everything.

How long did it take?

We smash. In a matter of seconds. One minute and the whole car is in pieces.

We'd come with knives, tear up the top, everything. No car left. Chances are it wasn't exactly in usable shape after we were through. Then we left him go, having inspected the passengers, see?

ID check or body inspection?

Body inspection.

Testimony 14, Hebron**You mentioned some incursion in the casbah.**

I did.

When and why?

Following settlers' claims, something that may have taken place, I don't know. They say two Palestinian children somehow came to the Avraham Avinu settlement, then ran away. Following that, fifteen people, settlers, heroic salt of the earth, from eight-year old girls to an armed settler, enter the western casbah through gate 4-5. The 4-5 outpost commander could not block fifteen people, reports this on his radio. Our 'patrol-30', present inside the casbah, chases them for ten minutes.

And you are where?

At the outpost at the time. I was summoned later simply as reinforcement. So the the guys of 'patrol-30' do this. One girl shouts to another in Arabic, "Keep quiet!" while this guy could just trample her. Naturally the Palestinians know that any reaction is followed by a counter-reaction, so everyone there keeps from reacting to Jews. The children are yelling, running the whole operation, and in the meantime our patrol conducts a chase.

Just yelling?

As far as I know, yes. They enter an yell, all sorts of stuff – a show of Jewish force inside the casbah. I don't know when this ridiculous event took place. Our patrol

chases, the command unit arrives, begins to chase them. One of the settlers swore at one of our soldiers, an Ethiopian Jew.

What do you mean?

Things like “This is what you came here for, all the way from Ethiopia?” Let’s say I’ve noticed they really badmouth our Ethiopians, mercilessly...

And then they come to you?

No. Then plenty of reinforcements were summoned, Border Patrol reconnaissance unit as well as ourselves. So I get there, block some gate, push some girl. Push? I wish it were that. It was more like, “Girl, I’m about to close this gate so either I squash your fingers or you move.” So her mother starts up, “Don’t you touch my daughter!” If I had not touched her daughter she wouldn’t have had too many fingers left anyway. They open one of the gates that had been closed, and run in all over the place.

Why a gate?

Gate 5 has this bolt on the Jewish side. So they open it and enter. In the meantime we chase them all over the place. Stuff like you only see on television. All this police and army chasing the settlers. So me and four others totally block the gate, making a human chain. Then some girl sitting there says: “You, you only protect them...” You this, you that.

Were they violent with you?

My officer on ‘patrol-30’ experienced more violence. He was shoved around, stuff like that. He’s already filed a statement with the police. He really came out angry at them, unreasonably furious, because he was really offended by the insults hurled at his soldier, which made him even madder. He was really mad about how they behaved there. They were worse than ever that day.

How does this all end up?

Dozens of soldiers and policemen arrive, and they chase them (the settlers) away. At some point their fighting spirit just died down and they cleared out.

No one was arrested?

No. No way. It’s pretty absurd, the things that go on there.

Testimony 15, Hebron

Eventually you get to the outpost at the end of your patrol, and there's this lull just before you fall asleep, which is very short, and you call home or your girlfriend and she asks you, "Hey, how are you?" "Okay." "So what did you do today?" And I don't know, suddenly you think about everything you did, like an outside observer, and to this day she doesn't have much of an idea about my service in Hebron, because I simply didn't know how to tell her what I did that day, or the past week, without feeling ashamed of myself.

That's what I mean when I say that I'm afraid to think what would happen to us if we had stayed there, because this sense of not being able to face myself and tell the person I'm closest to in the world, being unable to tell her what I had done, for me this is the worst discredit. This is how I sum it up.

Testimony 16, Hebron

... Not always but mostly. I mean if you are already inside the home, you go through it. The purpose of the search eventually – and we were also told why it's done this way – a bunch of lefties from our unit would come along and ask, "Why just go into rooms and homes and stuff?" We were told: "Listen, the layout of Hebron makes it impossible for us to create a borderline such as settlements have, for example, in the northern West Bank, where they are fenced in. So terror here can emerge out of any home. So what we do, is to random-check everyone." Now what does random-check mean? For this to be effective, it has to take place at times when everyone is already at home. So it's nighttime. Meaning that harassment here is supposedly just a 'side-effect', and it is, but eventually this too, as I see it, was a goal in itself. For at the end of the day the objective is also to sow fear. Make everyone know that the army can appear at any moment. An army patrol can show up anytime and search a home.

Testimony 17, Hebron

Being a TIPH (Temporary International Presence at Hebron) observer is really a bad scene. Here's another classic example of having a shitty time in Hebron. TIPH regularly get a 'warm reception'. Whenever they come down from Abu Sneina (neighborhood), they are target for a stone or two at their car. Extra-special.

By the settlers?

Sure. Simply for being TIPH.

And what do you do about it?

I can just repeat what I told one of them. I'll do it in Hebrew. He goes: "Stones have just now been thrown at me."

Where do you meet him?

He shows up. Comes back to Gross (outpost). I go, "Yes, I know. That's why I was summoned here." Then I tell him, "Listen, you know that these are kids under the age of 14 so there's nothing I can do." And the, in these very words: "I know, I just wanted you to realize that." Like, he already knows and there's nothing to do about it, absolutely nothing.

So what are the procedures you're given, generally, regarding the settlers?

Nothing. Ask my deputy company commander, who's really dying to do something about them, what the procedures really are...

... Any time TIPH or CPT (Christian Peacemaking Teams) activists approach me – before we absolutely prohibited any leftist or such activists enter Avraham Avinu settlers, once they went in there and I told them: "Do me a favor, don't. I can't be responsible for what could happen to you in there." The funniest incident was when this group, I mean all of the CPT activists came through, twenty of them, and I was commander at Gross and I go: "What are you doing here?" You can't mistake them, with their CPT and those awful red caps they have, so "What are you doing here?" and they go, "Why, is there a problem?" I ask them, "Did you coordinate this with anyone? Did you inform anyone you were walking around here?" A huge group, I mean you can't really hide such a thing.

I was really concerned about their safety.

Where were they walking, at the wholesale market?

No, just plainly no the 'David Route' which you know as Shuhada Street.

Are there any special instructions regarding the Bnei Avraham tour groups?

Bnei Avraham (a group of activists that conducts guided tours in Hebron) arrive, and they are not supposed to enter anywhere in Avraham Avinu neighborhood settlement.

I'm dying to know how we got to the point where a Jew is not allowed to walk around Jewish public space. For leftists...

There's an instruction forbidding them to enter Avraham Avinu?

Yes. There's an explicit instruction forbidding leftist activists and international organizations from entering Beit Hadassah, Avraham Avinu and other such settlements.

Testimony 18, Hebron

We were on patrol, going way out of our assigned borders. Never mind.

Why?

Because we were always extending our patrol range. So no one will know where we were. Some of us kept clubs in our vests. It would get to the point where we'd be walking down the street, patrolling, suddenly stop a vehicle, just for the sake of it, stop it, check it out, break doors and such, not really gentle. Smash up the door from inside. Maybe they're hiding weapons.

Who decided that now they stop and search vehicles?

Just like that. Soldiers. Not even necessarily the squad-commander. Whoever did, it was alright. "Smash it", he'd say. "Go wild."

The squad-commander?

Most vicious patrols were with him. There was this patrol which included the most vicious guys in our platoon. So they went out, and suddenly stopped this car. Someone came out and announced, "I've got to reach the hospital in a hurry", like really pressured. We couldn't care less. Get back in the car. Yelling at him. "What's with this talking?" So they got at him, beat him to a pulp. The father wants to get out of the car, and as he does, an elderly man, someone took out his club and – boom! smashed the windshield. I'm telling you, really smashed it. A whole mess started out there. The guy was forced inside, with clubs.

Who?

It was a man, about 20-years old. Something like that. The guy who shouted "We're in a hurry to get to the hospital. I've got an aunt to visit there", I don't know.

Forced inside where?

A house. Nearby. We were just going in for a mapping. So he was forced in, with these iron clubs, and beaten to a pulp.

Calves?

Yes. I said... They had absolutely no pity on him.

The whole patrol goes in?

Sure. Everyone goes in for a search, two secure on the outside.

What about traffic?

What do we care about the traffic? Let him block it, think anyone cares? It got to the point where as far as we were concerned, let the whole place go up in flames. Just like that.

So how did this incident end?

They broke him. They told him: "If once more you dare talk to the army, you realize what'll happen to you." "Sure, sure." He was already in tears. After having been clubbed in the ribs, too. I think he ended up in the hospital. He understood the message and they released him. Released him with a smashed up car, after taking the car apart, too.

Testimony 19, Hebron

I was on commander duty at 4-5 on a Saturday. 4-5 commander on Saturday is simply standing there at the post that day, and this is what I note for myself: your mission is to protect Palestinian homes from little, vicious Jewish children. Period. That's the mission there on Saturdays. That's when they pass along, a whole bunch of about ten kids, and you have to be something like their adult accompanier. The kids are terrible, really. A horror. The parents know, okay? We couldn't do a thing. Somehow they instill such hatred in their kids. They arrive at this junction of four buildings between the 4-5 and the Tenuvah posts, to the 'Tenuvah triangle', literally shutting off the Palestinians' electricity switches and turning on the water and cursing a Palestinian child who happens to be passing just then. All I did there for six hours was accompany little children from point A to point B. And you have no choice.

... At Abed roadblock I see a Palestinian woman going out, and immediately I say: "Wait a second". I turn around and take the risk to make sure that going through that

crowd she'll come to no harm. I stop her there, turn, and in the meantime two (settler) children approach her, "Hey, hey..." holding their torches, getting close to her, joking like this: "Look Palestinian woman! Fire! Fire!" I am standing watching them. "Go away, little nasty kids before I step all over you!" Like really, it reached such an extent... I don't know where they learn so much hatred. I get down from one of my posts and there's this four-year old child asking, "Have you killed an Arab already?" A three-four-year old child plays in the sand and asks me this. I ask him: "Why, child, what happened?" "Arabs beat me up" he answers. And I go, "What? Who hit you?" Then I understand that he wasn't actually hurt, but someone got it into his head that some Arab hurt him sometime in history, something that didn't even happen. Where does so much hatred come from? It's really, that of the things that most... They're being filled with so much hatred.

Testimony 20, Hebron

We would go on these revenge missions.

Against whom?

Palestinians who threw stones at us.

But you don't really know who throws stones?

Other kids inform on them. We catch them, beat them to a pulp, kids who were nearby, until they lead us to their homes. And you identify them, see them from a distance through the weapon's optic sights.

From what distance?

From a hundred meters you can recognize a person, so you catch him later, you know it was him.

How do you remember?

By his shirt. But they often change clothes right away. I recall we'd catch them, grip their hands, see if they were dirty, with soil and stuff, if they had thrown stones.

Right after the stone-throwing?

Yes, straight away. Or sometimes on the next day, so we weren't sure, but we were told that this was the one, so it was he.

What about women, what did you do to women?

Not too much, to tell you the truth. That's already more out-of-bounds.

Everyone agreed on that?

Yes. That was the limit. Like that was something we still had to respect. There's was this talk: "What, she's a woman, still got to respect them, even if they're repulsive and all, still you have to respect them." I mean, once you hurt a woman... Once we did a heavy 'disturbance'.

You did a 'disturbance' (disturbing public order)?

We did it. Made it happen. We caught some kid, his mother came to pick him up straight away. We wouldn't let her have him. A whole argument started with her over him: "We're not giving him back to you, he threw stones." "No! No!" She started shoving soldiers. One of them slapped her on the spot. Straight out. Right away the whole family came out of the house. You know how it is, a mother, a woman, if you hurt a woman – there's nothing you can do. So the riot started. The woman slapped him back and a whole fight started, chaos... There were many such cases actually, come to think of it. A mother comes to pick up her child, does not get him back, he came to rat on someone, she gets it, she's afraid he'll inform, and catches him: "What, no way!" Move, where is he? He is slapped in front of her, she starts a fight with the soldiers, boom! Some one slaps her and all hell breaks loose.

Testimony 21, Hebron

Listen, you can't do it. This is not something you should subject kids to. So much power. It corrupts their mind. They begin to look at things in a totally distorted way. Also, you know, you keep shutting off so much, that suddenly that's what reality becomes for you. Then you suddenly find yourself at the Jerusalem Central Bus Station and you're all... Like 'hey, what's all this?'

How did the transition affect you?

From Hebron to where? To Jerusalem? Look, it's so close. I mean, how far is it, a 50- minute, 40-minute drive, another world altogether.

Different how?

First of all it's a city. Okay, so is Hebron but here it's a real city. Not something that looks like a giant village. It looks like a city, with buses and pedestrians, mainly Jews. Whites. We are whiter than they are, what can you do. It's amazing. Suddenly

everyone's speaking Hebrew instead of Arabic, people. Not just your buddies. Everyone is talking Hebrew, you understand everyone fine and you're going home, too. It's like living in two worlds. You get here, come home or even just to the Central Bus Station, you get on a bus going home, and it's so good. Cut. Okay, we stop.

Stop what?

Stop everything that's behind us. Everything going on in Hebron. In the army. Now it's stopped. Like I'm a different person. You're a different person... All the time you're just, during arrests too, you don't sleep for two days and then you get sent to make arrests, and you go: Why do I have to do that? Go, two of you, shoot him in the head, leave us in peace. What do you need to arrest him for? You haven't got any energy left. Listen, sometimes it's really hard to do these switches. Especially as you have to put your feelings on 'pause', like on your sound system, some two-three weeks, and then you're on the bus back, and press 'play' again and start rolling. Suddenly you can love and even be much softer to people. Not so tough, even to your buddies, you are much more immune to your own feelings.

Testimony 22, Hebron

At some point a really effective solution was found to make them stop throwing stones. Say a kid was caught throwing stones. First off, if you brought him to his father, he'd get a real beating. The father would beat the kid. But if a kid was caught and the patrol was summoned, the kid would be put on the patrol jeep, driven to the other end of town, then thrown out and he'd have to cross the whole city on foot and get a beating on top of that.

In the jeep?

In the jeep, on the way, all the time.

Slaps? Kicks? What?

All of the above. We have a guy, called ***, he was on a patrol, got off the jeep for a second, someone yelled at him "your mother's a..." The guy took off his helmet, hit someone in the face with it. Really tore it apart. And there were beatings with sticks.

What sticks

Wooden sticks, like the handle of a 5-kg. hammer, or an ax.

You had sticks in your vests, too?

We confiscated them, from shops and such.

You mean a hammer.

No, without the hammer-head. Not the metal, just the actual stick. We'd walk with that, like "seniority clubs". Later too... What's the big deal? The kid gets beaten by the patrol, then thrown out at the other end of town, and he has to go through guard posts, pillbox positions, checkpoints. So he gets beaten on the road as well. Through Gross and Avraham Avinu (settlement outposts) where he gets it too. So it's the whole way home, he doesn't just have to walk, he has to get beaten all the time.

What age-groups were you arresting?

From thirteen-year olds to fifty. More, sixty-year olds.

A sixty-year old man?

No, especially young men. Around thirty or so. The older men are usually the ones trying to calm them down.

Testimony 23, Hebron

The Shaharabati family home is right next to the sandbox of the Jewish settlers in Hebron. It's the Israeli government that's funding the construction of that house. First off. Consequently, of course, it's the Jewish settlers who shattered his house. Actually, the whole yard there is surrounded by a wall, that's what separates the Jewish settlement from them. I was on 'patrol-30', about to finish my shift, and right that morning during my shift, construction begins. People are let in through gate "4-5", through gate 4 and from there to his house. That same time, the mobile command unit stands next to the construction site all those hours. Just as we go in, we look up, and I don't recall who it was that suddenly said, "Oh, shit." One of the big-shot settler women of Hebron, her house, her window looks straight down into the Shaharabati yard. So she starts: "Here comes the Palestine Defense Forces", just pacing around the window. "Oh my, oh my, oh my". As if someone would hear her, the construction has started. So I change my patrol because at that moment we knew there would be horrible friction, this whole bit with the Shaharabati house. So 'patrol 30' had to be there, and if not 'patrol 30', then standby squad A and such. So we get back to

the post, change roles, becoming standby squad B. Then all hell breaks loose. From egg-throwing to stone throwing into that yard, naturally all done by Jewish settlers. Hitting policemen, hitting anyone in sight. They hit one of my sergeants with an egg right on his helmet. The funniest thing – funny? – is that I suddenly hear my platoon commander on the radio, yelling: Stones, stones, stones. Boom. They (settlers) just came with a pile of stones in crates and threw them right down into the yard.

These are the same people who invited you all for Friday night dinner (Sabbath meal)?

Again, that's the whole point. They're the ones who differentiate our being the defenders there, from our active duties. That's the weirdest thing about them. Unlike other settlers, where the the 'defense forces' have taken charge and all that, they really differentiate. Only there. It's these settlers who really appreciate being protected, on the one hand, and on the other hand, they... I can't explain it.

How long did this thing go on?

Can't remember if it was an hour, maybe less. Some Jewish women began to climb up to one of the posts, I don't know, to try and occupy our post. Really weird stuff.

What are your instructions for such a case?

Just get to a certain spot, and then we were directed. Always when it came to rioting, whether Arabs or Jews, it was best to have our orders from as high up the ranks as possible. So you start by getting through to the deputy battalion commander, and lots of police. We get there, the event's over. And that work day, too, is over.

Anyone arrested?

No.

Did you enter Avraham Avinu (settlement)? Climb up to the roof? Talk with the family, with the father, the mother? Did you yell at the children?

Nothing. Can't do anything to them. At the end of the day, you're empty-handed. Even the Border Patrol recon unit that arrived didn't really dare handle them. I don't know why.

What do you mean when you say that you wouldn't dare?

I don't know if it's really the daring, exactly. No one wants to open this and arrest people there. I don't know the official reason for all these problems. On the one hand I realize why we deal with it, because we're not the police, and we're supposedly authorized to arrest anyone we want, but yes, sure.

You're told that you're authorized?

Yes. We're told that, and it's just one big joke, really. That's also what the brigade commander and his deputy have said to us, but it means nothing.

Did you ever arrest anyone (of the settlers)?

No.

How do you respond when the brigade commander says it?

We just don't get it. Nothing of what we're being told. You can't actually use what they tell you. We get there, it's over. Then I meet that famous doctor (one of the Hebron settlers, the physician of the Jewish settlement in Hebron), in Avraham Avinu, he goes: "You and your games, you Palestinian-army..." The same person goes: "Last time it ended with a wounded man, and this time too. The Jews," this is how he said it, "the Jews won't let one single brick be laid in the Shaharabati house". He wrapped up the whole thing. "The Jews won't let one single brick be laid in the Shaharabati house" and just went on. I checked out the story. Apparently, half-a-year or a year-and-a-half ago - forgot which - there was this case where two Palestinians were wounded, one seriously and the other lightly. And that was the end of that. The Shaharabati case.

Testimony 24, Hebron

Were there no shootings in Hebron?

Not live ammunition. Demonstration-dispersal means. Plenty of those.

What do you mean?

Teargas. Rubber-coated bullets. Stun grenades.

Against demonstrators?

They (Palestinians) would throw stones at us. It was a kind of game for the kids there, to pass the time, and you go with their flow because it passes time for you too. They throw stones, we throw teargas canisters, rubber ammo, throw stones back at them.

Would you provoke them?

Sure. There were cases where guys would catch them, say one of the guys spoke Arabic, he'd catch a child and tell him: "If you don't start throwing stones now, I'll fuck you all.' To pass the time.

You wanted him to throw stones?

Yes. He and his buddy throw stones, then you shoot teargas, rubber bullets. Fun. One

day there was this really big demonstration, and the mobile command unit showed up and all that, all hell broke loose. It was a heavy demonstration. We climbed on top of a house, some six stories high, and looked. Four of us went into the house, up to the roof, two stayed downstairs, hiding in the corner. We'd tell them on the radio, "See that kid in the red shirt?" Yes. "He's throwing stones." Okay, they catch the kid, bring him upstairs. Then one of the guys who speaks Arabic really well starts interrogating him.

What's there to interrogate?

Plenty. Why are you throwing stones, who are you, what does your brother do, all that stuff. Rough him up a little, let him go. I mean, tie his hands up, put his coat over his eyes. Sometimes you forget he's with you and then he bumps into some lamp on the way or misses a step and trips down the stairway a little.

Testimony 25, Hebron

I had another horrible incident. I was on 'patrol-30' and then one of the Palestinians went up to (post no.) 38, the passage between the casbah and the Jewish settlement. He comes up and tells us: "My house is being blasted". Stones and such. I ask him what he's talking about. He lives on 'Gold road'. That's actually the street below Beit Hadassah. Then there's the Small Shalala and the big Shalala. The Gold Road is all closed except for the very end, with a building situated right next to Beit Hadassah. All its windows are welded shut of course. The army has sealed its windows in the direction of Beit Hadassah so they won't see what goes on there, but Beit Hadassah settlers see their wall. I come there, and see his house. He has these two rooms and a bedroom. His whole family is standing outside, trembling. Suddenly we notice that at the corner of the metal sheeting a hole was simply broken through from the other side with a 5-kg. hammer. The Jews.

... Every stone thrown against these iron plates booms really loud. And that happens in the bedroom. That case really made me furious. I called my company commander, really angry, I couldn't get him on radio so I used... Then he goes: "Just remember one thing: when you talk to the settlement security guy, remember he's one of ours." He understood why I was so angry, he was also really nervous in this situation. You come

and see this gaping hole they made with a heavy hammer in the metal plating.

I want to understand, they actually broke a hole in the wall?

They broke a hole in the wall and stoned their windows. That really made me mad.

What did you do, summon the police?

I called the guy responsible for security in the settlement. We get there and I'm coming from Beit Hadassah, met up with their Beit Hadassah patrol, tell them what happened. In the meantime I see a bunch of little kids standing on the side of the road: "Hey, we boomed their house!" and they're all blissfully happy, glowing. At that moment I just wanted, I don't know what I wanted to do to these children, because they were so delighted to have vandalized the house, as if they had actually done the best deed in the world. It's one of the most irritating incidents I had. Such a family...

Why did you call settlement security? Is that the procedure?

That was the procedure. Call settlement security.. And of course the police. But until the police gets there, it could take a decade. Obviously.

The settlement security guy is the first to arrive?

The first to arrive.

What did he say when he came?

He looks, and goes, "Okay, I know." That's it.

Did he have a word with the kids?

Could be. I don't know.

What is the authority vested in the head of local settlement security?

I have no idea. He is a good guy, nice, supports the army and all, but he is still an insider of that community.

Where does he live? Beit Hadassah?

He lives in one of those neighborhoods. Yes. And he simply, I have no idea what to call this farce. After all he would not do anything to people of his own community.

But he does have the authority, the responsibility?

He is subject to the Ministry of Defense, that is his authority.

He is the first person to turn to in an incident?

Depends what kind of incident.

Something like this?

He, and the police. Him, because he is a local, he can talk to the children. After all, what can you do about a child who is less than fourteen years old. You've got nothing to go on. So maybe there were 15-16 year-olds.

And if it's someone over fourteen?

Well, what of it?

You do nothing. And how do you feel about it?

What can I do to them?

Testimony 26, Hebron

What kind of special missions would you undertake?

We'd pick out a vehicle and get on. Throw everyone out of the car and begin to ride around in Hebron dressed in civilian clothes. No one could tell we're soldiers.

Who would drive?

The cab driver. We'd hold a gun to him and he'd drive and keep mum.

Where would you get off?

Wherever he'd say there was action. We'd ask him: Where do people hate soldiers the most? "No, no..." Wham, slam. A few slaps on his face. "Okay, I'll take you." He'd take us to places from which we wouldn't know how to get back.

So how did you get back?

Same way. He'd drive us.

You go out on patrol, ride a cab.

Get on a cab, tell the driver: take us to where there are a lot of people, where they'd riot, where they hate us.

So you get off the cab and what do you do?

The driver is ordered to stick close to one of the soldiers, who takes his car keys from him, and to keep quiet. So the patrol proceeds with the cab driver. Eventually we get back to the cab and drive back.

What other kinds of missions did you have?

All kind of different ideas. We'd keep coming up with new ideas. Fresh.

Who would think them up?

We always sit and think together what to do to attract fire. To take down armed resistants. That's what we focused on for three years: how to help the platoon succeed in catching arms and taking down armed men.

Testimony 27, Hebron

My company commander once thought he'd manage – it was the most ridiculous attempt – to close up the post's guard shack and not let the residents exit through there but through Beit Romano settlement (the interviewee relates to the company post in Hebron called 'installations' where several Jewish families reside). So that it wouldn't be their own gate. He thought, and I emphasize this term, thought it would work. Then he got yelled at by... Don't remember the name of one of those settlers. Our soldiers at the guard shack got yelled at: "Your mother etc..!" My deputy company commander got a real talking-to from him: where his mother was born and where she can go.

What do you mean?

It was really, those are the descriptions I recall: your mother so and so and your grandmother so and so and you can go there and there. Finally the Jewish settlers agreed for us to keep a list of names at the guard shack, of whoever is authorized entry or not. And that was more or less it, that case.

Why was it the company commander who decided?

Because he decided that the guard shack was actually a soldiers' post, and no civilians should pass there, but rather use the Beit Romano entrance, a civilian gate.

And why do they want to use that passage specifically?

It's more convenient for them. Why should they make the whole detour if they can go straight through?

But they do have a way out?

Sure.

But they cross...

Through the guard shack.

And they actually hang around the army post?

They cross it. Which is pretty strange. But listen, it's a weird post from this point of view. Say you have a little kid there from those homes, who's really cute, and he comes along, skipping, and plays with the soldiers. It's an unusual situation for the army.

And what explanation were you given? Why this situation?

It was never discussed. They're there. Period.

Six caravans?

Yes. Nice families, except for that one man. Who, since that case, has been the most... He has exploded on several occasions. Once delivery guys were bringing groceries, and they were not allowed to use the guard gate.

Where were they from?

From the grocery store in Kiryat Arba, they'd use the guard gate. So he started: "What, you're not letting them bring me food? It's for me, that's who it's for. What about your grandmother, your father..." Our soldiers, we're yelling: Why are you yelling at the soldiers? Yell at us, we're the commanders here. "What about the grandmother of the guard and the aunt of the ***?"

Swearing at them?

Yes. Shamelessly. And really, when he swore at the deputy company commander, that was fine. Or at me. Okay. Or the squad commanders. But not the guard! He just received his orders.

But at the end of the day, they go on using the guard gate.

That's it. Now we're back to using the name-list of families who can, and those who can't. Okay.

And the groceries?

Get through. The guard gate is closed. Up till now, an opening would be left at the guard gate. My company commander simply said, we'll close it all the way, so now he opens and closes it.

Testimony 28, Hebron

Listen, there are beatings all the time. Constant beatings... Thinking back, it's really bad. Things that I did, things I didn't do - I have to deal with them. I have to live with them. I'm certainly not proud of it. Even ashamed. Very ashamed, to tell you the truth. It's not something I see in any kind of positive light.

... We caught, we were on our way back from a patrol, and saw someone in a cab – saw him through the windshield – hiding something, making a motion to conceal something. We stopped the cab. There were three people inside, the driver and another two young guys in the backseat. There had just been an attempted stabbing of a soldier at the Cave of the Fathers, or something like that. In short, we got them out, searched the cab, found a knife. Not a kitchen knife. A knife ideal for stabbing. We separated the two young guys and began to interrogate them. We asked: "Whose knife is that?" They said they didn't know, not this, not that. We brought

them together again, and said: "Listen, we're off. We come back in two minutes, and then you'll tell us whose knife that is. If not, we're arresting both of you." Okay, we left and returned.

Did you watch over them?

Yes. We went about ten meters off so they could talk in private. "Well, whose knife is that?" One of them who was standing closer to us says, "I don't know whose knife it is." So his friend in back goes like that with his finger – pointing to the other. They were very frightened. We were excited too, about a soldier almost being stabbed, and then us finding a knife.

Did it show traces of blood or anything?

No. It hadn't been used. So we released the guy who told on his friend, and we asked the other one, "Why the knife? We know it's yours. Are you lying to us? You want to tell us this is for cutting salad? What are you, an idiot?" "No, no, it's for my mother." He really got on our nerves. So he was gripped and beaten a little, really, just some punches in the ribs, nothing in the face. Suddenly the the rest of the patrol got wind of it. We keep asking him, "Why the knife?" Everyone jumped him. *** guys with vests, and sticks. They began to hit him on the knees and fell on the ground, then they started kicking him. Really kicking him, like wanting to tear him apart, and hit him with sticks on his back, on his head. Hit him to a pulp. Like you see in the movies when a bunch of guys stand over someone and really mash him. Then one began to strangle him, you know, choke him with both hands. And the guy, he was 17-18 years old, begins to cry out "Mama, Papa!" And the other guy chokes and chokes him, and you see the guy start to go blue, and half-conscious. So the other guys realized this and started pulling the strangler away, pulling him back. And he wouldn't let go, he was screaming: "You're trying to murder us, eh? Coming to stab me? Son of a bitch, you come to stab me!" and keeps strangling him. "I'll kill you!" He was into some kind of frenzied trance. Normally he was not a violent person, really. This guy is the best person I know. And he doesn't usually beat up Arabs, this is something very exceptional that he did. Like some demon got into him, a madness. He choked and cried "I'll kill you! I'll kill you!" And we keep pulling him away, catching him in the legs and belly. Think about it, the soldier is already up in the air, but his hands keep their strangle-hold on the Arab's neck, and we pull. Like someone hanging onto a post. We pull him in the air, pull with all our might. We try running with him so he'll let the Arab go, and that makes the Arab go up in the air too. Another two keep kicking him and *** yells at them: "Enough, leave him alone. You'll kill him." And they: "Shut up, you..." and they keep at him. Finally we managed somehow, we hit the choking soldier's

hands, caught his elbows, we really hurt him. We gave him a blow with a stick on his arm, on his elbow so he'd let go. He was locked on him like some pit-bull. Finally we dragged him away. There was this sudden release and he flew off out of our grip, the soldier. We got the others to back off. The guy was lying on the ground, I don't know whether he was still conscious or not. Hardly, if at all. That's it. It was a sick scene. Really. Then I realized that people there got really screwed up in their mind.

Did others go crazy like that?

Everyone. Everyone's mind got fucked up there. Your whole grasp of reality gets distorted. After having such total control of so many lives, you can do anything you want to them: you can steal from them, sleep in their house, anything. Take their car. You really can. Do anything. Anything. Anything.

Testimony 29, Hebron

Do you recall an arrest?

Sure. I still remember arrests where we'd take apart entire homes, but one case was really the ultimate of this: we were on an arrest mission and the GSS agent tells us, "Check if there are arms in this house", indicating the house we were in. We broke the plaster walls.

Who said there were arms there?

The GSS (General Security Services). We tore apart the plaster walls, everything, ripped out shutters, left nothing whole. We cut sofa upholstery to shreds, tore them all up. I tell you, nothing was left whole in that place. The family stood there, crying. We found nothing. We checked everything. We went up to the roof, broke everything you can think of. You could say the house no longer stands.

Did you find anything?

No. Suddenly, the GSS tell us on our radio: "Wrong house. It's two houses down, on the right." The whole house was already smashed. Everyone cracks up laughing. We go two houses over. There we found arms. But we destroyed a house, I tell you.

A nice home. Everything, everything was shattered. We left nothing... Wow, what we used to do on arrests, I tell you we took houses apart. Any plaster walls – we'd break them.

Television sets?

Free for all. People broke all the plastic. The glass is a bit tougher.

How does an arrest go?

Like all arrests. You know. Close on the sides, a scanning squad goes in, breaks up the whole house.

The people stay inside?

They're all concentrated in one room, or all taken outside.

Anyone stands guard over them?

The guys outside, and then the house is scanned with one of them that is made to come with us.

What does he say when you break things up?

"No, no". And we go, "We're not asking you. Shut up. You're a terrorist, why are you even talking to us?" That's how we talk to him.

.... There were lots of Arab-haters among us. Even the lefties already got to the point where they were sick of it all, so fuck off, do what you want, what do I care...

The lefties in the company did not take an active part in this?

What do you mean? They knew exactly what went on, the lefties in the platoon. Once, a leftie opened his mouth, and the others told him: You wimp, you this you that, really badmouthed him. So he goes: Okay, what the hell, I don't know what happens, I don't care. Do what you want.

Testimony 30, Hebron**So how was it, being back in Hebron again?**

To tell you the truth, it was scarier. As for moral scruples, these no longer played the same role as the first time I was there. A year later the reaction was also strong, but you got accustomed really fast. I that even – let's go back for a second to my first round in Hebron – the first time we conducted a search, we were in the casbah, patrolling. We were searching a guy: stand there, hands on the wall. That's how you search. I was in shock. I said: Wow! What's this? By what right? What is this? Just somebody, not anyone you saw had anything on him. Random. I did this on my next patrol, too. *** came along, he was new, it was his first patrol. For me it was already the second or third

patrol. We conducted a search and I saw that ***, he too was in shock. And I was, like, okay: What's with you? Get out of the shock. Seems normal to me, already. Forget if it's right, legal or not. Forget the moral issue. I mean when you search a person, there's something essentially wrong about the situation. At first it bothered me, after two days it no longer did. And I saw this happening to *** too. It reminded me of myself.

Or when we'd always jump from roof to roof in the casbah, and go through houses, enter them, go up the stairs, and always peep inside to take a look at the rooms. At some point it bothered me. I say: What gives me the right to look into someone's home? What, just my being a soldier, carrying a weapon, gives me the right to peep? I mean now, would you just come in and someone would be peeping in on you... Slowly you lose it, your sensitivity is gone. My second time in Hebron was much scarier because I was already a commander and responsible for soldiers. It's much more frightening when you're on patrol as a commander than as an enlisted man. It's different. As a commander, you keep thinking: Wait, now this and that happens. What do I do? I carry the responsibility. As a soldier I have my commander who tells me what to do. As a sergeant I was much more worried about my men. Later, in retrospect, after my discharge, sometimes I recall it. I say: hey, how come I didn't act with them the way I did in that other incident with the sergeant and picking up the bag? (The interviewee refers to an incident he describes in another part of the interview, in which a patrol-sergeant used a Palestinian passer-by as a human shield and ordered him to pick up a bag suspected as an explosive charge). How come I didn't do something similar, to shock them, make them think about it and not just accept the way things are.

Did they seem to accept them?

In a way, yes. You know, they all do. Anyone who's there ends up accepting things, you can't help it. Unless you're not there.

To what extent do you accept it, yourself?

It's not that you actually condone it. Like 'I'm going to do this and then I get to go on leave'. It's not like fun or anything, but you accept it: this is the way things run, I'll swallow it.

Testimony 31, Hebron

We would go to different places, see a Hamas flag, out in an area that is not even ours, and we'd say: No way. We're getting there over there. We'd go, trash entire households... We'd do whatever we wanted. It was really bad.

Why did you persist?

To pass the time. Can't help it. If you don't do this, you'll die sometime of... No, it's impossible. Like, people have really had enough of this all, and just want to get something out of it for themselves. I mean, what do I get from being in Hebron like a son of a bitch? At least I take stuff home.

What would they take?

Car loudspeakers, stereo systems for cars – people would take those.

Testimony 32, Hebron

How was Hebron, what were your missions?

Well, basically there are *** posts, I think. I'm talking about *** (a company post in Hebron), not Hebron in general. Some *** posts and one patrol.

Patrol-30?

Yes, that's what it's called. But it's 12-hours a shift. Although sometimes they did more, suddenly they do something special like a 36-hour patrol. Things like that. Basically that's all we did.

Take over houses, stuff like that?

That's it. There are rest periods during a patrol. You can't walk around for 12 hours inside the casbah – so there are breaks. Say our platoon, we always took our breaks in abandoned houses. But still you got other platoons doing it in people's homes. I think especially at night, maybe because at night sometimes the break are longer so you get to nap. There was this comander who would always go to people's houses. I even remember our guys rather liked it. It was a thrill of sorts. This kind of life is so gray, that even the most screwed up things give you some kind of color. So that did it for them, a bit.

For a long while?

In people's houses? Could even be just a few hours. You know the procedure. You get everyone together in one room. You take a different room and stay there.

Do you think this was an operational necessity?

Not one-hundred percent operational, no. The fact is that there were countless abandoned houses and we got along fine without the inhabited ones. I can say that there was absolutely no operational necessity for this. Perhaps deterrence, but that is just bullshit in my opinion. We sometimes checked houses, especially if something had happened. After some kind of incident, if a molotov cocktail was thrown somewhere, or something like that, then some deterrent action would take place, but I don't know if the idea was to find the perpetrators, because it was pretty obvious that this would be pointless, but rather a kind of deterring act: Look, we react. A kind of reaction would be, say, to go into all the houses and sometimes we actually had orders to "trash them". Go in, trash the whole house. Stuff like that. My company commander especially liked to do this kind of thing.

Were there many incidents, was this area hot?

Relatively not. Usually pretty quiet. When we went in there would be disturbances and incidents.

Were there stabbings?

Stabbings? I don't remember. There may have been. My memory's a bit blurred. There were many 'disturbances' (of 'public order') and molotov cocktails and stuff were thrown at us. It was in the beginning, and then there was a quiet period, and then again, towards the end. We came to another round and there was some noise. I don't if shooting in the air is necessarily connected, but again – molotov cocktails, and an incident where a burning tire was rolled... Not a tire, a (cooking) gas tank was rolled towards the Border Patrol post. It didn't blow up. Another one was rolled, it didn't blow up either. And then came – oh, that's the stabbing you mean – a guy came running amoc at them with a knife, so they killed him. That was the most...

And after each such incident, you were told there's a procedure of reaction to 'disturbances', to trash the casbah? Policy or whim?

No. There was this policy and "let's show them we're in charge" and such. Say the (order) sheet would say that we're in a state of threat of incursion or something like that. That one of the houses was broken into. So the procedure would be specific: you block here and here and there, no one coming out, no crossing these points, but beyond that there were always additional orders, I don't know, like detain them, or stuff like that, trash their homes.

Did that come from the company commander?

No, could even be the battallion commander.

The battallion commander would say “trash their homes?”

Yes. I can't say it with full certainty but it did come from on high, not from our direct commander.

Testimony 33, Hebron

... We were there with vests, the works, on the roofs, just waiting for someone to come along and do something silly and then we'd beat him to a pulp. Once it nearly backfired at us. I don't know, it got to the point, a stone was thrown at us. And we ganged up and beat him like some idiot children. Then suddenly a whole clan came down on us. We were surrounded. The whole platoon was ther then, shooting in the air, all hell broke loose. Really stupid. I mean, we were such idiots.

Your faces would be masked?

Yes, this kind of balaklava, which we'd pick up from the Palestinians. We'd find them in shops and such... We'd trash the stores loking for firecrackers, stuff.

Bullies going into a neighborhood, begin to turn everything upside down?

Yes.

Beat up everyone you see on the street?

No, why? Go into a shop, ask “Got any firecrackers?” in Arabic. Some of us know Arabic really well. Like they're fluent. They'd talk with them in Arabic. The people would notice from your accent that you're not local. So they'd bring out these plastic guns that shoot these little bullets.

Bullets or caps?

No, these little plastic pellets. We'd go into shops, boom boom, shoot them with these too. We'd take them in large quantities. Confiscate them. We'd come back with bags full. Lots of stuff. Anything. Didn't leave them anything.

Where is it all?

We would take it all to the company base. People would take stuff home. Until the deputy battallion commander came one day, saw it: what are you guys doing? What is this? We said, confiscations. They're coming at us, we're afraid to shoot them. Then he simply took it al. There was a trmie we'd have firecrackers fights in the posts. We'd take

them all from the shops. We'd ask people: Got any firecrackers? He'd go "No,no!" We'd trash his whole shop, and if we found any, that guy would be sad shape.

What would you do to the shop?

What did we do? We trashed it. We go in, ask: Any firecrackers? He'd go "No." So we'd start trashing his shop, and if we found any, he was a gonner.

So if you found it?

We'd take him somewhere, beat him to a pulp. No mercy.

With your weapons?

Clubs, everything. We had these metal clubs, that the Border Patrolmen use, they open. Some of us at the company had those.

Where did they get them?

People brought them. We also caught some in Hebron. Sticks, you know. They have those in their holidays, you know? You catch them in their cars. Like hoe-handles which are taped. We'd pick those up too. We'd beat him to a pulp, break up his whole shop, trash it. Lamps, mirrors, the works. All the snacks on the floor. Step all over them. We'd leave him nothing.

How many times did you do that?

Lots. Nearly everyday. It became a kind of routine.

Testimony 34, Hebron

It's a crazy town, Hebron. At first, when I just came to the company, I mean I was this leftie kibbutznik, Hashomer Hatzair, you learn that Arabs are human etc. etc. Really, I would fight with my mates after an arrest – we'd put the detainee in the jeep or patrol truck with us – and I'd fight with them not to beat him up. It makes you sort of apathetic eventually: beat him, don't beat him, what do I care. I don't do anything. I don't beat anyone. So go ahead and bang his head up.

You started out with the first approach you mention?

Yes, until we got up to Hebron. Until Hebron.

Hebron was the first line of duty?

No. After our first training period. Then we got to Hebron and that was like the Wild West. It's like, you know, the soldiers do patrols and it's like everything belongs to

them. You're the law. Like inside Israel there's police? That's you. You decide what's right and what's wrong.

What makes something wrong?

When you see something that's not right.

Like what?

A kid walking around with a red rather than a black-and-white keffiyah (head kerchief). You decide it's wrong, so it's wrong.

Is this is a hypothetical example?

No. Also. Could be hypothetical. Or not.

Do you have specific cases?

Someone beats a donkey. You like animals. You think it's wrong. You saddle the guy, start riding him and whipping him with his own whip.

He was at the roadside?

Yes. A Palestinian was riding a donkey and was hitting him - according to ***, a guy on that patrol – too hard, while making it carry really heavy sacks. They stopped the fellow, told him to take off the saddle. I mean, it was no real saddle, just a sort of rag. Get on all-fours, put it on his back. Got on him, with the bullet-proof “ceramic” vest, all the gear, about 30 kg. beside the soldier's weight. “Go, move!” Whips him some. “Come on, well, how does it feel? What about a donkey, isn't that a living creature too?” He had feelings for animals, it didn't seem right to him to whip a donkey. Well, everything gets lost there, gets very very blurred.

What gets blurred?

Everything. What you're entitled to do as a soldier, and what not.

Testimony 35, Hebron

There was one incident that is, I think, still under judicial proceedings, when Jews went into the casbah. I was there.

It was to commemorate some special day?

No. It was after they claimed – Jews there claimed, I just got back from home so I don't know, but the Jews claimed that two Palestinian kids entered the Jewish settlement and then ran away or something. So the Jews there decided to take the

law in their own hands and entered the casbah the next day. Started turning stalls upside down there, I don't know, pushing people. Running wild. Until we came. That was a story in itself. We began to chase them, trying to push them out of there. We arrived, we were just on patrol so as we arrived, some of the standby forces arrived as well. The company commander was there as well with his mobile command unit. It was chaos. We were in the middle of the casbah. The casbah is built along a central main street with little alleys running off it. We tried to push them all along the main street and get them back inside the Jewish settlement, and meanwhile they tried to run away through the side alleys, disperse, run riot. There were two Jews there who'd come in armed, and that stressed us most. Jews in there with weapons, no one knew what they had in mind. Pressure was way up. I think most of them were girls, and some men. Some adult women and some girls.

So who evacuated the girls?

We did. Yes, I had to. What could I do? So they start, physically attempting to get in. People got into some short alleyway, forcing their way in, and we were told to start pushing them off. Now there was this one guy there, armed, and he seemed a reasonable fellow. ***They're all going wild, and he looked relatively... Seemed like someone we could talk to. What a mess. They were more than we were, and I said I'd try to talk to him. First he goes, "Yes, no problem, I'll help you." But it didn't help in the least.

Did they introduce themselves as any kind of official position-holders, those armed guys? Some kind of standby team?

No, but later when I talked to him, we asked him: "You came in there armed, that's not right. You came in there, and even armed. Why?" Something like that, I don't remember exactly. So he said: "No, I saw people going in so I went in to secure them" or something in that vein. Surely he had no intention to shoot anyone, but he went in and that's already something he wasn't supposed to do. So we were told to get them out. We began to run, and we were being told "Don't let them out". Something really weird. First we were ordered to get them out, then not to. A chase developed because they were running, they heard it so they were running towards the exit. We began to chase them. A really unequal chase because we're with all our gear, and I had the communications gear too, and they were running unencumbered. So I got there, there's this post at 4-5 and there were soldiers there too. So there were guys in the post and more that had already arrived. I got to... There's a narrow passage before they get out. I got there, did what I was told, it seemed strange but I did it. One woman already managed to cross, ran away, I didn't manage to catch her. Right

afterwards I was already standing there and saying, "You mustn't cross". I don't know, that's what I was told to do. I tried asking on radio what I was supposed to do now, all stressed. Finally they began to tackle me, as in a game of football. Now I am a man and they're girls, after all, I could have blocked them, but it seemed so strange, made no sense. In short, I let them through. They passed. They arrived to where three soldiers were expecting them at the passage between the casbah and the Jewish area. So I asked them: "What were you told: Are they allowed to pass or not?" They were sure, they were instructed to let everyone through. Eventually we found out they had misunderstood their orders. But the whole situation was really weird. Then they started running away and at a certain point me and another guy chased that guy with the gun. He escaped and we tried to catch him. From that moment I was no longer with everyone, I was there waiting for him. He went up. I was told to wait there in case he came down. The rest of the guys were with the other people, chasing part of them. Some they managed to catch. Even after that there was a whole chaos there, some fighting between the Jews and the soldiers. The girls there started to yell "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" Some boiling water was thrown at some soldier and, yes, they were really going crazy. And I was standing right in the middle of this place full of buildlings and one crazy woman was screaming: "Everyone, come to 4-5** and bring stones with you!" Really screaming wildly. Then there was a whole crowding of Jews and yelling, maybe even the media got there, if I'm not mistaken. Some Jews were caught and they were waiting for the police. The police got there about an hour late.

It's always like that.

Yes. That's how it all ended. I don't remember, perhaps they were released. I don't remember exactly what happened. There was a lot of swearing. At me too, as I stood there: "How come you're protecting the Arabs, not the Jews?!" stuff like that. That was a serious incident. Afterwards we were all interrogated, at the police, we gave testimonies. I don't know what happened with all that. That's how it ended up. It was a pretty severe incident.

Testimony 36, Hebron

Where did you see Border Patrolmen in Hebron?

Where didn't I? We'd go on patrols. We'd just be passing by the Cave of the Fathers, and they'd be beating up Arabs. Walk up to an Arab, get him inside the post, beat him to a pulp and get him out. Once we were on a patrol, walking towards the Cave, you know, along the Prayer Road, there's that curve, with concrete slabs... We were there, and that's where Border Patrolmen always stand, checking people. So some BPman comes along, calling out to some Arab, "Got a hard head?" "What do you mean", the guy answers. "I don't understand". "Got a hard head?" So the guy went "Yeah" just to be let alone. The Border Patrolman put on a helmet, said "Good. You got a hard head, and me, my helmet is even harder" and – boom – rammed him with his helmeted head. The guy bled. Something terrible. He was really mean.

His whole forehead?

Yes. It was one big bleeding gash. Really. You wouldn't believe he'd do it... I remember a case once, they caught some Arab, stood him.

Where?

In Hebron, too. Same areas. They're always standing there. They go: "Warm, warm". They wanted him to say "Shuwarm" (meat sandwich). So he goes "Shu?" (what?) And they'd repeat it and he wouldn't know what to say, and they'd slap him hard in his face until he could say it. They went "Warm" and every time he'd make a mistake they'd slap him again, until he said "Shuwarm". And they'd crack up laughing and then release him. You understand? "Then the Arabs understood and started saying "Shuwarm" straight away. So the Border Patrolmen would start with "Bidubidu", and the Arabs would ask again, "Shu?" and boom, there went the slaps again until they started saying "Shubidu bidu" Get it? Real assholes. All kinds of idiotic stories like that.

Testimony 37, Hebron

Once we were checking some woman. We didn't want to. They went: "No, not a woman!" We don't care. No one gets through. We delayed a woman for three hours at a checkpoint until she agreed to lift her blouse and be checked.

Which checkpoint was that?

The Pharmacy.

At night?

No. Daytime. Guys take her off to the side and say, "Lift your blouse, if you want to get through." They sat there for three hours. Finally she gave up and said, okay.

What did you ask her to do?

To lift her blouse for the check. One of the soldiers said, "What, can't she smuggle arms? If she wants to get through, she'll lift her blouse."

And she finally did?

Yes. She gave up.

There was no woman-soldier there?

Just men. No female soldiers in Hebron. As far as I know. Perhaps at the observation posts. Listen, there's plenty of bullshit.

Testimony 38, Hebron

The Shaharabati house (the home of a Palestinian family next door to the Avraham Avinu settlement), in our time, was different. At first the stopped construction there.

The fence?

No. The fence had been finished long before that. The house itself. The construction of the house was stopped while we were still there, then the ruling came from the High Court of Justice saying they had a legal approval to build, and so they (Palestinians) resumed building. So another army post was put up and there were troubles there too. First the settlers tried to disrupt work there every day, throw stones at them, and at the soldiers, they threw eggs at the soldiers and Arabs both. They really gave us a lot of trouble. They kept trying to break in. I think they even managed to break in there once and break something, and then ran away. It was really a trouble spot.

Was there an army post there?

There was our post, basically there to prevent, to protect the Palestinians. It was this real absurd situation.

Testimony 39, Hebron

There were also lots of cases of stealing from many people.

Looting?

Lots. Lots. Once we were out to locate some house, you know, there are lots of rich houses in Hebron. In short, we found cash, dollars, in one of the drawers. Crazy. The commander calls two of the senior guys of the platoon to hi, and tells them: Okay, we're cutting this money three-ways. Each of them took one-third. They left the owner just this much. They said to him: "If you talk, we'll be back to slaughter you." We got out of there.

How much money was there?

A lot. Really a lot. Something crazy. A huge sum. No one believed we'd found something like that.

And you didn't want to take any?

No. We were the kind of guys who don't want to get in trouble. We said, we don't recognize this, we don't know. Do what you want.

But petty looting was normative?

Petty looting was normal. Backgammon sets, cigarettes, everything.

You had enough room in your pouch?

We'd have these bags, a *Lowe* bag, know the type? Green, camouflage colors. Army gear. We'd take these with us on patrol. Everytime we'd come out with stuff, to gather stuff.

Electric appliances?

Everything. Whatever we wanted.

Did you take just anything?

Sure. Prayer beads, we'd lots of those, flags, as much as you want, everything we could, anything that seemd nice and fun to take. Gifts for our girlfriends, they'd pick them out of shops.

What kind of things?

All kinds of junk. Silly things. You know what we took from a shop? Elastic cloth. They had sewing threads, they have these sewing shops there. We have a military sewing division at the company base, so we took huge quantities of thread, stuff.

What does the shopkeeper say when you pick this stuff up?

"Please, don't! Please!" Shut, if you speak we kill you.

Testimony 40, Hebron

The main problem is that I came there with a different kind of mind. We hung up these flyers of 'Breaking the Silence' in the bathroom. We had a guy in our platoon who had volunteered with B'tselem (human rights organization), he brought us stuff. We really tried to be very conscious.

But you did the job?

I say this was before we got to Hebron. We were aware. The first place I encountered this kind of stuff was in Hebron. In Gaza it was, the atmosphere... In Gaza, on an everyday basis, what we did there was totally detached from the Palestinian population. In Hebron it was the first time where things really seemed insignificant. In Hebron, at installations, you are supposed to enter homes at night as a routine, just like that. Wake everyone up and throw them all into one room.

How does it happen?

How does it happen? Truth is first of all that in Hebron, the way I feel it, no one really had an idea. Our commanders, no one had any idea how this was supposed to take place. What to do, what's right, what's wrong, where to draw the line. On one of our first patrols, we picked up these three guys. We got into a house, there were these three guys, so our patrol commander decided to detain them. So we detain them, on and on, and after about an hour we find out they're collaborators. We apologize and release them. Stuff like that. No one knows who you can pick up, what you can do.

How does it go with entering a home?

It's done in two parts. There's just plain entering, like by whim. You walk and walk and walk and then go, "Okay. Let's knock on this door here. Do a search."

Why?

Because. The army says it needs deterrence. That way there won't be any terrorists in Hebron.

Says who?

The commanders. The platoon commander. I, at least, had a hard time accepting this arbitrariness. Even when things got concrete, it was still very arbitrary.

Testimony 41, Hebron

We had a guy in our unit, really screwed up. He enjoyed abuse. He once hurt someone so badly his hand had to be amputated.

What happened?

Just some Arab. I don't remember exactly what happened. The situation. There was some roughing up, they were pushing each other. Some Arab and he, I don't know, they were arguing. He stole a box of tobacco from this Arab, the soldier. And no one knew about it. You realize? No one. The Arab suddenly said, "Thieves! Thieves! I saw you!" We tried to push him away, "What do you want? No one touched your stuff!" So that soldier said, "You calling me a thief?!" No one knew what happened. He said, "You calling me a thief?!" and started beating him up, really badly. The soldiers said, hey, stop, and we caught him. But They beat him to a pulp.

Who beat whom?

The soldiers beat up this Arab. And he took a wire, that soldier. He was really screwed up. He wound up this wire around and around this guy's hand, that hand was already...

Around his hand?

Yes. I'm telling you, we tried to stop him. "No, I won't let him go, he raised his hand at me! He will be punished!" And he wound this wire around and around, and finally cut it as close as he could to the skin. We tried to cut it off for about an hour, we couldn't. It literally cut into him. His hand got blue in a second. And the guy cries "I can't feel my hand any more!" I said, he'll probably have to be amputated. We got to actually digging in with a knife to loosen it, and we couldn't. Screwed up, that soldier, really screwed up.

What did you with that Arab?

Let him go, what could we do?

With his hand in that state?

We told him, "Go to the hospital". We can't do anything.

You cut his...

We couldn't. We tried. You know how many times we tried to cut off that wire? We couldn't manage it. ***, I'm telling you, the best medic I ever saw, really soft hearted, he says to me: "I want to kill the person who did this. It's a sure amputation, if we can't get it off." A whole hour, I tell you. He went through hell with this. He says to me: "I'm a medic, I can't believe I'm letting such things happen." That's what he told me. You see what a state he got into? He tells me: "I'm ashamed of myself for being a medic and letting such things happen." He really went through hell.

Testimony 42, Hebron

There's this post in Hebron called Magen Avraham. Securing the Avraham Avinu settlement. For several nights in a row it was getting stones thrown at it, one, two three, as if...

Where from?

The area. Not sure where. Orders were to do a big operation and at night every patrol would enter a certain home in the area and we weren't told exactly what to do, but that the locals should know there was army around and not to mess with us. That's was it, roughly. That's the message.

What was the scale of this operation?

We went into a house, it was called the 'deaf house'. There were two deaf children living there. And we were told: this is the house you have to enter. The whole family – first of all, we go in at two o'clock in the morning. Knock on the door, wake up the whole family, get the father and tell him: Bring everyone into one room. They all get in one room and then, with him we go around turning everything upside down and inside out. Pick this up, move that over, get that picture down, lift the sofa, move the sofa, turn it over, let's see what you have here.

To what extent?

Those houses there are messy to begin with. I think we messed it up a lot more. Also, this situation is terribly embarrassing and very scary for the children. One of the things

I remember, especially since this is what's so specific here, we told a child to move to the other room, and he didn't want to. Our commander didn't yell at him, just spoke, but a few moments later we found out he had wet his bed and was simply terribly embarrassed, and was crying, and this whole situation for him was...

How did you relate to this?

I was terribly embarrassed.

Was it the first time you encountered a child in this state?

Yes, you could say that. There were all kinds of situations where, you know, you walk around in the streets, and me, as a guy who's worked with kids, I am used to making funny faces and stuff. They look at you as though they can't figure out what you want from them, and suddenly you realize you're there with your gear and vest and helmet and gun and you look like the scariest thing in the world. The most irritating thing about this, was that we kept telling our commander we shouldn't be there. That it was totally unnecessary, and enough and we're overdoing things and there's nothing there, nothing here. Finally, a minute before our commander said "Okay, let's go" we suddenly discovered some 12 knives hidden in all kinds of places in that house, so we didn't know what to do. He said he was selling them for food and hiding it because he knew they would be taken from him. So there was this terribly embarrassing situation there, for us and for him.

What did those knives look like?

A cross between a butter-knife and a commando knife. Somewhere in the middle.

Can I find such knives in a hardware store?

I guess so. Finally, the kid was sent to the police and released that same day. They did nothing about it. The thing is that you really can't know, you can't know a thing. And mainly you have no idea how to deal with this. One of the things that most upset me was that we did train endlessly for... I don't know, like working against obstacles in combat. A thousand and one times I'd practiced crawling, shooting after exertion, but never in my life did I have any training to talk to a Palestinian. What do I do when I go into a house, what is allowed, what is forbidden, what is right, what is wrong. What things are important to them. Perhaps it is absolutely prohibited to address a woman, I don't know. Things that I know about in my own culture, in theirs I don't. If I were to enter a religious home in Israel, I'd know more about how to behave. And everything was just terribly arbitrary.

Testimony 43, Hebron

... So there's this school. We used to provoke lots of disturbances there. We'd cause them. Go on a patrol, walk around the village, look for firecrackers. We'd get bored. Trash shops, and such, find a firecrackers, beat someone up, you know how it is. You search. You trash. Then say we want a riot? We come by a mosque, shatter the windowpane, throw in a stun grenade, big boom, then there's a 'disturbance'.

While people are inside praying?

Yes, that's possible too. Everything. It's best during prayer time. That gets them the most. You know how it is. Soldiers are bored, they want action. Some are already waiting for you with their rubber ammo, just waiting for people to come out, and start shooting rubber ammo as soon as they show up. Once we came, truth is this wasn't so planned – one of our guys comes, boom into the mosque window, and the school over there as well, broke the window... Suddenly there's a riot. In short, we came, shot rubber ammo, everyone ran back into the mosque, one guy went over there and threw in a teargas canister.

Into the mosque?

Sure. You realize what a riot broke out there? I'm telling you, I've never seen the likes of it. In Hebron we got to the point where we were boiling things up hysterically. And then the company commander was summoned, say in his mobile command unit, so there would be more non-lethal weapons for our messes. This company commander would arrive and say: identify, and shoot, aiming at the knees. Ours was such a screwed up company commander. And a real Arab-hater, too. We went out and there was a huge riot. They threw down building blocks at us from roofs and all. Really, I never such a riot in Hebron. You know, throwing stun grenades into their windows on their holiday, that upset them. So building blocks and all. He (the company commander) go mad, stopped, froze everyone. They all start to get back from the mosque, no one is allowed to pass. Old people want to go home – no go. It's already 11 o'clock at night, they've standing there for some four hours, things begin to boil. People are getting edgy, and he goes: "Okay, snipers. Get up on the roofs, soon there'll be molotov cocktails thrown". We were waiting for that. He says: "Wait, they're getting mad." He is used to playing on their nerves. "Give them time, warm them up". Some begin to push. He grips some stones, throws at people, tells them: "No one passes here." A car came, the commander took the blocks that were thrown at us from the roofs, broke them up, "Get out of here, fuck you!" and began to smash up that car. All of it, lights and all, didn't leave anything whole. Fucked up.

How did the riot story end up?

There was a real riot. We shot a lot of rubber ammo. Lots. We'd catch Arab children, take them with us, grip them like this, with the stones, like retarded kids. So children would throw stones at them, not at us.

You turned them into human shields?

Yes.

Did it work?

It works, sometimes. It depends how much you provoke them. With the mosque it was a bit difficult, because stones were being thrown at us from all directions.

The children don't try to get away? To escape?

Do you realize how badly beaten up they get? What do you mean 'escape'? You catch a kid and lock him with your rifle like this, as soon as makes a move, and he's scared to death. He only goes, "No, no, army", you know, totally scared, and he sees you're screwed up, that you couldn't give a damn and you hit him real hard. And all the stones flying, so you catch him like this, get it? We were mean. Really. I only started thinking about these things later on, that we'd really become pitiless.

Testimony 44, Hebron

There was a case with this antique sword. You know the kind, those Islamic swords hanging on the wall as an ornament. My platoon commander decided "That's a weapon". Took it. The owner begged him: "Listen, I got it as a present..." No way. This is a weapon, I'm taking it." Nothing. No one could tell him anything. The Palestinian is going to tell him what to do? What, yell at him? He can't do a thing.

(...) Who took the sword?

My platoon commander.

And then he placed it at company headquarters?

Later yes. He showed it to the company commander and then it got to headquarters, like everything else, like all these things. Or you steal so-called incitement material, and then they hang at the company headquarters.

It is not given over to some other authority?

No, it is not really looked into.

(...) Where is this sword now?

The company commander would play with it, I don't know. Fence with it.

You didn't hand it over to the General Security Services?

No.

Testimony 45, Hebron

This is the greatest frustration in Hebron. Say we were in Gaza for two weeks, just before Hebron. There was this operation, and a guy from our battallion was killed there. And the feeling was really that you were there because the situation demanded soldiers. Hebron is the exact opposite. A slap in the face, in that sense. You are there to serve a certain status. One of the most frustrating things in Hebron is that the settlers there don't give a damn about you. They'll do anything they please. Our first week there we were... There's this road that leads from the Avraham Avinu settlement to the Cave of the Fathers. Now, this was just at – I don't remember whether it was a Jewish holiday, it was some holiday – Jewish or Muslim. I don't remember. I think it was some Muslim holiday. So they made these partitions down the road, on one side of which Palestinians would walk, and on the other – Jews. Now, the number of Palestinians using that street was not just two-three times the number of Jews. I'm talking with you about hundreds every morning, for every prayer. And they walked along on their side. If let's say a Palestinian woman would walk on other side, all her people would start shouting at her. I came and told her, "Ma'am, go over to the other side." I am armed. At some point she fell silent and went over to the other side.

Who yelled at her, Palestinians?

They called out to her, "Yes, come back." They didn't want her to get make trouble. That same day you get something like a family of 10-15 Jews. And they're walking down the street, you know, free style. And I approach them and say: "Sir, listen, we've separated sides here on purpose. It's this time of year, I'm asking you to stop." And he'd reply, "Who are you to tell me?"

That's how he talked to you?

Yes. "Who are you to tell me? This is my street, my city. I do as I please here." I said: "I came here to protect you, if you don't mind." "No, I'll do as I please. You give in

to them, you're too easy on them, not tough enough." It was as though from that moment on, I decided to separate issues. Like this whole issue of accepting their coffee or not, I said: I don't them to legitimize my being there, to feel good about it. From that moment on, the settlers and I were at odds with each other, until the end of my tour of duty. I never agreed to accept anything from them, anything or any help. I said I'm not interested. They made me mad. There were several examples. There was this, a situation where a Palestinian father – again, all within the official Palestinian movement route - this father was walking alongside his son, and then four settler children showed up. "Hey, look at that, look at that!" They picked up a stone and threw it at the Palestinian child. I yell at them, the father comes to me, saying: "You see? We weren't doing a thing!" He sounds really frustrated, "Look what they're doing to us". Except for hanging my head in shame, there was absolutely nothing I could do. I am not allowed to raise a hand against settler children. I cannot threaten them with my weapon. If the situation there were reversed I don't know what would have happened.

What would have happened?

If an Arab child had lifted a stone against a Jewish child naturally we'd have to shackle him, cuff him, send him off to (interrogation), those are the instructions.

Procedure for the arrest of a suspect?

Exactly. If a child lifts a stone. What, even if a Palestinian child goes and starts talking back to me the way the Jew did, saying "Why, who are you to..." I'd have to shoot a bullet in the air, then a bullet at his legs, stuff like that. There were all kinds of incidents in Hebron. The company that replaced us told us. There was some Palestinian guy, a young man who was crazy, I mean not crazy but a bit retarded, who didn't understand why he was being yelled at. So he ended up with a bullet in his leg.

You replaced them?

Yes. It was like the biggest absurdity in Hebron. The encounter with a Jewish population that doesn't give a damn, throwing their garbage right into the Palestinian market.

You saw them throwing?

You could see, grocery crates and all. The absurd difference in the looks of Avraham Avinu settlement compared to the whole city. In a way we were really lucky to be there for just two weeks. Otherwise we'd...

Testimony 46, Hebron

As for myself, what I remember most from Hebron, what most amazed me, is that you were simply at liberty to – at liberty? well, forbidden but actually permitted – to do anything at all. Anything you pleased. You're the law.

And people took the liberty?

Sure. It was also a really shitty time. I had a lot of trouble with it. I couldn't sleep nights, I didn't get any sleep for a long time. Conscience pangs, I guess. I don't know. It's like coming to another place, a different country, a totally different galaxy, where anything is allowed. Anything. You can enter someone's home just because you want, take a nap on his couches, make yourself coffee in his pot, watch television.

There were no official prohibitions no what you do inside a home?

I think it was forbidden to rape or something, but beside that – or murder. But beyond that, not that we knew. We didn't know, and no one actually cared. No one really cared. It was like, I don't know, like – I don't even know how, you were the emperor of the place. Really. Like some king. Ruler. You walk down the street with your hands in your pockets, your rifle hanging on your back even, and only because of your uniform no one dares talk to you. Feel like munching some cashews all of a sudden? You close down a house because, wow, you feel like having some cashews, so you go into that shop, pick up a kilo of cashew nuts and go out the door.

And what would the shopkeeper say?

"Hello, hello, what's... Hello!" What 'hello, hello!' Want me to trash your shop, what are you, fucked up or something? Give him a slap on the face and walk out.

Who wanted cashews?

People wanted cashews. They felt like it. Wanted munchies for having with their coffee in the house they were going to enter. Cashew nuts, coke. Coke was going strong.

Testimony 47, Hebron

It all started with those eight-hour guard-duty shifts. Eventually you're so fed up you don't sleep at all, and if in between shifts you have to do all kinds of dirty maintenance work... So you simply have no time left to sleep. You do 21 such days and then get a three-day leave and you're a bundle of nerves, and then they pressure you even with permission to go out... So you end up stressed and then you're out on patrol and dying to take out some of these nerves on the Arabs, those shits who are the reason you're on guard-duty. I think that's how it works. And the settlers there don't exactly love you either.

You had confrontations with settlers?

Yes, several.

At the Shaharbati House?

Some, but at first we were too tolerant. There was a guy there who blew his top and had a row with some settler. He's not a leftie and not a rightist, just simply got sick of it all. A settler spat in his face bigtime, so he blew a fuse, gave him a rifle-butt punch in the face and began to hit him. He was punished for a long time, 35-day grounding, something like that, after having done 20 already. He got to the point where he was so fucked-up he no longer cared about anything. Do you have any idea what shape people were in? I've never seen such things.

Like what?

Like they couldn't give a damn any more about anything... And then you end up falling asleep on guard-duty, and you're fed up and everyone's a pack of nerves. And when you come down from the guard post you go: Fuck, I'm so sick of this town. You come down all nerves and then you run into some Arab on the way and slap his face just to... Guys would take the Arab into their post and beat him to a pulp.

Just like that?

Just like that. Because really, our nerves were gone and we said, what the fuck.

Did it help?

No. But it passes the time when you're on duty. Truth is I didn't deal with such stuff too much, but I remember my buddies getting a kick out of it. I mean you just had it. Some said: I'll fuck with those Arabs like I'm being fucked with here. You know how it is. Not too cool there.

Testimony 48, Hebron

The most extreme operational incident I had in Hebron was when my unit was standing guard duty at 4-5 post... A Palestinian child was walking home on the 'Tenuvah' road. Suddenly a bunch of 20-30 settlers show up with their children, and see him. "Let's go, guys!" They jump him, give him a beating. I was with my company commander, this was reported to us on radio. A guy from my unit went in to rescue this poor kid. And my company commander was taking a crap just then, so we didn't make it in time and the battallion commander's mobile unit got there first, just as the medics were already taking care of this kid.

You bandaged him up?

I got there after the battallion medics. You know how medics are, everyone runs. So they were already treating him.

How did he look?

Bleeding, wounded.

Where?

Face, body. He was without his shirt so you could see that most of his body was bruised and lacerated. And his face, too.

How old was he?

12, 14 – I don't know. A kid.

What was done with him afterwards?

I don't know what the medics did with him. Perhaps took him to be further treated somewhere, or brought him home. I don't know.

Testimony 49, Hebron

We'd also got on such actions, you know. There were some who threw stones at us, we'd catch some kid who happened to be around there, and beat him to a pulp. Break him. Even if he hadn't thrown any stones, he knew who had. "Who is it? Who is it? Who is it?" He ended up telling us who it was... Once on a patrol, some stones were thrown at us, nothing serious. So we got hold of just some Palestinian kid nearby, we knew that he knew who it had been. Let's say we beat him a little, to put

it mildly, until he told us. He led us. He told us where that kid was. We wouldn't let go of him until he told us exactly where the other kid lives. We went to that home. The other guy wasn't there. We got back to ***. We went out on patrol again at 6 a.m. First thing, we went to this kid's house, a 15-year old. Something like that.

The kid you caught?

No. The kid who was pointed out by him. The one who was told on, who regularly throws stones.

The kid you caught was how old?

About 10 years-old.

And the kid he ratted on, how old is he, about 15?

Something like that. Yes. Went to his house. He hadn't been there the night before. So, in short, we get there in the morning, knock on the door, an old woman comes out, looks about 60. She says: "There's no one home". You know how it is. We said we don't care and went in. You know, the way it goes when your mind's already screwed up, and you have no more patience for Hebron and Arabs and Jews there. We went inside and began to trash the house. It's this kind of house with a corridor and doors going out in both directions. We found the kid behind the last door on the left. The kid was really scared, realizing we were on to him. First he tried to escape, then realized my buddy was standing by the door and goes: Okay. He gave up. We got him out. We had a commander with us who was a bit of a fanatic. We gave the boy over to this commander, and he really beat the shit out of him. He said, "Wait, now we're taking you." He showed him all kinds of holes in the ground along the way, asking him: "Is it here you want to die? Or here?" The kid goes, "No, no!" you know.

He spoke to the kid in Arabic?

Yes. He spoke Arabic well... We started walking, trying to follow them. I won't describe the whole situation to you, there were some really bad things going on.

... Go on, tell me everything.

We walked and walked. He shows him pits along the way, keeps asking: "Want to die here? Here?" "No, no way." He was taken into a concrete house under construction. This commander griped sticks and broke them on this kid. The kid was not crying, I tell you, he was really tough. A 14-year old, something like that. Not old. Then he took a stone, shoved it into the kid's hand... and he goes: "Go ahead, throw at him" (pointing at one of the soldiers), slapping his face. "Man, huh? Go ahead, throw!" Boom. Beating him. The kid goes "No, no!" Another slap. So the kid says, "Okay" and throws really lightly, in that direction. So the commander says: Sure, you're throwing stones at a soldier!" boom, broke him even more. I tell you, that guy... Then people

started coming, the whole family. And they weren't let in. The soldiers wouldn't let them, they heard all the beatings. This kid was really miserable, they tore him apart. Then one of the soldiers said: "Guys, you're going too far... We don't want to carry a dead body out of here, the family's still here." I'm telling you, this kid got fists in the face, knees, kicks and everything.

Just from the commander?

No. There was another guy doing it, too, not as hard as the commander. Really, merciless. Anyway, the kid was stood up, and couldn't stay standing on his own two feet. He was already crying. The commander stands him up and says: "Stand!" And the kid says "I can't". He really couldn't after all the beating he took. And the commander continues: "Don't pretend" and kicks him some more. And then ***, who always had a hard time with such things, went in, caught the squad commander and said: "Don't touch him any more, that's it." The commander goes: "You've become a leftie, what?" And he answers, "No, I just don't want to see such things." He would always stay out of these moments. He didn't like this stuff. Sort of sensitive.

And then what?

So he goes, "Enough, I can't see this". They started arguing.

Where were you standing?

We were right next to this, but did nothing. We were indifferent, you know. Okay. Only after the fact you start thinking. Not right away. We were doing such things every day. Little things. It had become a habit, we'd go on patrol every day, and there were a lot of beatings. It was happening all the time.

And then he let the kid go?

No. He gripped him, took him outside, and lots of people there were looking on. And the parents saw it. What do I mean, took him outside? He picked him up forcibly. That kid could hardly move. I'm telling you, I don't know how he managed. After about an hour the commander makes him stand and goes: "What are you, putting on a show?" and kicks him some more. So he took him out and then others said: "What did you do to him??" It was obvious he had been badly beaten. "What did you do to him?" They understood what was going on. So he goes: "Get away!" and then a whole row started.

What kind of a row?

You know, it's her kid after all. "What is this, he is just a child!" He was bleeding from the nose. The commander ordered her: "Don't get any closer". He cocked his weapon, already had a bullet inside. She was frightened. He put his weapon literally inside the kid's mouth.

Facing his parents?

Sure. "Anyone gets close, I kill him. Don't bug me. I kill. I have no mercy." He was really mad. So the father, or not his father I'm not sure, got hold of the mother and said: "Calm down, let them be, so they'll leave him alone."

All in Arabic?

No, they talked to us in Hebrew. And he wanted to show that he wasn't dumb. He was a good man. The guy who talked to us? Really a good person. It got to the point where we couldn't tell right from wrong. That's how it was in our platoon. All shits. That kind of a mind. So, the commander held the kid tight, with the weapon in his mouth, yelling and stuff. And the kid could hardly walk. So we dragged him some more, and then: "If this kid just lifts a stone, one more time, or does anything, I'll kill him. I have no mercy."

If I were Palestinian, I'd get beaten up for doing what?

If you even just looked at us in some way that irked us, you'd get beaten up. We got to the point where we were so sick of this place, you know what I mean.

Testimony 50, Hebron

Did you have any run-ins with the Border Patrol?

Mostly just observed them, often. On mobile command unit we really got to see them. There was 'prayers' alert on 'Tenuvah' road (settlers on their way to prayers), and I saw them (BP) in action, checking Palestinians. "Come here!" he yells at the Palestinian guy, "hands on the wall." The Palestinian forces the guy's legs open, kicks him: "Open wider!" The guy falls. They two Border Patrolmen crack up laughing. "Okay, get up, get up". They check him. "What's this?" they laugh at him, gripping him wherever they grip, terribly funny. "What's that? And that? And that? Okay, okay, run along."

Where is this

At the checkpoint entry to the Cave of the Fathers, at the end of 'Tenuvah' road. They were terribly amused. Very funny, all those checks, great fun, cute. And they walk, you know, these Border Patrolmen swagger around with their guns on their shoulders, really ugly, everything amuses them. These are the main things I saw them doing, unfortunately. Also the way they treat the settlers. If one of them doesn't keep to his

side of the street, they yell at him, almost slapping his face. They're not, as I told you, really nice to whoever they don't want to be. Makes no difference to them.

Testimony 51, Hebron

We went on walking patrols through the 'Shalalas', the Palestinian market. It's a bustling Palestinian street which serves as a market, and we as army would patrol there regularly. The soldiers are warned, and rightly so. It's very scary to walk around there as a soldier. I mean you're actually walking along Palestinian streets, inside the market. It's also terribly easy to hide things there. On the other hand, you're there all day, so you don't want to damage this market too much. Now this market is located right below a Jewish settlement called Beit Hadassah, among others. I remember one Friday or Saturday afternoon, we were walking along inside the market, it was relatively quiet. I was last in a single file, and suddenly I see a little rock falling right next to me. I get on the radio and tell the others to stop for a second. I take a look, and realize there are a lot of little children beginning to throw stones, sometimes rocks, in my direction, from Beit Hadassah.

Jews throwing stones at you?

Jews throwing stones. They weren't aiming at us but at the Palestinians in the market. They didn't have us in mind at all. We turned back to run in their direction and try to stop them. Now, I'm talking to you about kids who were all under ten years of age. Lots and lots of kids, more than twenty, I recall, standing on some roof, grasping stones and beginning to throw them. We were six on patrol. Myself and the commander, my sergeant. Immediately we started catching the kids and trying to chase them away. It's the same thing, same situation, little kids, none more than ten years old, you can't be too violent with them. You try, I mean you keep thinking: no violence. On the other hand, you say: what kind of a situation is this, they're throwing stones at Palestinians and I have to be non-violent with these stone throwers? What, I mean I have to stop this no matter what. At least that's what I was thinking. I remember this incident. It took us quite a while to stop them.

How long?

I don't remember, some minutes. It's not right. We caught, you know, each of us

caught three kids, pushing them, they try to stand, then they would run home, it took time. I remember we had a big fight among ourselves, later, when we got off duty.

Why?

Because as I recall, one or two guys tried to 'educate' them. I mean they sat, while their buddies were throwing rocks, two guys sat aside with 5-6 of them trying to explain to them why it was wrong to throw rocks at Arabs. I remember myself getting there and moving some kid and putting him on the side and seeing a close friend of mine arguing with him whether what Baruch Goldstein did (massacred dozens of Palestinians at prayer inside their mosque) was right or wrong. And it hurts, I mean it hurts to see 8-9 year-olds idolizing Goldstein. All the kids there idolize him. On the other hand you know that your mission there is not to keep them from thinking like that in the future. It's not within your capacity, you haven't got it. That's what I felt. Only to keep them from throwing stones at Palestinians down the road.

You fought about this with one another?

There was an argument. Some said they couldn't hear this because they keep seeing them as children and we must stop them from thinking this way. I told them it was not a possible option. I wish it were, but it's not. We don't have that ability or that place.

And that's one incident that occurs how often?

(Settler) children throw stones quite often, as I recall.

Testimony 52, Hebron

Were you out doing mappings?

Not mapping, false-arrest.

What does that mean?

It means that in order to be prepare for a real arrest, you carry out an arrest assignment in some house, of someone who is not really wanted (by the authorities). You close in on his house, go through the whole procedure, for practice.

And what happens?

You conduct an arrest, pick up the person. Practice. It's a simulation. That's the point of it, let's put it that way. You pick up the guy. And I don't know how much time later, depending on how nice a guy the company commander is, he lets him off one-

hundred meters further off. If the commander's not a nice guy, he lets him off two kilometers away from his house.

He's not even taken in for questioning?

Right, he's not even interrogated.

Try to tell what you know about this.

A house is surrounded from all corners, in the middle of a neighborhood.

An official order comes in?

Yes. The idea is to practice an arrest, so that the platoon will be able to stage an arrest of a wanted man, someone who is sought after for something serious. I'll say this again, I don't know about the General Security Services, indications – whether they have such or not. If he is really a suspect of something or not. The platoon practices before it sets out. When the order comes in, it goes out to do it. It closes in on a house, goes in, picks up the person, who has no idea what he has done, no idea why this is happening.; Everything is carried out as if he were wanted. He may have been taken in for interrogation. If I'm not mistaken, that time he wasn't. He was let off a few meters down the road. It was part of our training which the platoon needed so as to be able to make arrests.

A closing-off team here, a break-in team there?

Exactly. That's part of the idea.

Testimony 53, Hebron

I was on a patrol once, there was this TIPH vehicle, know the one? With people inside, traveling down the road. We didn't like them because we knew what was coming.

What do you mean?

As soon as the Jews (settlers) see a TIPH vehicle, they... pick up building blocks that look about 5 kilos each, and simply throw them at the cars, smashing glass.

Where were they standing with the blocks?

It's like, I don't know if it really was an ambush. We didn't see them at first. We heard children whispering, and then TIPH appeared. I was at 68 (army post), facing the stairs. No, I was on a patrol. Then all children ran to the TIPH people and we, our

sergeant said each of us would catch a kid, we were more or less equally-numbered, or one-on-two... So we caught the kids, and they started going wild. Then our sergeant took out a camera, wanting to document the whole... they simply beat us.

The children?

Yes. Tried to punch us and all. At first it was sort of ludicrous, a 12-year old kid hitting you. You don't know how to react, so you sort of snicker: "Hey, bro', he's punching me now, got this? Just got a fist." Then it went on and you start freaking out so you grip him real hard, because you must, he's jeopardizing you. Not me, I wasn't attacked in any life-threatening way, but 20 seconds earlier he just threw a block at a vehicle that accelerated and escaped. I don't remember what broke, the windshield probably got smashed, I don't know if it shattered inward, into the cabin itself.

How did the TIPH officials respond to this?

I'm sure they're used to this, although it's hard to get used to being constantly assaulted with stones, it's not the first time. Not even the first time I witnessed this. I've seen it done. But those kids simply beat us there, they came and jumped us. I think we summoned the police, we caught all the kids. We didn't shackle them, nothing like that. Still, they're children. Jewish children. Little terrorists, but they should be taken care of.

What's the standard procedure? What are you told?

It's not talked about. I don't remember any... I guess they should be caught...The civilian police is summoned. There's no, listen, it's hard to say. You're army, you're not supposed to deal with that shit, but over there you're a policeman.

But do you know whom to summon?

You do, but you also see how they behave there, I mean (civilian) policemen too, you know – it's their neighbor, so they sort of slide through this, they can hiss at you "these Nahal soldiers..." and go through the motions and then release them, saying, "Yeah, guys, it won't happen again, right?" No.

Does it happen again?

It happens again on the very next shift.

Testimony 54, Hebron

How were your relations with the settlers?

They had this wild love-hate relationship with us. On the one hand, they embrace, they feed you all the time and always see to it that you have a coffee corner and stuff. On the other hand they swear at the army and they hate the army. Once we went and asked them: What's the story with you guys, I really want to understand how you feel about the soldiers. So one of the women defined it for me.

Who?

I don't remember which one. She said: We hate the army, and we love the soldiers. This was her definition. Besides, you get really angry at them, you're shocked by them. I'm shocked that they dare let their children grow up there. How they dare bring up their kids like that. It's shocking.

Didn't you encounter any violence on the part of adults there?

No. Not flagrant, physical violence. No. That's part of what made me so sad, that they send their kids to do it. They send their kids to throw stones at the girls from Cordoba (a Palestinian girls' school across the road from Beit Hadassah settlement). According to what I've heard, and what I've actually witnessed, they only send their children to do this. But they did walk around with a bullet in the barrel of their gun.

Who, the settlers?

Yes. I couldn't figure out why they're allowed to do this.

Did you go on a patrol with Noam Arnon while you were there?

No. But there was this leave-taking. I remember the Jewish settlers had this leave-taking event before the battallion left the area. A week before we were done, they came around, brought us these certificates of appreciation, stuff like that. With the battallion commander. That I do remember. The army tries to maintain very good ties with the Jewish settlers. The Jewish settlements are also... You feel they have their say with the battallion commanders.

How do you sense this?

They're involved, okay? I don't exactly know how and what, but you sense that they're involved, they know. I told you about the children. They're familiar with the army. They know exactly where all the posts are: "Hey, was this or that post taken down?" They know everything. "'65 (army post) is not manned tonight?" How come you know this post is called 65, with all due respect? Do you get what I'm saying?

He lives there.

Okay, that's right. He lives there and he also puts on the pressure for that post to be

there in the first place, and that it should operate just that way, and we're protected and we're not protected - their lives are mixed up with this the whole time. They pressure for this.

Testimony 55, Hebron

Here's something I remember very clearly. There were several cases of injustice that I can tell you about, some instances. We were at Tel Rumeida then, guarding... You know how it is, there's Tel Rumeida, it connects to 'Installations', that connects to the Cave of the Fathers, and this whole route is 'sterile'.

What does 'sterile' mean?

Great, what does 'sterile' mean? You realize the injustice in this? Sterile means that all the shops on this street, that were once shops, nearly all of them, except for one or two, are shut down. All along a whole street, dozens of shops are shut. It means that all the houses that were once inhabited, now stand empty. They've been blocked and no one can go on living in them. No Palestinian may enter this street. I mean, very few. Few who have work permits, and they're not active there, the shops there are closed. There's one shop that's open. Only certain persons have permits. Very specific. That's outright injustice, because you see that in order for there to be "Mitkanim" (army barracks) which is Beit Romano Yeshivah and the house next to it, I don't remember...

Hadassah.

Could be. And Tel Rumeida (all names of Jewish settlements). Flagrant injustice. You see that they simply closed everything. Also that neighborhood, after Beit Romano, there's another neighborhood, with a courtyard, where a Palestinian guy once blew himself up. Near Gross Square. The Avraham Avinu settlement. I had to do guard-duty there too. So down there, because the houses are really crowded together, Hebron is a real casbah, you know - houses huddling against each other, so we had a patrol that simply skipped from roof to roof. The patrol itself was on the rooftops rather than the street because these are separate routes. So all the shops down in the street were closed so Palestinians wouldn't bring in explosives there or break out from there. Now it seems sort of logical, I mean it makes sense that you want to

protect them (the settlers) in a real way because everything is so accessible. Killing there can take place as near as a hand is stretched. The problem is – this is the real question - if they should be there in the first place. You see it. You see the squalor, the checkpoints, the hardships that a whole city or entire neighborhoods must live with for the benefit of just a few hundred people. You see this very simply, and you also the huge social gaps, wealth in face of utter poverty, you see the rift of hatred.

Testimony 56, Hebron

I remember one thing that amazed me. I was standing – there's a post or two on the slope going up to Tel Rumeida – I was standing in the army post there. Near Tel Rumeida settlement there's an Arab house, usually surrounded with fences several meters long all the way to the edge of the house, because obviously it was blasted, and obviously has graffiti. By the way, all the streets where I stood guard, they all have graffiti, hate writing, racist inscriptions (anti-Arab), the works. And a Palestinian boy was walking up to his home – there are several names that are permitted to pass me, I already know their faces – and a Jewish (settler) child comes down the other direction. They walk past each other, and the Jewish child simply turns his head, spits at his face and goes on. Now this wasn't a whole show of hatred – I mean except for these three seconds of hatred – no beatings or yelling, just a master-slave thing. I saw this and felt I just had to catch that kid, slap his face or ask him what he thinks he's doing, 'who do you think you are.'

I was stunned. It's as though, so naturally... The Palestinian boy just walked on. He felt it, he absorbed this and just went on.

What did you do?

I was stunned. I didn't deal with them. Also, it was obvious that we mustn't deal with them.

What do you mean?

We don't argue with them. They did try to provoke us. We don't argue, we don't talk with them. There's nothing to talk about.

If a (settler) child throws a stone or something, what do you do? What are your instructions?

Nothing. We chase him and warn him not to do it. What can you do? Obviously , if it's a Palestinian child you arrest and shackle him and all. Not Jews. We're there to serve the Jews. That's also part of this sense of injustice. For you have a very clear feeling that you're helping the Jews. As though you're helping them in their revenge against the Arabs. You're helping them do it, hassle Arabs. They hide behind you. There are these cases where, like one day we had real chaos, I didn't see it. Jews threw – following the Shaharabati House business, something was ignited - and Jews threw eggs and bashed the army jeep, broke its lights and beat someone up, literally, there was real violence in these kids. But besides, beyond these specific confrontations, you simply get the feeling that you're serving them. Helping them.

Testimony 57, Hebron

... It's an unpleasant situation. Highly unpleasant. People (Palestinians) go to the market in the morning, or wherever they need to go, and you have to check their IDs. I don't remember detaining people, hardly. I don't remember anything like that in our unit. I know that *** company who were in 'Mitkanim' for a while, where there's a post, if you're coming from Beit Hadassah, cross Mitkanim, turn left to the Shalala, there's this roundabout with a post in the middle of the street. So there was this kid- he was some commander, not soldier – commander.

What rank was he?

Sergeant, I think. He was standing there. We get there on our patrol, and find out some kid has been standing there for two hours already. And why? Because for the second or third time he didn't bring his birth certificate along to show that commander when he crossed there. A child has no ID yet, so he must show his birth certificate. A 14-15-16 year-old kid, I'm not sure. So he detained him for two hours, perhaps two and a half. And so we came along, and we had an officer on our patrol. Then someone came from one of the relief organizations, spoke with that commander, and he refused to let him go. Until we got there with our officer, who said: "Let him go now". And that commander expressed himself really... it seemed his whole mind-frame, not opinion, mind-frame. The way you perceive things, your whole mentality. You have people you need to let through there. You don't even need to experience the kind of burnout guys

get at large checkpoints like Huwwara (near Nablus) for this, you just need to do it often enough to get fixated on that mode of thinking. Someone comes along who needs to cross the checkpoint, he hasn't done something or another, you'll 'educate' him. We're the Palestinian people's army. We're 'educating' the Palestinians.

Meaning you punish them?

Punish them.

How did he put it?

This commander said: "Hey, he's been through here twice already, without his birth certificate! Now let him wait. He'll wait and learn to have it with him next time."

Testimony 58, Hebron

Scnd interviewee: I think most of the contact I had was in Hebron. These are things I recall most, contact between Jews and Palestinians in Hebron. I remember I hated it. That was my strongest feeling there, simply hatred.

That's some feeling...

Scnd interviewee: Hatred. Real. I didn't feel related in any way to the people there. They're not my people. They're not people I want to have anything in common with. That Star of David they spray-paint there all over the walls, that's not my Star of David. It's a terrible feeling. I have never felt that way before. I simply hated them. I hated them. I hated them. I hated their kids. I have never before looked at a child and hated it.

Why?

Scnd interviewee: Why? Because they were terrible. They were awful. Awful. Awfully violent. And you feel that you're serving them. Them and their capacity for violence. There were all kinds of situations there of stark, brute, shocking, disgusting violence.

First interviewee: ... There was an incident – between Beit Hadassah and Tel Rumeida, at the 'Jilber' post, there's a grocery shop. When we got there it was closed. Then they opened it. The moment it was opened people (Palestinians) came, and the Jews really got mad about that. One Saturday someone not from Hebron, some boys went in there and started vandalizing the place.

First interviewee: So one of our soldiers, standing guard at Jilber, threw them out of

the store and they went and harassed some old man. Literally sprayed his eyes with teargas and broke his cane.

Just an old passer-by?

First interviewee: Yes... He was walking downhill towards the "Shoter" checkpoint post.

An area with not too many soldiers.

First interviewee: No, but the mobile command unit arrived.

Scound interviewee: That's funny, what you just said: not too many soldiers. It's exactly 100 meters, and at each end there are soldiers, sometimes in the middle, too.

Testimony 59, Hebron

The patrol we had then, I was the sergeant, and my sergeant would consult with me on radio: shall pick this person up, or that person?

On what grounds?

I simply think that the first patrol the 'kids' go on (we're the 'kids') has to carry out this kind of simulation, in case we'll really have to catch someone. So we practice how to get there, who secures, where do we aim our weapons, how the suspect is surrounded and caught.

Manoeuver?

Kind of. Naturally no one says it is, but now I know, and we knew then as well. I think if you ask anyone... But no one thought about it, and we certainly didn't talk to one another about this: Listen, let's not be dumb. We know that we're just picking someone up without any kind of indication against him. Nothing. I don't know. Okay, the guy will be wearing such and such a shirt, go pick him up. Anyone who wear a red shirt was caught, interrogated. We picked up a guy, took him into some alley, we started talking to him. Nothing special. It must be frightening for him. I also remember once seeing traces of piss on a guy, meaning he really really got stressed out. Yes, because it's scary. Listen, these six monsters come at you, surely good kids from a nice upper-middle class home, obviously still kids. I mean, we were 19-20, really kids. But again, kids with stuff, with ceramic vests and guns and 29 bullets in the cartridge ready for anything. We entered one of those alleys, started talking to him, checking his ID, what are you doing here... What kind of a question is that, what are

you doing here? It's a shock. What do you mean what are you doing here? But you ask him, 'what are you doing here?'

Testimony 60, Hebron

... But there is still this callousness.

Yes, again, I never managed to talk at all during that whole time. You might say it was also the time when the largest number of guys broke up with their girlfriends. Yes, during that tour of duty. Lots of people said this too, later, when we talked about it. Many people said they couldn't... didn't talk about what went on. Didn't say anything.

But it was a shock? You say you were not scared.

It didn't seem there was too much to be scared of or get agitated about. No, we weren't scared.

So why didn't you talk?

There wasn't any kind of rule not to talk about this. Nor did we do anything crazy enough to say that you get home and don't talk at all with your friends about things that happened. I could come and say things, the truth is I did try to talk about it a bit at home, a bit later. But the checkpoints and how they affect you and stuff, it seems to me that a combat soldier leaves home and – how he suddenly behaves if he has to shackle a child. How he turns...

What, how he suddenly gets power?

Yes, suddenly he gets this power, I mean even the way he drives. Stuff like that.

Did you feel you were changing that way?

Changing how? I just didn't talk about stuff. I really kept it all inside.

Becoming numb, that's also change.

I also experienced this kind of numbness. If you attach too much importance to it, and you have to because everything in your life is important, you're doing it so you have to take responsibility, attach importance to it. And most of us didn't, I think. I can say I didn't. I mean, I could have thought before I let someone through. When you attach importance to the fact that you let someone through the checkpoint or not, how he takes this, crossing these 200 meters inside his own neighborhood.

Again, you also think about what you can, and the importance it has. But if you keep getting into what that does to him, and to me, and this and that, you end up not being up to carry out your assignment, so you naturally go numb. It's not that anyone here is doing it to you. You do it to yourself. There are some things here that you see, also the way this whole situation forms you. It's important to say that the checkpoints in Hebron, the way they look, the way they really are... After all we all came from living in each other's hair anyway, even in the service year we did together at our 'training farm', or at the brigade training base, basic training. I mean, infantrymen are always in each other's hair anyway, but there it got to the point where you just didn't want to talk any more, you preferred to just sit there like some... just vegetate on the sofa or on a pile of kitbags in one of the rooms. Literally. So you no longer talk. Very few guys managed to talk, we even tried to issue a company bulletin, but that fell through.

I heard it got burned.

Yes, someone burned it.

Why did he burn it?

Because there were things like "What am I doing here?" Statements really not very welcome in the army. What do I mean by not welcome? As soon as you start asking those questions...

Testimony 61, Hebron

How did you leave Hebron? With what kind of feeling?

What feeling? That's it's a horror. Again, Hebron exists and the world is silent.

I mean, people really don't know what's going on there.

And did you tell anyone?

Yes. It was easier for me to talk to people who had been there, with their understanding. Anyone who had been there simply knows what goes on there exactly, so you can talk with them like I'm talking to you now. Each of them had gone through similar things, or even the same, it's incredible.

Your men too?

Yes, sure.

... and their stories?

Same thing. Truth is, they managed to stay more humane than we did. Again, I wasn't out there, I was serving as a deputy first-sergeant at the time, but according to them, it seems they stuck to more humane behavior. To tell you the truth? It made mission-accomplishment somewhat of a problem. That's why I remember that as commanders we had a lot of criticism, that they were too... What can you do, as soon as you live there, you have to go with the flow. No, it doesn't sound good in that context. In order to accomplish your mission you have to give up some of your humaneness. There's no choice, otherwise you cannot go through with it.

Testimony 62, Hebron

What are the sterile roads (forbidden to Palestinian traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian) in Hebron?

The 'David' Road. That's a sterile road... Avraham Avinu settlement, all of it.

The wholesale market, what happens there?

That too. But I believe that's already on 'Tenuvah' Road, no?

I mean the wholesale market inside Avraham Avinu settlement.

Yeah, okay. That too is totally sterile.

Have there been problems in the wholesale market?

There were break-ins, and once they (settlers) burned something there.

What about break-ins?

They tried to break in once, with a crow bar. After all, it's all abandoned there. But once they tried it. I remember some two girls burning something there, too. I don't remember exactly. I thought, 'Hey, what the fuck, I mean two girls? What could they want?' We also talked about this thing where Jews pass by and don't give a damn, even in places where they're actually not allowed? So once they passed where Jews are not allowed to walk, that stretch from Shelomo post to the 'David' Road towards the school and the pharmacy junction, they're only allowed to travel there by car. I'm almost certain. So once they simply walked by, we tried to stop them and finally we were told on radio, "Okay, let them walk." There was nothing to do about it, what could you do? We tried to keep them away, it didn't work.

Officially there is no such prohibition.

I don't know. I have no idea. Maybe.

Are Arabs officially prohibited?

Sure. If you see an Arab on the David Road, you go ahead with suspect arrest procedures. Every time.

You know that's illegal?

Really? No. Why?

David Road was open all the time, but de-facto the army closed it (without a legal closing order).¹

Too bad the soldiers are not told about this. I didn't know that. I don't know, listen, so I broke the law. I didn't know this. I know that when I was there as a deputy first sergeant, the High Court of Justice ruled to let them use the entire length of 'David' Road. I remember all hell broke loose, and it gave the army a real hard time. We didn't understand that ruling. Like I said, it was for nothing. We as soldiers just didn't want our hands full with riots, we wanted as little violence as possible. And this just created violence. It's not like the Arabs have no way to reach the Cave of the Fathers. Again, sure it messes up their life fabric, they're stuck with it. But if you look at the balance, you think: okay, what do you choose? Their walking another five minutes, or a riot?

Are you sure there would be trouble?

Positive. No way it wouldn't. You know ***, the sergeant? I remember him telling me once, that in his time there was a patrol on David Road. There was a market there, there were Arabs on David Road. That's what he told me once. He told me everything there was less troubled. I couldn't possibly imagine that. I said: How can that make sense? Now, every Arab who shows up there, it's like the settlers have some kind of intelligence service, immediately they all gang up.

Has that happened?

Yes, sure. Plenty. All those slappings. Action wise, it's very quiet, no stone throwing. Occasionally, but not... I've been in other areas where stone throwing was a daily occurrence. None of that there, nor too many serious outbreaks. It's always people slapping each other, you separate them and it's over. Maintain a kind of status-quo. But when things break loose, you really go into a state. Wow, there's a riot. That's what is so amazing in Hebron, it's not actually a tough front, I mean not a front with lots of combat incidents, not a lot of terrorist activity or anything. But I guess mentally

1 In December 2006, in his answer to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Government Attorney General confirmed that Shuhada (David) Street had been closed for the six previous years to Palestinian pedestrian traffic without official or legal justification. This street continues to be out-of-bounds for Palestinians.

you get fucked-up there because you don't understand what you're doing there to being with. You just don't know the reason.

Do you know now?

No.

Did you know then?

No. Then? No way.

So what did you do?

I was a well-disciplined soldier who obeys his orders. Today, if I were sent to Hebron on reserves duty, I don't believe I'd... Just Hebron. The rest of the Occupied Territories, hard as it is, it's problematic, I realize it has to be done, what can I tell you? But Hebron? I couldn't stomach that. Neither the Arabs nor the Jews. I wouldn't be able to do it. Have a family and kids and be called a Nazi? I don't want that, can't handle that. Why should I? Do you see?

Do many in your company share this feeling?

I think so. There was a lot of talk about this.

Testimony 63, Hebron

The Palestinian children are done with their classes, come of the school building and head straight home, and some children start making noise and throwing firecrackers and instigate all kinds of trouble. Don't know where that stupid commander came from. Our battallion commander began with this, we started chasing kids on our patrols.

On patrol-30? Inside the casbah?

Yes. We'd simply chase children who threw firecrackers. If the comamnder heard that sound, he'd immediately run towards the house from which it came. We'd start up the stairs, search the house. If we saw kids we stopped and checked them.

Check what? They don't have IDs.

Not IDs. Searching on them. To see if they have firecrackers.

Against the wall?

Yes. As soon as we heard a firecracker go off in the casbah, we'd start running.

Are you referring to a specific case?

Yes, a specific case. I don't know where that idiot commander is from, I take the liberty to call him an idiot in this case. Actually, every time a firecracker went off, we'd start running in that direction. It was ridiculous as hell.

There are plenty of places like that.

Yes. I didn't understand what the point of it was. At the moment it seemed logical, wow – a firecracker, maybe because it sounds like a gunshot. Then you run and check and confiscate firecrackers as it were. Did that help things, confiscating firecrackers from children? Is that what would end things? So we really conducted a search on two children.

Where did you catch them?

In the middle of the casbah.

You actually saw them throwing?

No, no. We didn't see them throwing. We just saw them passing by there. They may have been running, but I do remember stopping them for a search. One of them was really a little kid.

How little?

Maybe 4-5 years old. He was a really small child. And his brother was with him...

A little kid, in kindergarten or first grade even... And you search him. Him and his brother, just a little bit older. Of course you don't point your gun at him, so as not to frighten him. But that's another confrontation I have to face, with Hebron. Suddenly you're searching a little boy. It's unbelievable. I did this search on him and was shocked. I felt so... I can't say it. I felt so immoral at the time, so inhuman. So yeah, the gun was not pointed at him, and you're not threatening him, not yelling. Just conducting a search. Telling him: stand like this, and checking him.

What's 'like this'? Hands out?

Yes, spreadeagle against the wall. He stands and you're checking him and you can't believe you're doing this. At the moment you're not really thinking about it. But afterwards, you realize: For God's sake, I just searched a child. Until you brought up this case, just earlier, this talk we're having, let's say it was forgotten. Left aside. Occasionally when Hebron comes up I recall it. But I didn't actually do anything about it. I'd be shocked and then shove it off to the side again. Maybe there's not too much I can do about it, tell it to someone. But you look at it and it's incredible. You tell yourself: can there be an end to this? Is this something we can put an end to? I don't know. It hurts me, as I said. I'm an educator. I've worked with youth, with children. Suddenly you imagine it's like a kid you worked with in a classroom, sat next to him in an arithmetic class. Just this small, same age, and you're searching him.

It's inhuman. A policeman here in Tel Aviv wouldn't take a kid that age and conduct a search on him. Unless, you know, it was a real severe case – murder, knife, I don't know, drugs, stuff like that.

He threw a firecracker.

I'm not even sure he did. We searched him and I don't recall finding one, I don't remember if we did or not. I don't want to just say things.

How many were you on patrol?

Eight guys, I think.

No one seemed to think this was unreasonable?

It seemed unreasonable, but we didn't say a word. You don't think about it. It was not the middle of the night, but it was 8 or 9 p.m. Evening. You don't think about it at the time. You're in Hebron, you're inside chaos. It really is incredible. A world totally different from anything else you know.

Testimony 64, Hebron

First interviewee: ... At Beit Hadassah we once ran on patrol because we were told settlers were throwing stones at the Shalalas (a Palestinian market in Hebron). So we ran all the way from Menuchat Rachel: Something was happening, we ran and ran, children on recess came out of school at Beit Hadassah, and went to throw stones. When we got to the site, they already went back into class, recess was over and they began their lesson.

Second interviewee: As part of the patrol, there was always that point in time when children would come out of the Palestinian school house, so we had to stand guard and watch over them so the settlers wouldn't throw stones at them. And then you continue your patrol. Every morning.

First interviewee: ...what happened was that we got there running, out of breath, suddenly we realize this is about a few cheeky little kids, second or third graders, who had thrown stones. Our platoon commander knocked on the door of the classroom, the teacher came out and he told him: "Listen, there are children here who throw stones. I'm asking you to have them come out for a second, we need to talk with them, with whoever it was who threw stones." Then the teacher answered him: "Will

you kindly let me educate my pupils as I see fit, and not intervene, please?” and he closed the door. That’s how it ended.

An this went on?

First interviewee: I don’t know what happened afterwards. Another day, a Saturday, I was with ***, we caught little children. They were throwing stones at the TIPH (international observers) as well as at Atabs in the Shalalas. We caught them like this, they hit us and *** accidentally ripped the shirt of one of these kids as he tried to stop him from throwing stones. It was on the Sabbath and all the parents were in the Avraham Avinu settlement, at Beit Hadassah, they saw us struggling with their children and they went inside. It really felt like, what am I doing here anyway? What is this bullshit, kids hitting you, little kids. Really. Afterwards we tried to corner them into a playground there, a basketball court. And Bnei Akiva (religious youth movement) were having their get-together there, with a counselor. So I spoke to him about this, to ask him to take the kids. You’re their counselor, come on, help us, round up the children, play with them or something. And then, I don’t know, we were talking and he told me that there was this ruling by some rabbi that Arabs are not humans. Some regional rabbi ruled this, and that it was okay to throw stones at them, really okay. And you’re standing there, in shock, facing some boy who’s a counselor in Bnei Akiva, wearing the movement shirt, and you don’t know, what can you do? What am I still doing here? There’s nothing I can do...

Second interviewee: I recall once standing at 44 post (army post), there’s this path below which was then opened just for Abu Aisha (an isolated Palestinian family livign in Tel Rumeida next to the settlement). One of the guys passed there, a young boy, and one of the settler women from Tel Rumeida simply caught him and began to beat him. I didn’t know what to do. I stood there between them. I let him go, he went back and she tried to push me away and continue hitting him. At some point she simply stood and began screaming at me and pushing me. I didn’t know how to handle this. Finally a sergeant showed up (from the second platoon, I think) and he managed to get me out of there. I had no idea what to do. All she wanted was to beat him up. She said he was not allowed to be there and was jeopardizing her children by just being ther. He must not pass by there and how can we let something like that happen. That he was there to murder her children and how can I let this take place. He came along, trying to go home, that’s his way home. Afterwards they came and yelled at me. That’s what I remember.

Testimony 65, Hebron

Our company commander at that time was a bit crazy, screwed up, really.

What would he do in Hebron? Make up procedures?

No, he didn't make up anything. He would throw stun grenades into cars.

Into cars? Why?

Yes, with or without passengers, I no longer remember. Just like that. Because they got on his nerves. Honked at him. Fucked-up Moroccan guy.

You're talking about the David Road?

No, in town. In the Palestinian sector. Near the the Tut Tareq Junction.

So what happened?

They honked on the road because the road was blocked. So he got really furious, broke their car window with his rifle and threw in a stun grenade.

Actually acme out?

Yes, actually placed his rifle in their window, threw the grenade and went off.

What did they?

Got out of the car. They got out before the grenade went off. It blew up the windows, there was a real mess.

Testimony 66, Hebron

It's all one big game in Hebron.

Hebron? The whole Occupied Territories are one big game. But the difference in Hebron is that the Jewish settlements are inside the town, and these are the worst zealots living there. There are all kinds of settlers, and they can be grouped. The guys from Gush Etzyon are nicer. The people who live in Ariel actually think they're living in Tel Aviv. 20 minutes drive on highway no. 5. They don't notice, they don't know a thing. Others are like this. The Efrat settlers, too, are these city jerks, that's fine. Just a few minutes from Jerusalem, and their homes are relatively expensive. And there's Hebron, and there's pure evil pouring out of the settlers there. Evil. I can tell you there was one guy there who was okay. When the kids made trouble he'd come along, take his daughter and send her home. All the other parents would

ignore this, they would actually send their kids to do it. I remember they broke into a 'welded shop' (a shop whose doors the army had welded shut). There were these aluminum trays, all kinds of plastic containers and stuff. The kids pick them up and take them home to their mommies. I forcibly took that out of her hands, put it back in its place and closed up, just so that an hour later they took it again, and although I didn't have to do it, for it doesn't help, I told her: "How could you do this?" "They kill us and this and that..." What can I say? The mother sends her children to do this, and she has no trouble using these un-kosher pans of the Palestinians. The mother did it, no inhibitions. And every time we were at the Shaharabati House, the parents would distract the soldiers, and the children would sabotage the place. In Hebron it's an upside down world. Simply upside down. You protect the Palestinians there. I swear to you. Because the Jews there... You're used to Arabs throwing stones, but in Hebron it's different. The Arabs don't do anything, really nothing, and the settlers are the ones throwing stones all day. It was amazing, what went on in Hebron. Beit Hadassah. (Palestinian) windows all screened against the stones.

Testimony 67, Hebron

There's this car accessory shop there. Every time soldiers would take a tape-disk player, other stuff. This guy, if you go ask him, will tell you plenty of things that soldiers did to him. A whole scroll-full... They would raid his shop regularly. "Listen, if you tell on us, we'll confiscate your whole store, we'll break everything." You know, he was afraid to tell. He was already making deals: "Listen guys, you're damaging me financially." I personally never took a thing, but I'm telling you, people used to take speakers from him, whole sound systems. He'd go: "Please, give me 500 shekels, I'm losing money here". "Listen, if you go on – we'll pick up your whole shop." "Okay, okay, take it, but listen, don't take more than ten systems a month". Something like this. "I'm already going bankrupt". He was so miserable. Guys in our unit used to sell these things back home, make deals with people. People are so stupid.

Testimony 68, Hebron

There's the usual Sabbath alert, when only Jews may use the road. That means prayer times on Fridays and Saturdays, and Arabs don't pass there. And they really don't. But after that, when the Sabbath is officially over, when everyone is out and people are just getting back from the synagogue, I remember one case which I didn't witness myself but I remember it was this big incident in my company, especially my platoon, because the soldiers were from my platoon. Six settler youths, around 16-17 years old, simply saw a elderly Palestinian man, about 60 years-old, maybe 70. An old man. He was walking along the street there, and they simply broke his cane and beat him up a little. Our guy (soldier) runs over to them and catches them at it so they started to swear at him and throw things at him, like; "What are you doing helping Arabs? You're here to protect us, and not... Whom are you protecting here? You've got it all backwards.: Each of us has had this incidents. Little kids come to you on the post, trying to explain things, or want to know about your gun or try to touch you and you already... Very gray-area stuff, you're no longer clear about what's happening.

Testimony 69, Hebron

Did you go on shows of force as it were?

The whole patrol thing is a show of force.

What would soldiers do on a patrol?

Walk around the casbah. Search for suspects. That's another definition I "like".

I mean, who's not suspect? They searched for suspects, and were allowed to do whatever they wanted, detain people in the market.

They would go out on a regular basis?

That was their mission. Patrol...

Simply rounded up detainees? Was that the norm?

No, some nights there were actual arrests.

Why, was there curfew?

No, because we'd just go out and arrest people. The truth is it had something to do with intelligence. One morning I was up at the post at 6 a.m., or 9 a.m., it

was morning, and that night there had been some kind of intelligence-gathering, checking IDs and where they live and their names, and I remember arriving at 38 post to replace whoever was there on the night shift, and suddenly I see several people waiting there, shackled and blindfolded. And I say what... I knew something had gone on at night, I asked what they were still doing there, and I was told that the *** (the General Security Services) guy... Again, I acted as fast as I could to send them off.

Testimony 70, Hebron

Settler violence was directed at us, at the police, at Palestinians and at Europeans.

Give me examples.

Any time a Palestinian would pass along the street, not every time but often, they would throw stones and kick him.

Who would throw stones?

The settlers. I've seen the tapes – there are video cameras throughout Hebron. There's a camera at every corner – so I saw these videos showing an eight-year old approaching a toddler, a two-year old out on the street, whose mother has let him there for just a moment: comes up, kicks the toddler and runs off while the toddler breaks out in tears. Terrible things. They throw stones at Europeans, and when we try to get them to leave, they throw stones at us. They throw stones at policemen, they throw eggs, tomatoes.

What is your duty regarding the settlers in Hebron? How is it defined for you?

That if there are disturbances, we should summon the police. We must not touch them, maximum we can take the hits – the stones – instead of the Arabs.

You must not even detain them?

Detain? I don't know.

Have you never detained settlers until the police arrived?

They're simply there, the settlers, they don't run away. I don't think so. Just recently, when I was not in the company, a soldier got hit by a stone thrown by a settler, and he filed charges and got 500 shekel compensation. Not bad. The settler paid 500 shekel compensation, another 200 shekel fine and another three months probation

for two years. The settler said he was sorry, he hadn't meant to hit the soldier, he was aiming at the Arab.

And that's alright.

Yes, that's fine.

Testimony 71, Hebron

By definition our mission is to disrupt everyday life and harass the city residents, for the terrorists are residents so terrorist activity has to be disrupted. The operational way to do that is to harass the residents. I am sure of it, and it's written to this day (on the duty board at the army post), unless the orders have been changed... Harass the residents, disrupt their everyday life, by definition, because that's how terrorist activity is checked...

How does it work?

How it works, is that the soldiers walk around the city, as if they have nothing to do. Just like that. Walk around, usually enter vacant buildings, sometimes enter inhabited houses, conduct searches, and sometimes the point is that if we saw a kid throwing a firecracker from there, that's where we trashed. But we could choose any house we wanted, it's not that we had some intelligence information about a terrorist hideout. We'd search homes. The residents are totally accustomed to this, not surprised, not stressed. I mean they get angry, they're tired of this nonsense, but they're used to it because it's been going on for quite a few years now. Soldiers come and trash their home, turn everything upside down, then go away. That's how it works. Sometimes soldiers go on all kinds of observation missions, sitting in the cemetery and observing couples, people who pass by. That's what we did quite a long time. Sometimes we did vehicle checkpoints. Stand at some junction and check cars inside the neighborhood. That's the work.

Testimony 72, Hebron

You get a mapping mission and then go from house to house?

Sure, from house to house. We trashed the whole casbah.

The Abu Sneina Casbah?

Yes. We caught a lot of arms there. We were really cruel there. I tell you, I had quite a primitive platoon in that respect. We went on mappings, got everyone out, took details. ... I recall, it was at the beginning, going on mappings, we got everyone to come downstairs and if anyone was rude we'd smash up his whole place. Once we came to this house, there was a fancy buffet with all the glassware. My buddy was screwed up. A good kid, got really screwed up in the army. He was sick of everything. Got hold of this buffet, and boom – smashed up the whole house. We go, what's the matter with you? And he says, "I feel like an elephant in a china shop". Something like that. Really screwed up.

Testimony 73, Hebron

Did they practice 'neighbour procedure'?

The company didn't have much operational activity. There were just ridiculous things, when I think about things I did, there were a joke.

Why a joke?

Because they were just ridiculous. There was no intelligence, no alert about anything. It's like, the top company did get to do things. Our company had nothing serious to do, we did night activity. Choose a house at random, on the aerial photo, so as to practice combat routine and all, which is instructive for the soldiers, I mean I'm all for it. But then at midnight you wake someone up and turn his whole house upside down with everyone sleeping on the mattresses and all.

You actually conducted a search, not just checking IDs?

Midnight. I knocked on the door and said, "Everybody up, IDs ready for checking to see that there's nothing in this house."

What kind of checking?

Just going through the whole house.

Under the floor tiles?

No, but opening closets and everything.

Literally going through closets?

Yes. Absolutely. I'm talking to you about something that has no intelligence information behind it. Done just like that.

Where was a line drawn in these things?

The line was drawn wherever the commander drew it at that particular moment.

Was there looting?

No, but again, when I did it, I knew that I take things out and put them back in the closet, I don't trash the whole house. Maybe I didn't get the clothes all folded right... but all the stuff, and the woman who has to get up in the middle of the night and cover her head and all. I did it respectfully, I mean there was no respect about it, it was pure humiliation, but it was within the limits of my assignment – I did it as considerately as I could. If you could call it that. I'm sure other people did other things, too.

Testimony 74, Hebron

Everything stays in the platoon. The commander encourages you to do it, so you probably won't get punished. And the commander is a good friend of yours so you don't get punished. Eventually, when the commander does the same thing, of course you wouldn't get punished. I was shocked when I first these things.

Why? What did you see?

Beating up Arabs big time... Suddenly there's no mercy. Everyone had balaklavas in their vests. Suddenly they'd all put them on, so you see only eyes. You don't recognize anyone. Don't know which soldiers these are... We'd wear only half our fatigues with the bullet-proof vests, wear civilian shirts and our vests, go to some neighborhood outside our region, so no one will see us accidentally, run into some patrol. Cross the lines slightly because we know there's no one there (army), go into house-locating mode, put on the ceramic vests, a civilian shirt over that, go down with our weapons and start the bullshit.

M-16s on you?

Sure. And woolen balaklavas on our faces.

Why did you do it?

Just so. Looking for armed insurgents. There were cases, listen, we had run-ins. We'd walk with Hamas flags, whatever. Get into people's cars, take cars, throw the people out, get in, half civilian-dress, make a round, looks for people, and get back. Bullshit. We were bored.

Like undercover agents?

Yeah. Sick. We left the vests with a listener at one of the houses. Going on a house locating mission.

An official mission? What's it called?

No, missions to take down insurgents. That's how we called it. And we didn't really take down insurgents. Because there were no... We didn't run into any.

Testimony 75, Hebron

Our task is to create a buffer between the settlers and the Arabs in town, the Palestinians. There are army posts at every street corner, a guard post.

What impressed you most favorably, or negatively?

I was most impressed by the absolutely empty streets, and once in a while some settler goes by, throws stones at an Arab.

Streets empty of Palestinians?

According to my father, who had been in Hebron too, he said that – my company commander said so too – the place used to bustle with life, all the shops.

Who was the commander, *?**

Yes. According to the stories I heard from my father and my commander, there were shops and commerce between Palestinians and Israelis. Now all the shops are welded shut, and sprayed over with inscriptions like "Death to the Arabs", "Arabs to the Gas Chambers" and other such cretaive stuff.

Testimony 76, Hebron

... Did you violate the open-fire instructions?

Big time. Really extreme. There were disturbances which we really wanted to get over with...

You opened (live) fire at 'disturbances'?

Sure. Lots of it.

But you had so many other means of dispersing demonstrations?

Okay. At some point you rut out of them. And you want to get it over with, because you say, what, am I just going to get stones here? You shoot in the air and they calm a bit, and then they go on, and you realize you're not shooting at them. And the commander goes "Well, point at some kid, someone who looks like a good kid – so they can really get excited. Point at his knee." And then boom, you knock out some kid's knee. And that's it.

And then they calm down?

Sure. You know what it's like when a kid get his knee shot? They say, wow, these guys are fearless. We better stop, split and that's it. Listen, we were cruel, really. I remember we were just being replaced and as we were leaving, they had this huge 'disturbance', huge. They rolled burning tires at the soldiers, everything, from up the hill. So we were alerted, we were already dressed to leave the region – so we put on our vests again. Everyone was sore as hell. We said, okay, we're fearless. Anyone we catch has had it. Some Nahal guy (the unit that replaced our unit) and we go "You wimps". I remember such a situation: "Open fire, what are you deliberating? Look you're being fucked with here." You know what is "shoter post" (name of checkpoint)? They were rolling down burning tires over there. It was a really bad 'disturbance'. They must have sensed that something was happening. I mean, get real. And they go: "We're for talking." and the commander says to them, "Yeah, so are we." And he signals one guy to kneel, spray. You see him with a blcok approaching us? Get his knee. As soon as the first boom was heard, you saw everyone looking. They realized we were back or something, I don't know. They started to riot, and then after a while the army was hit pretty bad because of all the chaos that went on there.

Why?

The Palestinians destroyed a lot of stuff. I mean relatively. There were molotov cocktails being thrown and everything. The battallion commander comes on the radio, "If you see any Palestinan crossing the line, you can do whatever seems right."

I don't remember the exact situation. That's how our commander explained it. Some knees were blown off and then it was over.

Testimony 77, Hebron

I do remember there were demonstrations at that cemetery, so we were brought there to secure the place. There was a grieving Palestinian family standing by some grave or something, and we were securing them, and then a mass of settlers came down from Tel Rumeida and started a fight. I found myself in the midst of an incident and couldn't figure out what I was doing there.

Generally, it was all just shit. Really bad. The Palestinians too, and they brought the press, the father hit the child, the child started crying, and he was carrying a picture of some dead guy and it was photographed. I was shocked. Suddenly that guy came, from Tel Rumeida.

*****?**

***. Exactly. He came: "How come you're protecting them?" He shoved my platoon commander and came up to hit them. All hell broke loose and I just couldn't find myself. That I do remember.

How did that incident end?

I don't remember exactly. It was over. They left. We separated them and told them to leave. The brigade commander arrived, some others high-ranking brass, talked with the settlers and calmed them down. And there was this (Palestinian) girls school where the neighbor (settler) children kept stoning all the time and we had to keep them apart. Protect it from the settlers so they wouldn't throw stones, just like a ... kindergarten teacher. This feeling of walking around the Shalalas (market) with all that gear.

Testimony 78, Hebron

There was very bad abuse by the settlers from Tel Rumeida which is now being exposed, too. The 'cage'. That happened when we were there. ***'s wife tried to run over someone, she sped by very close so the woman flew side with her son. The settler woman laughed. There were lots of really bad situations. Everyone there called

us Nazis. And then these leftists come from Sweden.

TIPH.

TIPH and settlers and Arabs and it's like really... You're in the midst of something you're not really connected to.

Testimony 79, Hebron

What do you on a 'house locating' assignment?

Get everyone in one room. In the winter it's nicer than in the summer. In the summer you're nervous, hot and sweaty and creepy. In the winter, you tell them: We're staying in this room, no one comes in here and that's it.

No one stands guard at the door?

At the door, yes. We'd locate the nicest houses, you know, to live it up. And they'd offer us coffee, refreshments.

Would you accept?

It depends. Usually we'd go into houses an they'd have Jewish stuff, you know, Israeli juices, everything. So we'd go into some supermarket on the way, loot some 10-12 bottles, go locate a house and sit. Everyone with their cigarette packs, as they usually collected. We had one guy who used to take them from the army and sell them outside.

Cartons?

Once one of them picked up tobacco. The vendor goes: "You stole it from me". He blew up at him. "What's this, you stole it." And guy got angry and – boom boom, are you calling me a thief? The guys all got hold of him, beat him to a pulp. They said, "Once more we hear you talking like that, one word from you about a soldier – we'll slaughter you." After he was beaten up and scared, they said: "We know you. We've seen your kid, seen everyone. Seen them come to your house, one by one." He's terrified. Every day we'd go get a carton of cigarettes from him. Because he was so scared. Get it?

Testimony 80, Hebron

Why Hebron of all places?

Because Hebron is unlike other places in the Territories. What can I say. Because Jews are stuck there in the middle of the city and the city is all closed up. I've been in Bethlehem...

Was there some incident in Hebron that made you realize this?

One? From the day I got there... You realize it's different. Hebron is a different kind of place, no doubt about it. Because of the friction with the settlers, it's different. Completely different. I was there for four months. It's totally different. Don't you agree? Hebron is totally different, and this was before the 'disengagement' and they (the settlers) really tried to show their clout. There was also this thing there, you probably know the Shaharabati House. They totally destroyed it. When I was there, the High Court of Justice ruled that the army should let them (the Palestinians) live there. The ruling was reached years back, and it was taking time. This was also the army showing its clout just before the 'disengagement', because the army also needed to show that it could do its job. So what they did was bring these concrete slabs like the ones used for the Separation Wall, three meters high.

How were they brought into the neighbourhood?

Believe me, when I was told they were going to do it, I wondered how the hell it would get there? What did they do? Brought in a crane that cost 100,000 shekel a workday. That's 50 thousand per 12 hours and that crane was there for 24 hours. It cost the army 100,000 shekel just to get the crane, not counting the cost of the concrete plates, just crane work. Bring a crane to lift the slabs over the neighborhood, Avraham Avinu, and place them down at the Shaharabati House. They surrounded it, and the workers had to come build there. They brought Border Patrolmen to secure the workmen, and the settlers were throwing down bottles all the time. One day they threw a wine bottle at one of the workers and gashed his head.

What were they throwing?

Everything. You know, that's Hebron too. The whole Avraham Avinu neighborhood is above the Shaharabati House. They threw stones, a wine bottle at the workers there.

And how did the workers manage to work?

They didn't.

They were secured?

They had helmets on. One guy didn't wear a helmet, and he's the one who got hit with a wine bottle. You know how it is, what they had there? Kids would come in with

crow bar and break a whole day's work in five minutes. You know how those kids operate. There were barbed wire spirals there, and as soon as the settlers decided they're into this, then the whole Avraham Avinu settlement was involved. The kids all jumping in, parents yelling and driving the soldiers and the Border Patrolmen crazy.

What were you doing at the time?

We weren't in on this, it was the Border Patrol's job to secure them.

It was in your area?

Yes, it was our area, but it was the BP's job. Securing the whole affair. But depending on how much it disturbed the Border Patrolmen. There was this Druze BP and they (the settlers) really celebrated this. Many Druze serve there. So they shouted all kinds of stuff at him. Kids jumping in, ruining all the day's work in five minutes.

How was this work completed?

By the time I left there, it was not completed.

Testimony 81, Hebron

We haven't yet spoken about the Jews in Hebron.

The bad Jews.

Did they give you trouble?

Sure they did. But there's not too much you can do about the Jews. What can you do? With the Jews it's the most aggravating part. There are cases where you really want to lash out at them already. I'll give you just an example, I was – you know the "Prayer Route"? A Jewish kid walks along, an Arab kid passes by, boom! He kicks the Arab in the face. Now if the Arab hits back, I have to catch him, slap his face. Got it? The Jew is allowed to do anything he pleases.

Did you work with the Border Patrol?

They're the worst. What we do is nothing in comparison to what they do. The BP, they really go all the way. They would break people's knees. I remember once they caught an Arab who had thrown stones, put his leg against the wall as he lay there, and boom, simply trampled his knee. No mercy. I thought, wow, I can't believe you could reach this degree of cruelty... Say we'd pass by them on our patrol and we saw them holding a checkpoint of sorts. "Come here!" boom boom, they'd beat someone, kick him, just a

kid. "Go on. Don't talk. You'er talking? Come back here." Boom boom, they'd start timing him, making him run back and forth. Within twenty seconds I had a bottle of juice.

What, from the grocery store?

Yes. They'd beat him silly. The kid would come back: "But he's not giving me any". "What do you mean, he's not? Tell him that if he doesn't give you one right now, I'm going to slaughter him." That's what they'd say to him.

In Arabic?

Obviously. The Border Patrol is full of Arabic-speakers, lots of Druze.

Testimony 82, Hebron

... What we did have though were false-arrests that we... that our company commander carried out, his own initiative. Also to train us and show that the army can go in anywhere it wants, arrests anyone it wants in the middle of the night, without any apparent reason. There was no reason. The place was chosen at random on the map, where the finger touched, that family's home was broken into in the middle of the night.

People were literally picked up?

People were picked up, checked out. Not sure anything was found. They were brought back after a few hours. I remember someone in our platoon wondering whether that was at all legal, he said it wasn't, but this was our first operations period, so we didn't think about anything.

Testimony 83, Hebron

Listen, the 'Pharmacy' outpost was literally an abuse point. One guy would catch (Palestinian) kids, make them splay their legs flat against the wall, with a metal rod he'd force them, pass it between their legs and go: "Sing, repeat after me", and they: "No way, why?" They had to shout Hattiqvah (Israeli national anthem) after him: "As

long as deep in the heart...” and if they were off the beat, they’d get a blow to the knee with the metal rod “Sing exactly as I sing it!” Regularly. Just like that. There was always abuse there. It was a permanent abuse station. They’d lock people in – you know that post with the two doors? At the Pharmacy? – they’d lock old people in, throw firecrackers in, lock them in, throw, lock in, throw. Regularly. Just for kicks. Plenty of bullshit. Our battallion was full of it. Soldiers were already desperate with guard duty, sick of it all. I’m being fucked her, let them all be fucked here too. You’re familiar with this stuff. All that bullshit. Listen, it’s just so awful.

Testimony 84, Hebron

I don’t know the story myself, I heard it from a friend of mine. He told me he was standing – either at a checkpoint or on patrol – there was a checkpoint called ‘Jilber’ that would be up occasionally, then taken down – and at a Palestinian grocery store nearby he suddenly saw two (Jewish) kids going in and raising hell, I don’t exactly remember. You know, throwing things off shelves, trashing. Now this story is known to the police. People complained.

Who complained?

I don’t know, I think my friend did, or someone else. A while ago he was interrogated too. So the story goes, that these kids really messed up this Palestinian shop, and tried to run away, and soldiers tried to stop them. These Hebron settlers, I felt they’re really clever. Not just my feeling – they really are terribly clever. There’s this house they want to destroy, and they don’t want any of them to be arrested for it or interrogated or anything, so they take all the little kids, up to – I don’t know, 12, 15-years old, and let only them work at it, ruin everything, throw stones. If you were over a certain age you would never in your life go throw stones at Palestinians just as a policeman is walking by, which actually doesn’t happen anyway.

You say that because of your own gut-feeling or because you talked to people?

Did you hear them saying that?

That’s my conclusion. I understood from both kids and adults that that’s how it works. No one there “violates the law”, however we put it. They know what to do.

And what are your instructions? If you see settlers doing something, can you

arrest them?

No, we are powerless against them. We don't watch them, we're not police. They're civilians, we're not allowed to deal with them. Say there were huge arguments at some place where kids – the TIPH vehicle would pass there in the morning before the (settler) kids were picked up to go to school, and all of them would take big stones and boom. That was a regular thing.

Where was this, at 'Jilber'?

It was around the Beit Hadassah area. At Beit Hadassah colony. So we talked among ourselves and said we must stop them somehow, and were told that we must not interfere with them in any way. At the most, go talk to them.

Who told you this?

I don't remember. One of our higher-ranking officers, okay? Not regular soldiers, let's put it this way.

At the briefing held when units replace each other at the checkpoint, when the officers brief you, what are you as soldiers told you're supposed to do?

We're not supposed to do anything. Alert the police, report. The police is afraid to come there. But it's also a matter of feeling, okay. The police is afraid to come there. The hatred it runs into there is wild, and it's very easy to just chase it away, I guess, or they're just not interested enough to come. They don't come there when they don't have to, although they know about the chaos that goes on there. They ignore it. Don't bother. That's another memory, of how things go on there.

So what are you supposed to do, what's your job?

At most, we can tell them to stop it. If they say no, we are not allowed to do anything. If it gets to the point that things can really heat up, only then can we keep them apart, but mustn't use any kind of force. Nothing physical. I mean, friction that has happened, friction between Jews and Palestinians is there all the time, and I've never witnessed Palestinians starting it, let's put it this way. And you don't have the ability, I mean you have the ability to use force against Palestinians. You cannot use force against Jews. You don't want to use force, it always reaches such an extent that you have to exercise force against the side that does not deserve it, let's put it this way. Not always.

Testimony 85, Hebron

He (a soldier in the company) was on guard duty, and really bitter for having been grounded. So he caught some detainee. Detainees would be frozen at the guard shack until the GSS would come to pick them up. They would be checked and stood in the guard shack. Anyway, this guy was all bitter, he'd been grounded, I don't remember the reason. He got mad, shackled an Arab to the gate itself, and said, "When I tell you to step forward, you go" as if to open the gate. "When I tell you to walk back, you walk back". Like some retard. So he was standing, and ** the company commander arrives and the guy says "Okay, walk forward", and he does, opens the gate. ** (The company commander) doesn't notice this at first. The guy's walking, the gate opens. Then the soldier tells him, "Come back". Suddenly **(the company commander) realizes what's going on. He reverses and yelled at the guard, like all hell broke loose. So loud, he woke up the whole company. He usually wasn't like that, a really good man. So he stood the whole company in a half-circle, woke everyone up in the middle of the night, you realize this? "What is this?" he yelled at everyone. "I never want to see such things happen in my company!" He really had it with us. At first we had no idea what he was talking about.

And the soldier was punished for this?

Sure. In a big way. He had been grounded for 28 days, and that was extended to 35. The company commander yelled at him like crazy. I think that just from the yelling he was frightened out of his mind. The whole company was at him for this, because we were woken up in the middle of the night. We never sleep enough as it is, and here he goes waking us up.

Testimony 86, Hebron

You know how many times I've seen Border Patrolmen abusing Arabs? At the Cave of the Fathers it is standard procedure. You know how many times I've seen them just like that, some Arab comes walking down the street, they push him into this 'refrigerator' post. In front of the Cave there's this kind of iron post.

To the right of the stairway. It's not a refrigerator.

A kind of cubicle. We called it 'refrigerator' because that's what it looks like. In the winter they'd freeze in there, it's really cold. So there, Arabs would regularly get beaten to a pulp. Standard procedure.

Next to the police?

Yes. I'm telling you, the police in Hebron doesn't care about these things. The policemen themselves, I mean in Hebron there are no rules. Hebron is the 'Wild West'. *** told me this. He said, "Hebron is the 'Wild West'." I told him, "What are you fucking about? How 'Wild West' can such a place be?" Anything can happen. The settlers do anything they please. The most extreme incident I witnessed, is when I saw a (settler) child, about three years-old walking along the 'Prayer Route', and a little Arab child passed him by. Just a little kid. What does he know? Also about three years-old. So the (settler) child spits at him thickly, square in the face. Really extreme. I said, Hey, how's this child being educated? What is this? I almost slapped his face. And his father walks with him, hand in hand, saying absolutely nothing.

Testimony 87, Hebron

So you're walking on a patrol, what's your assignment?

To locate and prevent terrorist activity in the Hebron city premisses.

That's what is written?

Yes.

How is this done?

How is done? You walk around, strolling.

Arrest people? You come, pick someone up?

Yes. You arrest someone.

On what grounds?

If he looks suspect. First people are mainly stopped and asked questions: What are you doing, what are you this and that, then no one has the energy to stop anyone or check cars, you just go into a house and that's that, go to sleep.

...While the family is in a room?

Yes. Looked in a room. One soldier keeps watch over the family.

They don't ask to get out?

If they ask to go to the bathroom, they do. If they ask to prepare food, they're allowed to do so. It's pretty free.

Relatively.

Relatively. Everything is relative.

How long do they stay there?

Until the patrol time is over. Walk half an hour, want to make coffee, want to eat something maybe, someone always brings coffee along. So you walk, go into some house. Even if you get up on Yom Kippur, always get up around 3 o'clock in the morning, to start watching against any troubles, so Jews going to prayers won't be attacked. So you go, 3 o'clock in the morning, 3:30 a.m. we get into a house, already know the houses, knock on the door and they go: Hi, what's up.

You had regular houses?

Yes, listen, you find a good house, soft sofas and stuff, not smelly, then you stay. What, I mean everyone goes to sleep except one, take off the ceramic bullet-proof vests, go to sleep. One stays up listening to the communication radio, watches over the family.

Testimony 88, Hebron

There were all the incidents around the Shaharabti House, I remember this patrol's assignment was to meander through the casbah, prevent passage of terrorists from the casbah over to Avraham Avinu neighborhood and to Israel, all that bullshit. At some point, I remember the usual timetable, around 3 p.m. until midnight, until the last of the settlers is gone. You're in Beit Shaharabati the whole time, fighting with settler children. That's what you do.

That's 'patrol-30'?

Yes. Get that?

From 3 in the afternoon until midnight there are no terrorists?

Right. I keep trying to explain this to my buddies, who don't understand because they've been in the Occupied Territories. It's similar but not the same. Because you get there, and listen, I'm telling you the truth, we were young, we were all 'gung-ho'. Really. We'd go the patrols, most of us, really seriously. We really wanted to guard the place. As much as we didn't really believe we should be there and all that, and

that the settlers were bad and all, still we wanted to do guard duty, walk around the casbah in order to be doing something, okay? Suddenly you're told, listen, according to timetable... At first we were just alerted there, every time, and then it was already a part of our timetable: From 1 to 2 o'clock we walk the casbah, from 2 to 3, then at 3 o'clock, Shaharabati House. What then? Shaharabati Hosue. Now listen, we were simply fighting there with little children.

What age?

From six to thirteen, I think.

...Where are their parents?

Waiting, looking on. It was a children's game. At some point, I remember a friend said: Okay, I'm tired of fighting with them, let's play soccer with them. So we played some soccer there. It was like keeping them company, you see?

...And their parents looked on?

Yes.

No social worker around?

None whatsoever. And then there were the serious incidents, when suddenly they wanted to block the house or surround it with a wall, concrete or something, and then more forces were brought and more settlers came and there were real fights and chaos.

What did the children do? Why did they go wild there?

I don't know. Their parents told them to. I don't know what the story was.

What was their intention?

There was a ruling by the High Court of Justice. Because the house was abandoned, and then the court ruled that this house belongs to the Shaharabati family. It's their property. This house stands right inside the Avraham Avinu settler neighborhood. So on the one hand I see their point, a bit.

Whose point do you see?

The Jews. Because it's right inside the neighborhood. Next to the kindergarten. There's a kindergarten there, next door. So the Jews said, this is not right. But the court ruling, that's it. So they simply came and for a while they did other things, they put a hose there that kept spraying water and simply deteriorated the house. I was in shock. I was gone for the weekend, after three days I returned and saw a hole in the wall. I couldn't believe water could wear away concrete like that. I was in shock. First they would come with crow bars and stuff, to try, then we chased them away so they simply put this hose. There were also egg-throwings and such stuff, and the police did nothing. You understand? As usual.

It did nothing for two whole months?

Sometimes there were night operations. We were there on patrol always, six guys, hitting as usual. Suddenly a policeman, who used to stand there regularly at the post, monitoring the place following these incidents, he filmed and stuff. So another policeman, his buddy, from outside the neighborhood, says to me: "Soldier, come here." "What?" "Come here, bro', please, take this food ration and bring it to that policeman, I can't have them throwing eggs at me again". I looked at him: Bring it. Just go and bring it. Do you realize how low they've gotten? You know, Israel police, they could just do nothing there. So once again you realize the state sends you there to be a policeman, because the police doesn't actually do anything. I don't know what it's like now. Truth is, I had a talk about this later on, when I became deputy company sergeant major, we had this week's pre-combat training or something. So the Hebron area commander arrived, talked to the soldiers and said many thing that really got on my nerves. The police officer, I don't know his exact rank. All kinds of stuff: "Yes, the police always helps"... So I told him this story: Say, what if – to embarrass him in front of all the soldiers, because I was mad that he came to us. Because we ate a lot of shit on account of the police, you see? We did their job. He starting saying, "I haven't heard this story before. I'll look into it, I don't know about this" and such. Or say, he said the Jews never ever – yes, they swear at but never lift a hand against soldiers. I told him the story I told before with (at another point during the interview the interviewee told about a mate of his who was pushed into a corner and beat up by settlers). So he tells me, "Listen, I haven't heard about this, could be." This got on my nerves. They totally shirk their responsibility like, I don't know what it's like nowadays, but then it was really annoying. It's enough that you're told the whole time you come to the Territories and you're a policeman and not a fighter, but you try to deny it. You say, no, I'm a soldier and I'm here for a certain purpose, I'm not here to do police work. And in fact you do it when the real authortiy who should be doing it simply doesn't. It drives you crazy. And then you eat all that shit from the Jews too. We were literally having fist fights there on a regular basis.

Testimony 89, Hebron

Were there cases where a soldier or commander went overboard, and did something violent or abusive?

They always do. It's not a normal situation to be in, and naturally 19-year olds go overboard suddenly. There were situations where people really went too far, and I think there were also situations where we treated people to gently.

Do you have any examples?

Yes. Just walking down the street and hitting children on the knee with a stick to see them fall, seems like a case in point. Or catching children passing the checkpoint who did not understand what they were supposed to do and simply beat them up.

Children how old?

Ten years old.

Do you have a specific case in mind?

Two brothers were at the 'Pharmacy' checkpoint. There's a metal detector there. They simply walked through it, it beeped so soldiers shouted at them to come back and they didn't hear or didn't want to hear. So one of the guys ran up and caught him, there's this iron post on the side.

Looks like a big oven?

Yes, exactly.

For protection?

Yes. He pushed him inside, beat him up for five minutes, and then let the kid walk.

A ten-year old child?

Yes. The kid got out of there after fifteen minutes, limping.

Testimony 90, Hebron

... There was this house episode.

What, the house that they (Palestinians) tried to restore?

Yes. Which had been destroyed. The Shaharabati House. .. The point is that the children are a very strong force over there. There's this story, not mine, that children suddenly go up on the roofs, throw stones on Palestinians, and swear at them. Children

abuse old Arab men, throw eggs and stones at them. Children at the Shaharabati House. How did they do it? There was not one adult there. The children kept getting little hammers and simply broke stuff. I have a picture of the Shaharabati House the way it was, and later. How can a wall - you know those Arab house walls built I don't know back in Turkish times, something at least half a meter thick - how, from a little hole in the wall, you suddenly get no wall at all. With hammers. Children. Dozens of children with hammers. Really determined. You hear this tick-tick-tick hammering away at night, you really do. An army force, we had a force that simply had to stand at the Shaharabati gate. Guys from the auxiliary company. Totally operational. Simply stuck there to watch out for little kids to come with hammers. And you know that it's the parents who send them. You know it all comes from the parents, from the adults. Everything. Also the way the kids talk to you. You stand on guard duty, in the street, a post every few dozen meters. This (settler) kid comes with you, telling you: Your Nahal unit, you're all lefties, the Arabs are bad. There are good Arabs, there are Jewish Arabs who are the Israeli Arabs, and there's the Arabs whom we have to kill, Palestinian Arabs. And you realize it's not from them, you realize what is going on there. You understand. And there are stories, my mates would run on roofs chasing these kids who threw stuff on them, and how guys fought with these children.

Testimony 91, Hebron

... all sorts of experiments to see who can do the best splits in Abu Sneina. They would stand guys against the wall, go as if they're searching them, you ask the guy to splay his legs wide: Open, open, open more, the winner is the guy who can go furthest. A sort of game. To try and check that.

The winner got a prize?

Yes. A lollipop.

The Palestinian?

Yes. He managed to do a whole splits, the first guy. He was really talented. Or who can hold his breath the longest.

How did they check that?

They'd strangle them.

What do you mean?

Someone would come along, go through the motions of checking them, suddenly begin yelling as though they said something to him they shouldn't. And then he would strangle them.

Their neck?

Yes. Their neck. He'd block their trachea. You press their Adam's Apple. It's unpleasant. You look at the watch until he passes out. Who takes the most time to pass out.

Testimony 92, Hebron

Throwing stones was another incident. It was the third incident, where I was standing guard at the post so I wasn't actually present. There were guys from the standby squad as well as the guys standing guard down the hill. I only heard the reports on our communication radio. At Tel Rumeida, you go up the road towards the army post and at one point there's this fork of the road. Now this corner house has two stories, and it's the first house of the Tel Rumeida neighborhood colony. There's this balcony there, and there were some settler children standing there, from 8 year-olds to about 16-17 year-olds, although the oldest weren't there. They started throwing stones at Palestinians. Usually it begins with throwing stones at Palestinians. The standby squad was alerted, and the guys from the 'Jilber' post down the hill came up to try to stop them. And instead of throwing stones at Palestinians they were soon throwing stones at us. Not especially at us, but that's what I understood. Again I say, I wasn't there in person. That's what I heard over the radio set.

Testimony 93, Hebron

We went into a house and sat there, and then the owner – apparently a bit crazy – began to shout, to go wild, shove soldiers and stuff. He gripped some soldier by his bullet-proof vest, under the ceramic, and began to shake him. Then he was hit with some rifle butt in the face to let go, so he went and called the DCO. The DCO representatives came, talked to him, talked to us. In the meantime we already trashed his whole house.

Because you were mad or because of procedure?

Both, you know. Really, if he behaves that way it means he must be hiding something, and also the final twist of - what are you doing even touching someone, are you out of your mind? So we trashed his house.

Did you find arms?

No. We threw the mattresses all over the place, everything on the floor, the whole house spilled on the floor. Literally.

Was he there alone?

No. With his wife and two kids, little ones. The whole house on the floor. Literally, from bed linen to suits, everything. Drawers. Anything you can imagine. Take a room like that, all trashed. Everything. The closets were up here. Everything. We got out everything. Pulled out the shelves.

Did you overturn furniture?

Yes. We overturned a sofa, looked underneath, made a little ‘seam’ with a knife to check if he had hidden anything inside. Everything, really.

Then the DCO (District Coordinating Officer) arrived.

The DCo arrived. He came, spoke with him for a moment, hello, what’s up. Then he comes to us, asking: “What’s going on, why did you trash the house?” We said, “Listen, he’s really suspect, this guy. What does he think, gripping a soldier like that? We had to search the place.” He tells us that the Arab said the soldier had called him son of a bitch, or mother-fucker or something like that, that he swore at him and that’s why he got so angry. The DCO ask the soldier, our buddy, “Did you call him a son of a bitch?” “Me? No way.” “Okay.” The DCO goes to the Arab and starts yelling at him that next time he doesn’t open the door to Jews, to the army, in a second flat, he goes to jail. That if he ever complain again, he’ll be arrested, and his sons and sisters and the whole family. He clarified for him really thoroughly that - no complaints. Just shut up and that’s it. Eat it and go on. Then it turned out the soldier really did swear at him.

The soldier?

Yes, but that really wouldn’t have mattered to anyone.

Testimony 94, Hebron

In that specific case, this was another of several examples where we were told, listen, we're going in now, and we said, let's wait another hour, and they said no. The Israeli army is not at the beck and call of Palestinians. We go in because it's necessary, period. Why now? Oh, because we have to make sure they know we can go in anytime. Every time. We can show up at any hour, at 3 in the morning, at 6 in the evening...

Did you ever barge in at 3 in the morning?

In the middle of the night, too. There was a case when we entered a house at midnight. We entered, told the owner that his balcony is ours for the next three hours, and placed a lookout there.

Did this happen often?

It happened once in a while.... There was this scene of entering houses and overturning stuff. I call it overturning, no one really broke anything or stole anything, nothing like that. I call that overturning because you enter the home, seat the whole family somewhere, take everything out of the closets, lift the bed, check it all out. Open all the cupboards, check all the blankets. Finally the guy has the contents of every room on the middle of the floor, and then you say thank you very much and goodbye...

Testimony 95, Hebron

The Shaharabati House (a Palestinian family home) is located inside the Avraham Avinu settler neighborhood. Some trouble was reported there, I got there and see about 40 adults taking the Shaharabati House apart. This happened every day.

Jews?

Sure. Our business was to fight with them all the time. We'd get there, go in, take them out, they'd go back in, there were hits, pushes. Policemen didn't dare go in there. It took them an hour until they would arrive. They would not go in without a protective shield of soldiers around them. Nothing was ever thrown at soldiers there,

except from two arrests that were made there, of two guys from Hebron. Two whose names I didn't know. That was what we did. Shaharabati House was something that the whole company – when we heard Shaharabati, everyone jumped. There's fights. We brought someone especially from the battallion for face-to-face combat. It was mad, when I think about it. We brought the self defence instructor from Harsina to give us more training with the bullet-proof ceramic vest and helmet. Minimum damage and stuff.

What were the ages of people you confronted there?

Four to forty. The kids are there every day.

What do they do?

Break walls. Four year-olds, with hammers. Okay, four is an exaggeration, perhaps, six year-olds. Really little. Tiny.

Describe the scene again.

You go into the playground through the Shalhevet Pas gate, right? You go in and on your left there's most of the neighborhood, houses, and on the right-hand corner is the Shaharabati House and here is the playground. I remember a Friday afternoon. I come there, there's... The kids sit in a circle with their kindergarten teacher. Friday story. The kids run around and she says, "Come on, sit down." Cute. Look like the kids on my kibbutz. On Friday when they sit on the lawn next to the dining hall and get stuff. Finally, kids who are just a little bit older come around and break stuff and take stuff apart. At some point the house was really falling down.

Do you remember a specific confrontation with settlers?

I was the commander at the Gross post, and I was told "There's trouble at the Shaharabati House, get there". I arrive and see... I get command post on the radio telling me – "It's more than just kids," okay. I send 'patrol 30' over there. That's six guys, and me, that's seven altogether. There were some thirty people, a huge number of people looking on. I can't tell why that day of all days. There was a top wall, a bottom wall, everytime they'd break up places in the wall where they discovered blocks/bricks rather than concrete. That's where they'd break it up. Some columns were left, concrete columns that were the foundation of the house, the wall towards the kindergarten.

They began to destroy the lower part of the wall?

Not the lowest... Move here, move there, they begin to push. It's important to say that they're really trying to tell you, "Get out of here, you've no business here". They keep saying that: "What are you doing here? Who are you protecting? We don't need you. Go stand at Gross post, go do 'patrol-30'." They know all the names on radio

code, they know all the good locations, when it's hot, when it's cold, when there's light, or where there's some ragged rug, an abandoned house with a rug so you don't have to sit on the freezing floor, at some point the patrol had to move on, it was told to get moving. I stay, keep watching. Towards the end, our mobile command unit came and the deputy battallion commander took and 5 minutes before they got there, the settlers manage to collapse the last concrete column. At this point I'm just watching, I have no ability to do anything. I remember it was like the days when in order to break in door, they would ram them.

They brought heavy equipment?

No. What heavy equipment? No tractors. I get on the radio and report, "Guys, the Shaharabati House is down." They go, "What??" As if they didn't understand that that's where things had been heading all along.

When did you summon the police?

I don't know. I don't call the police. The police is called in by battallion headquarters, they decided when to summon them. The police got there to make arrests. The wall fell, they asked me who did it, I said, "If I see him I'll tell you." He more or less disappeared. The guy who was leading the ramming, clearly it was some caretaker, their leader, or I don't know. All hell was loose there. We wanted to arrest him. The police came with a camera. They walked around and then they began to make arrests and everyone started... Their camera flew off and broke, it was broken. 'Patrol-30' arrives, chaos, pushes and hits. The next night policemen came, not in daytime of course. They fenced off the house, put a "Beware of collapsing debris", and "Keep away". That whole part collapsed.

Testimony 96, Hebron

There were some cases where someone was beaten up just for the hell of it and the DCO was summoned, so guys placed a knife in his hand: "What, he tried to stab us!"

They had to justify their action?

Yes.

And if you would have beat him up just for kicks?

Then we might be punished. There was this guy when we were patrolling, his kid had thrown stones, or perhaps not even thrown stones, we just thought he threw stones.

Usually the parents, start beating their kid up so you won't beat him up. He was so different, he only defended him as if he were totally fearless, not afraid of anyone. He reminded me so much of my dad, really, I couldn't even look at him. My dad once had a mustache, and so did he. He really reminded me of my dad, his whole demeanor, his body language, and... The squad commander faced him, stuck his helmet to his face and said: "Listen, shut up. If you don't, I'll beat you up." I stopped him and said: "Listen, leave him alone."

Did you explain why?

No. Why? Do I owe him anything? I said: "No way, you leave him alone." He goes: "What! He's this, he's that..." and I go, "No way. I'll talk to him." I went over and said to him: "Listen, I'm asking you, really, just take your kid and go. Don't do anything to him, just take him from here and go away. I don't want to see here. Leave." It was so odd. The whole patrol was in shock. You look at them, they have such a different culture, they behave differently, they live differently at home, everything. They're different. They're another people. What can you do. Different. Then suddenly you see something that's so similar to you, to yours, even to your home, it was a real shock.

Testimony 97, Hebron

Now that you're out of the Occupied Territories, what do you have to say?

I'd say it's absurd. I'd say it corrupts us. I'd say it corrupts them. I'd say we lose in both directions. I'd ask people to put this on their agenda, to understand and learn and check out what goes on there. I'd ask them to go there and talk to people. I'd ask them to tune in, to understand that for our society, even on the most selfish grounds, this is one of our worst ills, the severest of them all for Israeli society, for the people, the state, the economy, society, education. One of our worst ills. Our malignancy.

Whom would you tell? People in Tel Aviv?

To everyone, yes.



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