

# **OCCUPYING HEBRON**

Soldiers' Testimonies  
from Hebron 2011-2017

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**[ BREAKING  
THE SILENCE ]**

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ISRAELI SOLDIERS TALK ABOUT  
THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

## Introduction

This year, the Israeli settlement in the heart of the city of Hebron marked its 50th year. Over the years, due to the Israeli government's actions, the settlement movement, and the IDF's heavy presence, the city center of Hebron - one of the largest Palestinian cities in the West Bank - has turned into a ghost town, almost completely devoid of Palestinians. From the invasion of the Park Hotel by Rabbi Levinger and his students in April of 1968; the takeover of Beit Hadassah in April of 1979; the massacre committed by Baruch Goldstein at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in February of 1994; and to date, the story of the settlement in Hebron faithfully represents the story of the occupation at large.

In the past, settlers' daily violence and disregard for the rule of law, the deprivation of Palestinians' most basic rights, and the ongoing actions of soldiers maintaining this oppressive system were considered stains worth trying to conceal. However, in recent years it seems as though we have shed our pretense and sense of shame. Instead of striving to change the reality, the Israeli government has been working to strengthen and deepen the Israeli settlement in the heart of the Palestinian city.

This booklet of testimonies intends to offer a glimpse of the daily reality in Hebron from the point of view of the soldiers who served there. This is the fourth booklet of testimonies that *Breaking the Silence* has devoted to Hebron, and it is comprised of testimonies from soldiers who served there at some point between the years 2011-2017.

In the years covered in this booklet, the settlement in Hebron has seen an extensive building boom, both official and "unofficial," which we have not seen for decades. This expansion included the population of the "House of Contention," a new settlement in the heart of the city; approval for the construction of a new apartment building called the "Hezekiah Quarter," which will dramatically increase the number of settlers living in the city; and preliminary approval for the construction of dozens of housing units above the old wholesale market in the city. The approval of these building projects and de facto settlement expansion demonstrate the Israeli government's efforts to instill and normalize the occupation and settlement in Hebron.

As indicated by soldiers' testimonies, these developments resulted in the expansion of IDF presence, entrenching Israeli control over the city of 200,000 Palestinian residents. Anyone who follows what takes place in the occupied territories knows this dynamic far too well: settlers illegally invade a structure and cling to it; the army is required to protect the transgressors in their new place of residence, stationing soldiers within or near the structure; military presence and activity in the vicinity of the structure — namely, patrols, inspections, arrests, checkpoints, entering random houses, and more — grows increasingly intensive; friction between the army, settlers, and Palestinian residents increases along with violence; settlers and their government representatives declare that “violence will be met with construction” and rush to invade additional structures. Thus, the cycle of violence, dispossession, and oppression perpetuates itself.

The entrenchment of the settlement alongside military control in Hebron on the one hand, and how transparent and normalized it has become in Israeli discourse on the other, capture a broader trend gaining hold among the Israeli public. With time, the occupation and its inherent military dictatorship have become obvious to many Israelis. All the while, dispossession of Palestinians' lands and deprivation of their basic human rights in the name of the settlement project is perceived as the most patriotic act of our generation.

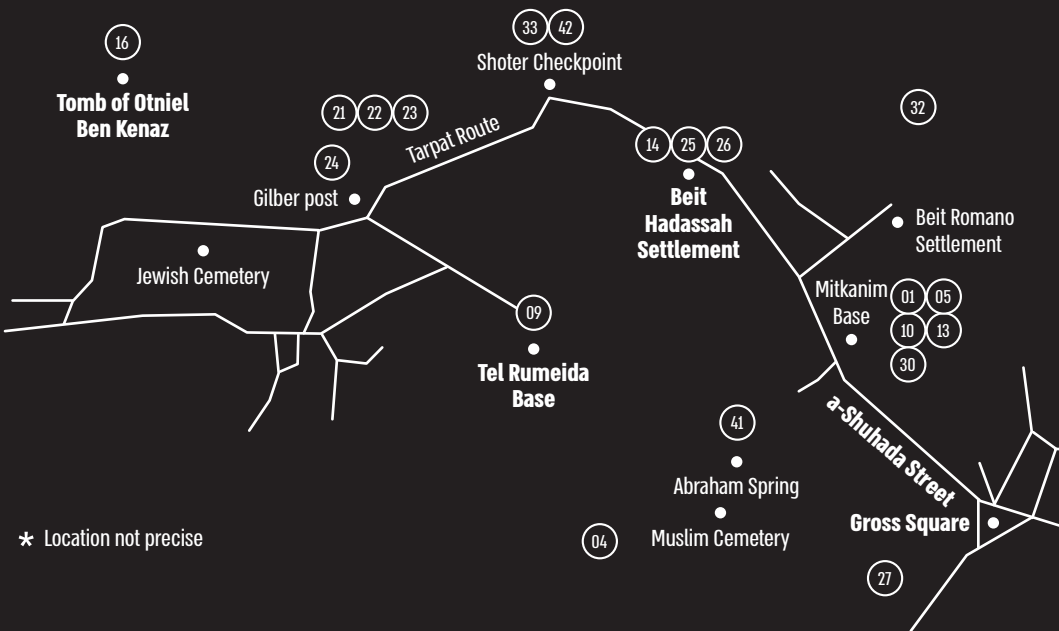
A close, sober look at what goes on in Hebron today, depicts the reality of Israeli control over the occupied territories as a whole: a reality wherein the division between rulers and inferiors is crystal clear and rests upon each individual's national and ethnic belonging. A reality in which violence is the only means of existence. A reality that steadily erodes the values of law and justice until they lose all meaning. From within this reality, soldiers' testimonies paint a self-portrait of the occupation. We believe that our society has a moral duty to face this portrait as it depicts each and every one of our faces and will continue to do so until we uproot the occupation, once and for all.

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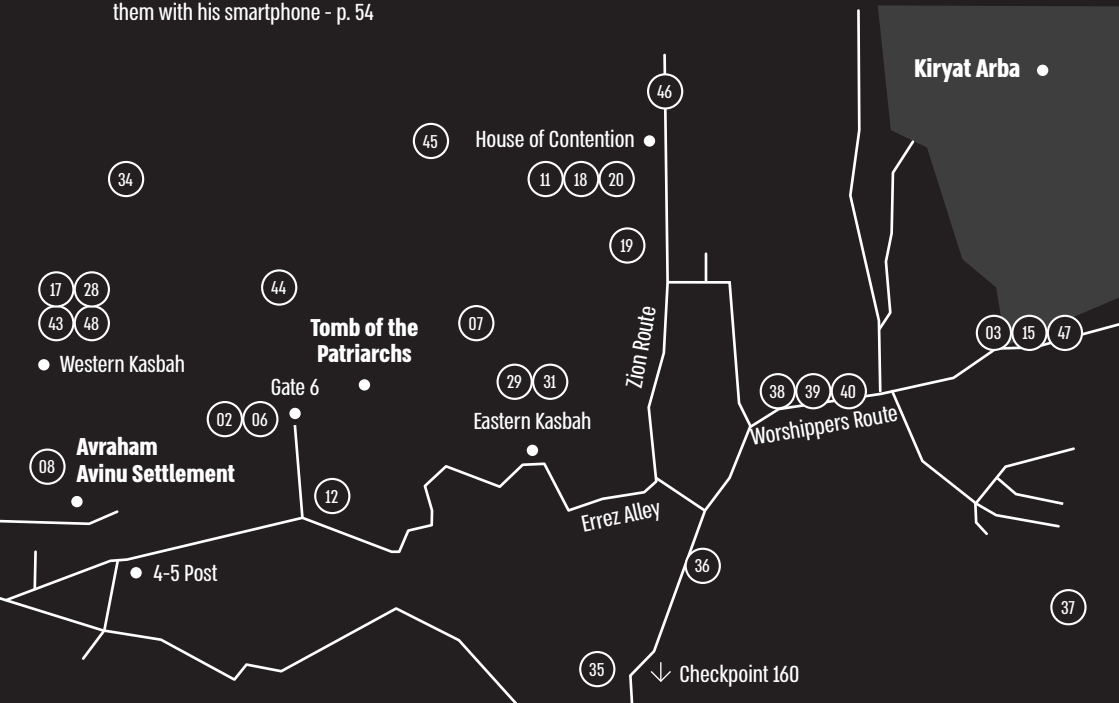
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## 01

### **Where I saw violence in Hebron?**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

You're asking me where I saw violence in Hebron? That's like asking where I saw Hebron in Hebron. It's really at every corner. You just leave your post and you're already on the street that separates people according to their ethnicity or nationality, or whatever whitewashed language is used to justify what's going on there. There aren't a lot of places in the [occupied] territories that I think it's OK for them to be called apartheid, because I think it's simplifying and one-dimensional, because the situation in the territories is really complex. But in Hebron it's... I don't know, I call it "apartheid light." It's not that I walk around with dogs and hit old ladies all day and do what I please, but it's very clear where Jews can pass, where Arabs cannot pass. It's very clear who the army is working for, and it's not for the Palestinian population. The mission there is not to maintain order; the mission there is to enforce Jewish supremacy in the city of Hebron. It's not that we soldiers are between a hammer and an anvil, [but rather] we are the hammer being hurled at the Palestinians by the settlers.

## 02

### **I really want to shoot the motherfucking terrorist who will try me**

Rank: Sergeant · Place: Tomb of the Patriarchs · Period: 2017

Starting to do guard duty with border police officers was a shock, because it was a completely different approach in perceiving things. In no time, discussions between my platoon and the border police officers evolved into 'what would you do if...'

#### **What topics did you discuss?**

We talked a lot about, at what stage do you start using violence and what sort of violence. If, say, he pushes you a bit, what do you do.

#### **A Palestinian?**

Yes. A Palestinian pushes you a bit, so what do you do. Their answer of course was to immediately pin him to the ground. And the answer that it shouldn't be so

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**"On the one hand there's the indifference, and on the other, the expectation to use the tools I've been given. A musician who practices so much and just wants to perform already, that's the feeling."**

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automatic, really stunned them. Even verbal violence. If he curses your family, what do you do? "Immediately strike him with the butt of the weapon." [To me] it's clear that if a Palestinian swears at me, I won't care. I'm standing there and it isn't... if he approaches me, that's a different matter. I think guard duty there (in Hebron) simply wears you down. This routine of constantly preparing for an upcoming incident, kind of makes us want it to happen, to put the skills we've learned to use. I've heard this

a lot there, too: "I really want to shoot the motherfucking terrorist who will try me, already." You're worn down by nothing happening, nothing happening, and you're also expecting something to happen. And I'm the guest [there] and he (the border police officer) spends a whole year at the same posts and knows all the people passing by, knows all the Palestinians who come to pray by name. I'm the guest and suddenly [I] harshly criticize the whole situation. But it's their routine and I suddenly come and undermine his reality.

**Did you feel as if you were harming his sense of righteousness, that the end justifies the means?**

That was actually what I was trying to harm for him. I didn't want to harm his sense of security.

**I'm sure he didn't enjoy abusing Palestinians.**

But he was indifferent to it in some sense, relatively indifferent to the suffering of Palestinians. I think the service does that. He was more indifferent to that.

**The question is if it comes from a place of indifference in him, or from the feeling that the end justifies the means.**

I don't really think it's that. It's what I said before: on the one hand [there's] the indifference, and on the other, the expectation to use the tools I've been given. A musician who practices so much and just wants to perform already, that's the feeling. I also felt that in my platoon.

## 03

### **They were at the wrong time at the wrong place**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 931<sup>st</sup> Battalion · Place: Jabel Johar neighborhood ·

Period: 2013

The post [Jalis] is above Kiryat Arba, and you get there on a road that runs along the outskirts of a Palestinian neighborhood, and the pizza delivery guy would take that route on the road up to us. And one time when we ordered pizza, when he arrived, he told us that stones were thrown at him on the way. Of course the whole post jumped [to its feet]. Obviously by the time that happened, a few minutes had passed. Meaning, by the time he told us about where the incident was, and by the time we reached the site, they caught a few children who were in the area and tried to frighten them. They put them up against the wall and threw stun grenades.

#### **At them?**

Next to them, to intimidate the children. Because the talk is that if we bring them to the police, nothing will come of it, and these incidents will continue. Someone there decided that it wasn't enough. Right at the bend there's a Palestinian shop, a small grocery shop of sorts, one meter by one meter, and they took them (the children), put them in the shop, and threw a [tear] gas grenade inside. Fortunately, they (the soldiers) didn't succeed, they tried to shut the door, but didn't succeed.

#### **The soldiers?**

Yes, and the children ran out of the shop, of course. And that's it, that was the end of the incident more or less. As far as I know, it eventually led to a military police investigation. Nothing happened to the commander who oversaw the incident.

#### **And what was the goal? What did they want to get from them?**

To deter. To somehow try to prevent the incident from happening again.

#### **Were they the kids who threw the stones?**

There's no way of knowing. You show up ten minutes after the incident. I mean, it's on the way to the post, it's about 400 meters below. Say they threw [stones] at the delivery guy, by the time he arrives, tells the base security guard, the base security guard informs the operations room, and the operations room alerts the force. We're talking at least around seven minutes from when it happened. There's no way of knowing if these are the children who did it.

#### **So who are these children? Where were they caught?**

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**"They caught a few children who were in the area and tried to frighten them. They put them up against the wall and threw stun grenades."**

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There. In other words, they were at the wrong time at the wrong place. It might be them, and it might not be. You can't know for certain. I don't think it's an official position, but it was some sort of effort to prevent the incident from reoccurring.

**Of stone throwing.**

Yes, of stone throwing, yes.

**I don't know how it was at the time, but I know that today there's a system of cameras around Hebron, on which you often see kids, kids are caught throwing stones on camera and then you can come even a few days later.**

I don't remember such a thing. I remember that no one talked about anything like that either. I mean, the talk that comes from higher ranks, probably from the Company Commander down, is, "No one throws stones in my area," and then everyone in turn interprets the implications.

## **04**

### **Crazy situations**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Abu Sneineh neighborhood ·

Period: 2014

We made an arrest during Operation Brother's Keeper that really confused me about the situation there. The family was apparently linked to Hamas somehow. They had lots of pictures of shahids (an Arabic word used to connote martyrs) on the walls and green flags in the house and stuff like that. We went in, they didn't open the door right away, so we started throwing stun grenades outside the house so they'd open. At some point they opened, we arrested the father really quickly, and since they didn't open the door quickly, we started a search to see if they hid something. And then stone throwing started outside the house and [there were] photographers and stuff like that.

**Throwing stones at whom? At the soldiers outside?**

Yes, exactly. So they (the soldiers) threw tear gas grenades and afterwards some of the gas got into the house. There's the father, two sisters and the mother. One

of the sisters was pregnant and the mother is elderly, and the gas got inside the house. We were pretty used to coughing and stuff, but they (the family) were really choking. The pregnant girl, I called her into the kitchen, me - I'm with my face covered, weapon, vest and helmet and everything, and a surreal scene ensues in which I pour her a glass of water, and she doesn't know what's going on. Then we called her (the mother), telling her in broken Arabic to bring her pregnant daughter some onion (inhaling the scent of chopped onion can help ease the effect of tear gas). Because you see a pregnant woman choking from tear gas, you don't care, she could be from ISIS for all I care. Then it becomes even more surreal when the mom comes in, doesn't understand why a soldier is letting her do this in the middle of an arrest. She comes to get an onion and slice it, so she pulls a knife out from the drawer. Now, if you're standing in a room in an Arab house and a knife is being pulled out – something went wrong. So of course I cocked my weapon at her, and within seconds I started screaming at her to drop the knife, and she was confused. Eventually they opened it [the onion] with their hands. But it's these types of crazy situations that made me realize that there's no such thing as a humane or enlightened occupation or anything of the sort.

## 05

### **The deal with facemasks**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

#### **What's the deal with facemasks? Why did you wear them?**

I remember the impression it left on me as a young soldier when I saw combatants going out to make arrests with facemasks. You feel like, 'wow, I reached the elite unit, I'm in the, like, counter-terrorism police unit'. It touches on all those desires to be part of a special unit that engages in these crazy commando operations. So it's also for military swag, which is... And I also imagine that the psychological impact it has on the person being arrested, that those arresting him have no faces, they simply become the uniforms. I'm almost sure no one thought of it to this depth. I think it probably stayed on the level of, 'Let's get these soldiers revved up for duty.' But then I think about the impact it has, of getting arrested by someone with masks. That is to say, it's no longer a person. I mean, there are soldiers in front

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"I think about the impact it has, of getting arrested by someone with masks. That is to say, it's no longer a person. I mean, there are soldiers in front of you who came to carry out operations. You'll look them in the eyes, you won't see any expression, nothing. Like, as if total blackness comes to arrest you."

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of you who came to carry out operations. You'll look them in the eyes, you won't see any expression, nothing. Like, as if total blackness comes to arrest you.

**I think it's really a matter of military swag, but it's true, it's really scary.**

Deathly scary. Think about some team waking you up while you're in bed with a flashlight on the end of a weapon being pointed at you and says, "get dressed - you're under arrest," with facemasks in the middle of the night. There were stories of people pissing their pants from fear during arrests. A person wakes up with a weapon in their face. Doesn't matter how long you've been living in Hebron and are accustomed to this routine – it's shocking.

## 06

### Sadistic approach

Rank: Sergeant · Place: Tomb of the Patriarchs, Gate 6 · Period: 2017

There was one point, a specific post [where] I saw a somewhat sadistic approach. [It was] at gate 6, the gate leading from the Kasbah to the Muslim side of the Tomb of the Patriarchs. [At gate 6] there's a post where you simply press a button, and when you press that button the gate revolves, an iron gate that can turn. If you release the button – the gate gets stuck. When this gate gets stuck it really surprises whomever is standing there inside the sleeve, it hits them in the face.

**It's a revolving door of sorts?**

Yes. And they (border police officers stationed at gate 6) would intentionally trap people in the middle, slam it in their faces.

**They would do that on purpose?**

It was... Yes. I remember I tried to get to that post with the button because I simply couldn't bear to watch it happen. And I asked them about it and they said: "What

do I care? He's stuck there, he can't do anything to me." That was the response.

### **How did the Palestinians react?**

The Palestinians? There were very few instances in which a Palestinian ever spoke up. It seemed as if they were really used to the routine.

## **07**

### **The kid got it bad, for real**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Border Police · Place: Tomb of the Patriarchs, Safsalim Post ·

Period: 2011

There was this little Palestinian boy who lived above Safsalim post, a little kid by the name of Mohannad. This Mohannad kid was seriously wild, even his father couldn't control him.

#### **How old was he?**

I would give him 10, at most 12. This kid was always bugging the soldiers. He had nothing to do, he didn't go to school, didn't study. He would bug us and wanted to play. This was the kid who got beaten up the most. They play soccer above the post, him and all the kids in the neighborhood. One day, he threw a ball toward the post, not on purpose. The ball just flew in the direction of the post. A border police soldier [standing at the post] pulled out his Leatherman [pocket knife], and without saying anything or warning him – punctured the ball. The kid started crying, he came over, took some water, and threw it in the direction of the soldier. Then it got messy. That soldier beat up the kid. What do I mean by 'beat up?' Punches, slaps, kicks, pushes, he even dragged him on the ground. The kid got it bad, for real.



## 08

### **The Jewish community has an interest to recruit the army to its ranks**

Rank: Captain

The Jewish community wants you to feel comfortable there so badly, they pamper you, they bring you a lot of cookies and a lot of stuff, and you're pampered, pampered, pampered. Because if they don't do it, the soldier will eventually ask himself more and more, why am I here protecting these people? Why are they here? The Jewish community has an interest to recruit the army to its ranks.

#### **And how do you, as a commander, fit into this?**

I tried to stick to orders and regulations.

#### **That are?**

Not to arrest anyone who shouldn't be arrested. Sometimes there was a situation that Patrol 30 (patrolling the western part of the Kasbah in Hebron), somewhere, would run into a group of ten little kids that started cursing Arabs going by, or telling the patrol: "arrest them," "check them," all sorts of stuff. In these situations,

I understood that the problematic element was these kids, and I would drive them away or call the adults to take them away. And that's the same kids and parents that later bring me the cookies. It's clear to me that it creates a difficulty. And I'll say even more: the Jewish community really wanted to come into the base. We told them: guys, you can't come in. So there would be some distance. You want to bring me cookies, fine, but nothing more.

#### **The guys from Patrol 30 you just mentioned, do you think there's any chance that the fact they received cookies from the kids affected them?**

In a case when a Jewish kid throws a stone at the Arab houses below – since the kid is Jewish and is one of us, and since it's the same Jewish community that gives us the cookies – then when the army, my

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**"In a case when a Jewish kid throws a stone at the Arab houses below – since the kid is Jewish and is one of us, and since it's the same Jewish community that gives us the cookies – then when the army, my soldiers, my squad commander, find themselves facing this kid, their attitude will be completely different than their attitude towards a Palestinian kid that throws a stone at the Jewish community."**

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soldiers, my squad commander, find themselves facing this kid, their attitude will be completely different than their attitude towards a Palestinian kid that throws a stone at the Jewish community. A Palestinian kid that throws stones at the Jewish community is grabbed by force, taken away, checked and put under arrest. A Jewish kid that throws [stones], will be scolded, "no, no, no, don't do that," [or they] tell his father that he shouldn't do that. That's it, basically. In a different situation I did the same thing with Palestinian [kids].

### **And where is the soldier who receives the cookies in all of this?**

He's even more confused, because he has both his personal story, and the story he's told by the army: now you're here in order to protect the Jewish community. And what actually happens is that these cookies actually do have an effect. To invite the soldiers for the Friday night dinner when they stay at the base, to invite them to eat dinner at Chabad house, so that they get a better meal than the one the excellent cook can fix at the kitchen of Mitkanim [post]. Today, in retrospect, you ask me if I think there's an ethical problem? Yes, I do. I'll say it openly, yes, I do believe that it affects [the soldiers].

## **09**

### **There was an instance in which one of the settlers gave an axe to a soldier who shot a Palestinian in the knee**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

The relationship between settlers and soldiers is really confusing. As a commander I deliberated whether or not to let them eat at Baruch Marzel's (an extreme right-wing activist living in Hebron). And then you say to yourself, like, what, am I going to put the burden of the situation on my soldiers who are hungry on Saturday because, I don't know, the cook is lazy? So I'll let them eat there and then he'll raise a toast and say he is really proud of everyone. He would tell us stories about how he had this automatic weapon during the Intifada and they [the Palestinians] would shoot at him, so he would stand at the window [of his house], shoot into the city and take down their solar water boilers.\* And then we said, wow, he's crazy, this is unbelievable. Everyone would laugh and it was nice. There was also an instance in which one of the settlers gave an axe to a soldier who shot a Palestinian in the knee.

**An axe?**

An axe. But the Battalion Commander also says that anyone who kills a terrorist, or takes down a knee (a phrase describing shooting towards the legs of a person with an intention to wound and not to kill, in accordance to the IDF's rules of engagement) gets weekend leave starting Thursday. A soldier of mine who shot someone in the knee before I arrived, he got like an award plaque and got weekend leave starting Thursday. They train you to be a soldier after all, and a soldier is supposed to want to fight, and then you get to a place like Hebron, and that's not war, so all your enthusiasm to fight boils down to you ultimately shooting someone in the knee. Like, they make you seek it out.

**With Baruch Marzel, did the soldiers go to his house to eat?**

Yes, into his home.

**Did it happen at other families over there as well?**

I ate with other families, but there were lots of interactions and things like this. They would approach every soldier, bring cakes and cookies and are supposedly really concerned, of course until you do something they don't like and then they call you a Nazi and throw stones at you.

**Your commanders, what was their attitude towards this?**

They turn a blind eye. They knew, they saw. "Fine," I mean, take the cookies, take whatever you want. The Chabad guys would come into our post. When a platoon got out [to go home], the Hebron Chabad guys would throw them a barbeque, which sounds really nice and fun, and it really did raise morale among the soldiers. The problem is that it confuses the soldiers completely about what their mission there is supposed to be, which is to maintain order, and it totally makes them biased. I mean, now they can no longer enforce some kind of order on the settlers if they get gifts from them all the time. You can really call it benefits. Before arrest operations, all kinds of guys would find us in bizarre places, and bring us pizzas and say to us: "Thank you, go get them." They really rile you up to execute violence and "get them hard" and that kind of talk. There was this time when they invited all the commanders from [the military post in] Tel Rumeida to a house somewhere in Beit Hadassah, they brought us pizzas and cakes and stuff like that, and then had a talk with us, a kind of review of the incidents that happened in the city, with emphasis on the things that are important to the Civilian Emergency Response Team commander [of the Jewish settlement in Hebron]. All in all it makes sense that the army would work together with the Civilian Emergency Response Team, but then \*\*\*\* (a well-known settler in Hebron) went like: "by the way, if you see

our children fooling around as kids do” – which basically means on Saturday they walk on the road because they have nothing else to do, and look to get into fights – “then be understanding with them, they’re under a lot of stress, they live here and they’re scared all the time, and sometimes it comes out in problematic ways.” Which is basically whitewashing the fact that they’re violent. “So don’t notify the police, just bring them to me and I’ll handle them.” Which is totally, totally, totally the polar opposite of how they encourage us to treat Palestinian youth.

\* In a story aired on Israeli channel 2, Marzel denied having made such remarks.

## 10

### **There’s one who also brings gifts**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

There was this guy (a soldier) who shot someone with the permission of the Company Commander. There was this big riot and he shot him in the knee. They caught him (the Palestinian) after that. The Company Commander talked about it around everyone, he congratulated him.

#### **Do you know if later, the soldier who did that received a gift?**

A gift, I think so, but not from the company commander.

#### **From whom?**

From someone who lives there. They always did that. They brought us a lot of presents.

#### **Settlers?**

Yes. I don’t remember the names, but I know what they look like. There’s one who also brings gifts. They brought us gifts and stuff every time we really did something, because...

#### **What do you mean “did something?”**

Either we hit them (the Palestinians) with rubber [bullets] or live fire or caught someone or were, I don’t know, good during the riot, I don’t know what. And he always... Like, he always brought us something.

#### **How do they know?**

They watch from their roofs, they ask us, they hear from the police, from the other

soldiers. It's a small community, they know everything. They know the people there who really cause problems and start riots. They know. They know one another.

**Do you mean they bring a personal gift to the soldier who fired? Or do they bring...**

Yes, yes. They would bring axes and knives. They did that all the time.

**In this specific case you were talking about, do you know what the gift was?**

He got a knife. I remember a second person (soldier), and he got an axe.

**Why?**

Something related to the riot. I don't remember what he did exactly, but also, it was the same thing. He was very active, involved in the riots. Someone (a soldier) caught someone (a Palestinian) with a knife. He got a gift from that guy, too.

**How is the gift given? Is there a ceremony of sorts? Or... How?**

Not a ceremony, but there's "Anat's corner" (a free coffee station adjacent to Beit Hadassah settlement in Hebron, run by Anat Cohen, a far-right activist from Hebron), yes.

**Anat's Café.**

Yes, Anat's Café. And we would do stuff there. When we were on patrol he came, he brought cake, a gift for someone. He would say some [religious] blessing and then almost every time he would end the blessing with: "and the Palestinian motherfuckers." He would add it to the blessing each time, and like... I'm not religious, but it really bothered me. He added something really violent, something really hateful, to something that really evokes emotion, you understand? And it messes with your head.

## 11

### **People know who Ofer Ohana is, some simply don't think there's a problem with him**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Period: 2016

Ofer Ohana, I'm not sure what his role is. He's a medic, he has an ambulance and a weapon. He's well known from the Azaria affair (an incident in which IDF soldier shot and killed a neutralized Palestinian stabber in Hebron), what he did there that generated the entire incident.

**His presence is felt, he arrives somewhere and his present is felt, with his All-Terrain Vehicle.**

No doubt. One of the insights I had about Ofer Ohana was that a soldier would feel much more comfortable receiving an order from a person who pampers him with grilled cheese and slushies, who arrives at his post with Shawarma, than from his commander who hassles him and makes him run around, or asks him why he isn't ready to be called-up. For that reason, when I saw the Elor Azaria footage and what Ofer Ohana was saying: "someone do something" – I realized that from Ofer Ohana's point of view, that's an order to be followed. And I don't know what the relationship between Elor Azaria and Ofer Ohana is like, I can just imagine that if one of my soldiers was there... Like, Ofer is, ultimately, for soldiers who don't see the full picture, Ofer is a warm pampering figure.

**But is he also a professional authority?**

Professional authority? Maybe. Yes. Because Ofer Ohana gets there before everyone else. He's physically there, physically already standing there. I don't know much about the Civilian Security Coordinator's organizational structure, or that of the civilian security officer. I don't know how they're organized, [and] how he shows up. He probably has a two-way radio and is notified. He's simply very much present at all incidents because he comes, takes photos, documents, and the fact is that the soldier sees him arrive before everyone else. Ofer Ohana can undoubtedly become an authoritative figure, and the means he chooses involve pampering, all sorts of stuff to eat.

**Did you arrive there after the Azaria incident?**

We arrived there just a few weeks after Elor Azaria.

**In this context, did anybody talk to you about it? Specifically about Ofer? because Ofer was really very involved there, as seen in the beginning of the footage. I wonder if anyone said anything to you when you arrived, like: this person is involved in an investigation, keep your distance.**

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"One of the insights I had about Ofer Ohana was that a soldier would feel much more comfortable receiving an order from a person who pampers him with grilled cheese and slushies, who arrives at his post with Shawarma, than from his commander who hassles him and makes him run around, or asks him why he isn't ready to be called-up."

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No, there were no directives. On the contrary, we never had any briefing about Ofer, whether to be or not to be [in touch].

**Following the incident, were you ordered not to use the 'Hot Corner' (A free cafeteria that serves food and beverages to soldiers, managed by Ofer Ohana)?**

Not at all, not at all. The only restriction at the 'Hot Corner' was that soldiers would go there inappropriately uniformed or without a weapon, stuff like that. It isn't forbidden, it's just there: "go have a slushie." It's so natural. It's very natural in everyone's eyes to just go do it.

**What's natural? That the settlers offer you food?**

Sure.

**When you were there, did you know what was happening with him in the Azaria trial? Especially what he said about Azaria's Battalion Commander and company commander?**

I, specifically, knew because I follow it, but I don't know if my soldiers knew. I imagine that they did see the footage. People know who Ofer Ohana is, some simply don't think there's a problem with him.

**"know" in what sense? That he's an extreme right-wing activist?**

No, they know that he's a person who lives in Hebron, drives an ambulance, and pampers soldiers. He has the 'Hot Corner,' that's what they know. As far as public image goes, that's a great image, he's got great PR.

## 12

**The moment you act in contrast to their opinions, they hate you**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

They (the settlers) know that they can do whatever they want, and they do whatever they want. They know that we can't do anything. The cops are their friends, friends of their families. They know that nothing will happen to them. They know they can say what they want, they can say "death to Arabs," that they all deserve to die. They know that they can slap them, they know that they can hit them, they know that they can steal from them if they want and nothing will happen to them. It's true, they know that the soldiers can't do anything. In order for the soldiers to further accept this behavior, they hand out gifts. They invite

them (the soldiers) to sit (for meals) at the Chabad (house). It's amazing, you eat the terrible army food all week and then have an amazing home-cooked dinner at Chabad. It influences you, it's [classic] conditioning.

**How does it influence you?**

You eat rice and plain cream cheese and "Milky" (pudding) all week. A cucumber, I don't know, okay? And one day, 30 of us go to Chabad on our break and have an amazing meal. They say: thank you for being here, thank you for that, and we eat great food. They pray for us, hand out sweets.

[And we] think: this is amazing, finally we get something good. The people who received a weapon as a gift (in earlier parts of his interview the testifier told of instances in which the settlers from Hebron gave cold weapons as gifts to soldiers whose conduct they appreciated), had it presented to everyone at Chabad. It was because they did something during a riot, or because they prevented something or enabled something to happen. It reinforces the negative behavior. If you get a good meal once a week, you want Chabad to like you. The people from Chabad walk around the entire area, they go everywhere and see us, they come to our post, they say hello, they talk to us, bring us coffee at night, bring tea with sugar. Sweets. When you're alone at two o'clock in the morning, it's amazing. Someone comes and brings you coffee and just wants to talk to you. You start thinking that these people are amazing because they treat you this way, but the moment you act in contrast to their opinions, they hate you. It happens all the time.

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"Someone comes and brings you coffee and just wants to talk to you. You start thinking that these people are amazing because they treat you this way, but the moment you act in contrast to their opinions, they hate you. It happens all the time."

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## 13

### As far as they're concerned, we're collaborators

Unit: Judea Regional Brigade · Place: a-Shuhada Street · Period: 2011

There was a call on the two-way radio by someone who said that Jews were painting the banister in the area of the cemetery in blue. [When we arrived] I saw kids painting the banister of the Muslim Cemetery blue, in the area of the Shuhada Street where Arabs aren't allowed on. We tell them to stop, and within two minutes \*\*\*\*\* (a well-known settler from Hebron) arrives on the scene. The ramifications of such a thing, from the Palestinian side, especially in Waqf areas, religious areas in Hebron - is an explosion. If they had seen us paint it in blue, the color of the State [of Israel] that bears a certain meaning in Islam... We told them [the settlers] to stop. \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* tells them to continue, disregards us completely. As far as they're concerned, we're collaborators in this case. The soldiers are caught in the middle. For me, as an officer, it's not completely clear how to tell the soldiers [to make] the children stop painting a banister.

#### **What do you mean by "children," by the way?**

Elementary school, first, second, third, fourth grade. \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* uses them as a tool. An argument begins between us and her. They (the settlers) presented it as an educational activity for Purim, something to do with the kids during the days off from school, that's what she said. We are, like, preventing the children from doing their holiday activity. "They just want to make the surroundings nicer and paint, what's the problem?" But they chose to paint a banister of a Muslim cemetery, and that's what it was really all about. Cops arrive. Another man from the Jewish community came and it deteriorated to shouting and violence, they were almost pushing each other. He was really screaming. He became hysterical and started to say we're collaborators, that we shouldn't tell them what to do, that we've got some nerve. \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* shouted the whole time that she has kids our age and have we got no shame, that we're shaming the army, and that we're protecting the Palestinians instead of protecting the Jews. And he was screaming: 'get out of here.' It seemed that he was about to become violent. If there weren't policemen there who took him aside, it probably would have become violent. This is the same old story about soldiers who can't, who don't know how to stop the settlers, and have to call the police. And the police, too, by the time [they] understood what they were doing, we had to explain to them the legal situation, that it's forbidden, and the legality of everything that goes on in Hebron. Only then did they stop [painting].

## 14

### **The sole mission there is to protect the Jews**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Beit Hadassah Settlement ·

Period: 2014

#### **Did you have instances of friction with the settlers or dialogue with the settlers?**

On Purim, all the religious guys are drunk, all the children, everyone got drunk, and we had to be on high alert, because that's when they cause problems with the Palestinians.

#### **Were you briefed that they would be drunk and that you would have to...**

Yes. It's also a day when the Palestinians want to attack, because it's a holiday, everyone's happy and drunk. It's a perfect time for an attack, but it's also a perfect time for some drunk to do something stupid. What really bothered me was that at night, behind Beit Hadassah there was a post overlooking the road. Everyone gathered there, all the people from Kiryat Arba and those settlements, they came there and began to throw glass bottles.

They threw glass bottles for hours at the (Palestinian) house. There were only bars on the windows, no glass windows. All the broken glass fell inside, babies were crying from within the house and all the children were peeping out and bottles were flying at their faces. They (the settlers) threw bottles down below, too, at all the houses on the street. They did it for hours and we tried to stop them, but as a soldier, you're not a policeman. There was nothing we could have done. We couldn't do anything to them. They threw them and I was very angry, the other soldiers were very angry, it got really bad. We said [to the officer]: do something, do something. He said: there's nothing we can't do, I'm sorry. It went on and they tried to cross the fence and go down to the Palestinian side.

#### **The settlers?**

Yes. We barely managed to prevent them from doing it. They continued to throw bottles, they reached the peoples' houses, breaking their belongings, vandalizing their property. Eventually, the police came. The policemen are their friends. These are friends of their families, everyone knows one another. They didn't do

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**"The sole mission there is to protect the Jews. The Palestinians don't matter at all, they made that clear."**

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anything, they just watched. They said: Okay... Maybe take it easy? Maybe stop doing that? Maybe... As if they didn't really show up with power. They just came as if they're all friends with one another, they [the police] don't care. Ultimately the Platoon Commander said: get back to the Mitkanim [post]. He told us to head back because he saw how much it bothered us, but we were limited, we couldn't do anything.

**Before telling the story, you said that you were briefed, they told you that the settlers might do this and that.**

Yes.

**In the briefing, didn't they tell you what you're supposed to do when you see something like that happen?**

No. Nothing. The rule is to protect the Jews. They focused more on the Palestinian reaction, not the Jews' actions. That's what they said when we did it.

**But aren't you supposed to protect the Palestinians as well?**

No, not at all. That's not the mission. The sole mission there is to protect the Jews. The Palestinians don't matter at all, they made that clear.

**Who is they?**

The Company Commander, everybody.

## 15

### **There's no rule of law, no justice and no judge**

Unit: Judea Regional Brigade · Place: Jabel Johar neighborhood · Period: 2012

There was a 'price tag' [attack] in Jabel Johar neighborhood near the Gal neighborhood, one of Kiryat Arba's neighborhoods, which is considered a somewhat-legal/somewhat-illegal outpost because it's located on Kiryat Arba's land. \*\*\* (the Palestinian who filed the complaint) is known to the army. He's a dirt contractor, he did some work in the Eastern Khirbeh (Kasbah) in the Jewish settlement, near the Tomb of the Patriarchs. And there were 'price tag' incidents he reported to the police, and the police didn't report to us. The incident occurred in the morning or at night, and we got there at noon. We brought a tracker and the tracker led us to this house in the Gal neighborhood. This incident involved some olive trees and fruit trees that had been chopped down. He (The Palestinian)

said to me, "What will it take for you to understand? When I go and murder the settler? Would you handle my complaint then? What sort of justice is this? I know who the man is who did this to me. This man threatened me, I went to police and filed complaints against him, and nothing was done." And there's nothing you can do. You're completely helpless in this case. There's no rule of law, no justice and no judge. As far as I know, nothing was done. If he filed a lawsuit, there's this committee for remunerations. Did he file one? I don't know.

## 16

### **The entire area is cleaned and becomes very sterile**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Tomb of Othniel Ben Knaz ·

Period: 2016

The Tomb of Othniel is in Area H1, outside of Israeli jurisdiction in Hebron, in the area under Palestinian jurisdiction. As with any tomb, it's a pilgrimage spot for Jews on certain occasions. Once every few months there's an actual operation for Othniel tomb. What happens is simply that to reach the Tomb of Othniel you have to leave H2 (the area of Hebron under Israeli security control) to H1. We need to receive a crowd of thousands of people, I assume, or hundreds of people, who want to make a pilgrimage, but they can't.

#### **People who want to pray at the tomb.**

Yes, and you can't just do it like that, you can't let them walk into an area that's clearly hostile and a very very central area for riots. So what do you do? The entire area is cleaned [from Palestinians] and becomes a very sterile area.

#### **How is that done? Describe it to me.**

The procedure is that every company sends forces to the company in charge of Tel Rumeida area, and they arrive at the area of the Shoter checkpoint and further on (into the designated area). A huge amount of troops.

#### **How huge? 50, 100?**

Even between 100 and 200.

#### **Soldiers and border police officers?**

Yes, and border police officers, each with his own role. So it really begins with briefings and instructions. We come in through Shoter (checkpoint) and operate

any possible resistance from the Shoter square, which is a center of riots in general.

**[So] the moment you cross the checkpoint onto the Palestinian side, the riot immediately begins?**

Yes, it immediately begins, the border police officers shoot the [tear] gas, all the tear gas and stun grenades and stuff. And we start to sterilize the whole road.

**That's before it begins, before the visitors arrive?**

Before, yes, a few hours before. A few hours before because now it's a procedure of everything that needs to be done: You have to tell everyone to close all their businesses, get to their cars and drive them all away, even if it's just parked next to somebody's house. I don't know how to do that, [but] I do know how you tell someone to close their shop.

**How do you tell someone to close their shop?**

You tell him: get into the car, drive away and close your shop by a certain time.

**How does this bloc of 100 to 200 soldiers advance? As one bloc?**

There are already armed vehicles blocking the road, and then a force comes in and operates the ordeal of closing of the shops and moving of the cars, and they simply create "sleeves," a sleeve around the entire route. in every alley, every place, there are two soldiers making eye contact with another two soldiers.

**That's called a sleeve?**

A sleeve. A sleeve is when one or two soldiers make constant eye contact with the soldiers in front of and behind them, and actually close down the entire road, which is a commercial route and whatnot, and they stand in every alley so that no one will penetrate. And that's it, this road is basically closed, this street, for the entire afternoon so that people can enter the tomb, and there are many groups that enter.

**And they walk by foot?**

Yes, they walk by foot from Shoter to the tomb. It's around a 700 or 800 meter walk.

**And the moment the visitors arrive, whoever arrives, what happens?**

**Something simply happens?**

No, nothing. No friction. No friction because it's all sterile.

**Can you estimate the amount of shops in those 700 to 800 meters?**

I don't know. It's not all shops, it's also apartments, it's a central route. It was once the main road that led to Be'er Sheva, if I'm not mistaken. There were a lot of vehicles when we were there.

## 17

### **A tour for Jewish residents inside the Kasbah**

Rank: Captain · Place: Western Kasbah

Every Saturday there's a tour for Jewish residents inside the Kasbah, encircled by the IDF. A very boring guide leads the tour. They [the IDF] decided to allow it, and anyone who wants [to come] – it's completely open. They open the gates in an organized group, secured and confined, they walk inside the Kasbah. He [the guide] stops at some spots and points: "there was a Jewish house right here, there was a Jewish house right here," tells a story here, "there was a terror attack here," and they leave. Once, a group of teenagers from some Yeshiva started singing in the middle of the Kasbah "David, King of Israel, lives and endures" (a well-known Jewish folk song) and were dancing in a circle. They were immediately stopped and kicked out [of the Kasbah] and it had backing. We understood that if Jewish guys within an Arab neighborhood, within the Kasbah, were now to do this, it's spiteful, it's like coming and giving you the finger in your face. We didn't want it, and they were kicked out.

#### **And the tour itself – isn't it spiteful?**

Maybe it has that as well, but it wasn't my call to decide whether there's a tour or not. My mission was to secure the planned tour.

#### **How many people take part in such a tour usually?**

Around 50 people.

#### **What are the preparations as far as you are concerned?**

First of all there's always a securing force that walks ahead [of the tour], checking that there's nothing suspicious. There's one patrol ahead and one patrol that splits up between the front and back of the force. When they stop, they're always encircled somehow. And we try to avoid blocking routes as much as possible, to minimize how bothersome it is (to the Palestinians). In the end, some dumb kid passes by a stand, and, just to spite the owner, turns something over. We shout at him and kick him out. After that he comes and apologizes, but it happens. These things have happened.

#### **Does it make any difference? I mean, the following Saturday there won't be any tours after this kind of incidents?**

It makes a difference to the local population in the Kasbah, the Palestinians and the Jewish community alike. Their lives are deeply affected by a battalion commander

and company commander who determine their conduct and the conduct of their tours. Their lives are deeply influenced by it - the general atmosphere and the day-to-day.

## 18

### **The settlers have a very clear interest to transform what is known as "Zion route" into a Jewish route**

Unit: Civil Administration · Period: 2011

The settlers have a very clear interest to transform what is known as "Zion route" (a route connecting Kiryat Arba to Hebron) into a Jewish route. The "Machpela House," the "Red House" (houses the settlers occupied), "Hazon David," which is an illegal outpost opposite the entrance gate [to Kiryat Arba] – it's all part of turning it into [a Jewish route]. Ultimately, the Palestinians won't want to live there because it's too difficult, and they [the settlers] ride that wave. All the H2 Area (the area of Hebron under Israeli security control), especially this area - if you're [a Palestinian] with money, you won't live there. Why should you? The army takes over your house regularly, there are roadblocks. But especially on Zion route. If you live on Zion route or in the Kasbah or something like that, and you have money, you just leave. Why should you [stay]? Why have the army sit there all day long... Not being able to drive up to your house, there's part of your neighborhood you can't go by foot? No reason [to live there.]

**You say the settlers want to turn it into a Jewish route. What do you base that on?**

On their actions. And you understand, strategically, why they want to do it. The idea is to make a connection, that Kiryat Arba and Hebron will be inseparable. And at the present, what's missing to connect the Jewish community in Hebron to Kiryat Arba is these 500 meters between Zion route and the checkpoint of the Cave of the Patriarchs.

**Was the issue discussed in the District Coordination Office, was it mentioned in any way?**

It was known that it was what the settlers wanted, and there was a serious focus on avoiding it, because it was a political issue, it would become a political issue.

It's very easy to evacuate a house [that settlers occupy] in the first 24 hours, but afterwards it's much more difficult, legally. So soldiers were told to pay attention to such things.

## 19

### **Go and tell them to turn down the music**

Place: "House of Contention" · Period: 2016

At the house adjacent to the Red House, (referred to as the "House of Contention" by the media, the "House of Peace" by the settlers, and "Rajabi House" by the Palestinians) a festive wedding was held at night, between 10 PM to 11 PM . It wasn't the middle of night at all. And we receive an order: go, tell them to turn down the music, it's late, they should turn down the music. It's ten, eleven at night, not that late [but] it obviously disturbs the [settlers'] children at the Red House, because they're no older than seven-year-old kids who should be asleep at such hours, but... We had to go to the wedding and tell them to turn the music down. This really bothered me, this incident, because [we] simply stand there with our gear, with a helmet, tons of Palestinians, we tell them that it's late and that they have to turn off the music. And you, like, think to yourself [that], like, the last thing a Palestinian wants at his wedding is for someone to come and ruin his celebration. And they don't want problems so they know not to start arguing, and they won't start mouthing off and getting mad because they want everything to end peacefully. Now, this was an upsetting incident because it's a bummer to do it, but what's more important is how the

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**"We had to go to the wedding and tell them to turn the music down. This really bothered me, this incident, because we simply stand there with our gear, with a helmet, tons of Palestinians, we tell them that it's late and that they have to turn off the music. And you, like, think to yourself that, like, the last thing a Palestinian wants at his wedding is for someone to come and ruin his celebration."**

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order came about. The only way we could have known there was a wedding there was for someone from the [Red] House to report it because it bothers him, and it bothers only certain people, that is the people who live in the "House of Peace."

**In any case, it wasn't you, the soldiers, who reported the wedding.**

We received the order from the company. It could only have come from one place, the advancement of an order to wrap things up there. Either someone who lives on the other side of the wadi [in Kiryat Arba], or someone who lives in the Red House. And yes, there are known cases of direct line between settlers and the (military) command, the company commanders. If it was a Jewish wedding, let's just say the Palestinians wouldn't have been able to say a word, if there was a huge event in Kiryat Arba, a wedding or anything, any event.

## 20

### **Why do you let him pass? Kill him**

Rank: Sergeant · Place: "House of Contention" · Period: 2017

**Ultimately, your mission as a soldier or border police officer is to be in constant friction with the Palestinian population. It would be interesting to hear from someone who was there about the dynamics of it, how things happen and how human nature conducts itself in such a situation.**

An example of that [is when] we were in the Red House (referred to as the "House of Contention" by the media, the "House of Peace" by the settlers, and "Rajabi House" by the Palestinians), and there are Jews there, in the middle of a Palestinian neighborhood. Across the street you have Abu Hamze's grocery store where everyone shops: Jews, Arabs. They're bitter enemies, but on the other hand they're friends on the street. So we were very suspicious of the Palestinians there, but on the other hand there's no way you can avoid befriending the (Palestinian) kids who play on the street. It was boring so we would play soccer with them during guarding shifts. We really hated the children of the (settler) families in the Red House who shouted at us, "How come you're not killing the Palestinians passing by there?" They saw us letting Palestinians pass by: "Why do you let him pass? Kill him." We hated them.

**How old were the kids?**

Six, seven, eight. We hated the Jewish kids, we played soccer with the Palestinian kids, and [at the same time] we checked the Palestinians very fearfully. We told them to throw their ID on the floor because we feared they would surprise us with a knife, and on the other hand, we knew the names of a lot of them and said good morning to Abu Hamze every morning.

**What you said about the children saying all sorts of stuff to you, was this common?**

Yes, the kids in the Red House, there's a checkpoint right above their house, at the entrance to the street. Only Palestinians who live on the street are allowed to enter. They (the settlers' children) would go there all the time and shout at us, "Beat him up," things like that. It's simply their lives, what they hear at home, maybe. We would always shout at them: go home.

**And what about their parents?**

I never met their parents. There were only two families there, something like that.

## 21

### **They wanted to find some Palestinian and kill him**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion ·

Place: Tel Rumeida Settlement, Tarpat route · Period: 2014

**Did you interact with the settlers? I assume that during [Operation] 'Brother's Keeper,' when the boys were kidnapped, it must have been a tense time.**

I remember when the [kidnapped boys'] bodies were found. It was almost midnight, and all the Israelis came out of their homes. They simply wanted to find some Palestinian and kill him. So we had to protect Palestinian families, it was the first and last time we really tried to protect the Palestinians. [The settlers] simply wanted blood. They didn't want anything else, they didn't care. A blood thirst. We stationed positions and waited for the (Palestinian) families to come up [the street]. The Israelis came to meet them. We had to encircle the Palestinians in order to get them up [the street]. We were called traitors, [told] that we're Nazis, that we hate Jews and hate Israel because we're protecting innocent Palestinians. This lasted three hours until the Israelis returned to their homes. We protected the Palestinian families that went up the road to their homes. They had nothing to do with those

(kidnapped) kids. Six-year-old kids, eight-year-old kids, a family with four children, a mother and a father, none of the kids was over ten and they were very scared. We encircled them for protection and escorted them on the road, because all the Israelis were out there, and tried to reach them.

**Can I ask you how you felt at that?**

I felt like shit. I was there to protect the Israelis and they took me for granted and called me a traitor because I didn't want an eight-year-old Palestinian who has nothing to do with the situation to be hurt because of something he can't control. That's the atmosphere – an atmosphere full of hatred and rage. I don't know, it's depressing.

## 22

### **They are people like us**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Engineering Corps, 614<sup>th</sup> Battalion ·

Place: Tel Rumeida Settlement, Tarpat route

**Did you have any issue with the settlers [in Hebron]?**

Yes, on all of Tarpat route [Tel Rumeida settlement]. All the time, on that route, you have the settlers with the Arab population, and many times it leads to brawls. The Arabs come up or come down [the route], say, and then younger settlers see them and tease them, sometimes they throw a stone at them, and fights start. Every time it's something else. But from what I've seen, ninety percent come from the Hebron settlers' side.

**As a soldier, how do you operate the situation?**

[I] come, pull them apart, and of course you have more empathy for the settlers so you're pulling the other side with more force, you throw them [out of there]. There were times when you see settlers doing [things] on purpose in order to agitate, so that a soldier would come and do something to them (the Palestinians): "He started." So you throw them out of there and tell them: "Get out of here."

**The settlers?**

Yes.

**And the Palestinians, do you do something with them or do you send them on their way?**

I send them.

**Did they define what your authority towards the settlers is?**

No.

**Are you allowed to arrest them?**

Of course not. It's forbidden.

**Why?**

Because they're, like, the people who live there.

**So do the Palestinians.**

Yes, but they [the settlers] are people like us. They're... you know... We were also told in a briefing that, like, on that route – there are fights and stuff so we should simply distance the settlers. It was more in order to protect them, the settlers.

## **23**

### **A brawl between Jewish and Arab kids**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Tel Rumeida Settlement, Tarpat route

Every Saturday we're on standby of sorts, knowing that the settlers leave for the central route, to the junction that joins the two neighborhoods (the Jewish and the Palestinian), and look for a fight. There's always trouble there, at that junction. I was at the post, we heard there was a brawl, so we immediately rushed over there. Tons of anarchists with cameras, tons of human rights activists with cameras, a few settler kids who started fighting with a few Palestinians [children]. Really little kids. Think about how a fight in school between kids who in the worst case would be sent to the principal's office, [in this case] the commander of the area is called up to separate them [from one another]. That's how it is in Hebron.

**How old are the kids roughly?**

A 12-year-old kid, something like that, 13. And because the police are supposed to handle the Jewish population, but by the time they arrive it takes a really long time, we simply came and took the [Palestinian] kid. In short, we pushed him away from there, and then we simply put him on our shoulders – he didn't agree to come – [and carried] him up toward the post.

**You arrested him?**

Yes, we took him away. I didn't even have time to handcuff him. We simply picked him up and started walking. And then some human rights activist looks at me like

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"Think about how a fight in school between kids who in the worst case would be sent to the principal's office, in this case the commander of the area is called-up to separate them from one another. That's how it is in Hebron."

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'look at what you're doing to the kid.' That's something that still stays with me.

**So what do you actually do with such a kid?**

You take him to the post, he stays at the post until you hand him over to the police or something like that, and that's it, I don't know what is done, he continues the process.

**At the police [station]?**

Yes.

**And where is he held while he's in the post?**

They would put him in the operations room, a side room. In this specific case we may not have even brought him to the post. They simply told us to release him because it was already on camera and looked bad.

**So you released him?**

Yes, I think so.

**So why did you arrest him in the first place?**

Because he was in a brawl between Jewish and Arab kids.

**And you can't do anything to the Jewish kids?**

No.

## 24

### **They really feel like they own the place**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, Reconnaissance Battalion ·

Place: Tel Rumeida Settlement, Gilber checkpoint · Period: 2013

**Have you ever encountered settler violence directed against you or Palestinians?**

That happened quite a bit, both against us and against Palestinians. They have this practice of sorts, mainly the young ones, where they just stand in a place where Palestinians pass through, [they] just sit there and wait, and the moment they see any Palestinians go by, they simply get up and start provoking them, and that

quickly leads to brawls.

**Do you remember seeing such incidents firsthand?**

Yes, in Tel Rumeida at the Gilber checkpoint. There, I remember, it was settler kids between the ages of 6 to 8. A group of them stand there next to the checkpoint, and the moment Palestinian kids go by, they just start provoking them and start a fight. I also remember many times when it was said that we can't touch the settlers. It's also up to the Company Commander there are company commanders who come up to you and say: if you see a brawl, for example, separate. don't worry, I'll back you up.

**And what about other cases?**

In other cases you aren't backed up.

**So what are you supposed to do?**

It depends on the orders you're given, I remember being told not to touch them. I did pull them apart, but the children always stand by your post and ramble on. If you tell them to go away or something like that, they have a lot of nerve and they tell you: you can't touch me, you can't tell me where to be. They really feel like they own the place.

## 25

### **A Jewish riot**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Beit Hadassah Settlement ·

Period: 2014

I was near Beit Hadassah and some group of tourists from France arrived, at least fifty people, something like that. And there are few buildings near the fence, near Beit Hadassah, of Palestinians, and there was a Palestinian flag there.

**On the other side of Beit Hadassah?**

Yes. On their side (the Palestinians). They [the tourists] saw this and went crazy. They started shouting "The nation of Israel lives, the nation of Israel lives," "Death to the Arabs, death to the Arabs." They found a ladder so that they could climb up. People from Hebron arrived, which is over 100 people, something like that, and then a riot of Jews began. Now, most of the people weren't Israelis, [but rather] tourists. And then residents (settlers) came, left their houses. \*\*\*\* (a well-known

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**"Now we had to worry about protecting the Jews who were caught in the barbed wire, so that nothing would happen to them, because now, the Palestinian family in that apartment was on the roof and filmed everything. They saw everything and said: look, the Jews are trying to take our flag down, they're trying to enter our territory. And they're right, that's exactly what happened."**

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settler from Hebron) and all these people. There were calls, "Death to Arabs, death to Arabs." They started climbing up the ladder. Two of these idiots got stuck in the barbed wire fence trying to reach the flag. We had to bring them down. I was really riled up because nothing had happened and they (the settlers) – it looked like they were about to kill someone, and no one was doing anything about it. No one did anything to prevent it. The patrol... The Platoon Commander and everyone tried to calm them down, but it didn't help. Now we had to worry about protecting the Jews who were caught in the barbed wire, so that nothing would happen to them, because now, the [Palestinian] family in that apartment was on the roof and filmed everything. They saw everything and said:

look, the Jews are trying to take our flag down, they're trying to enter our territory. And they're right, that's exactly what happened. They aren't lying, they aren't exaggerating. That's really what's happening. And we finally, like, succeeded in getting him, the person [caught in the wire], down. And then we were told to go to the Palestinian side, go up on the roof and take down the flag. Like, as an order.

**From whom?**

The Company Commander. Or from the Battalion Commander, I don't know from whom, but it came from someone above the Platoon Commander. So we entered through the gate, got to the house, climbed up to the roof and tried to take down the flag. This person (the Palestinian resident of the house) – he continues to film. And in the end we didn't do it, but we went up on the roof for nothing. We really didn't touch the flag. We almost did it, we almost took it down, and we didn't and... We went back down. The Platoon Commander didn't want to do it, but he was told to do it.

**What didn't he want to do?**

Take down the flag.

**But why didn't he do it in the end – didn't take down the flag?**

I think he got some order not to do it in the end. Just for there to be a strong presence on the roof. [To show] we're doing something. But in the end, we didn't do anything.

**But the goal was to show the settlers that the army is doing something about it?**

Yes. But we didn't do anything after all. We also did it to ensure that no more Jews would go up there. They moved the ladder, came down, and got back to the area.

**Were the police there too?**

No, the police, if they came, it was later, but they stayed on the road, they didn't go up there, only we did. Because it's Palestinian territory, and it's our area of jurisdiction, not the police's..

## 26

### **The Company Commander cut a deal**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Beit Hadassah Settlement · Period:2014

I once saw a problem solved without violence. There were these Palestinian flags hanging right next to Beit Hadassah. B'Tselem filmed it as well.

**The Palestinians hung a PLO flag on their house?**

[A house] that was very close [to Beit Hadassah]. There are barbed wire fences of sorts between both houses, on their roof. And it drove the settlers crazy. The settlers can't stand seeing it, they really can't, and they demanded that the army take it down. There's a net above the Palestinian Kasbah to protect them from [objects and stones] being thrown at them by settlers. The settlers began to throw stuff into the Kasbah where the net is, and you see the bottles on the net, you see the wooden beams, you see the stones on the net. So they sent a platoon commander with his patrol to take the flag down.

**Who sent him?**

The Company Commander. That's his mission, the foot patrol's: go take down the flag to put an end to the mess there. "It's making a mess and we don't like mess, so stop it." So the foot patrol went over there and ended up not taking the flag down, because [Palestinian] guys are filming here, and he doesn't know what to do, and he isn't about to start a fight now with photographers because the requirement is



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"The Company Commander cut a deal. He said: listen, we won't come to arrest this kid if you take down the flag. [...] it was the company commander's initiative. He cut the deal just like a businessman."

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no violence in front of the camera. [Around the same time] we had, allegedly, an arrest warrant for someone who was simply never home. He escaped, he knew he was going to be arrested. A 12-year-old kid, not some... In short, each time we came to the family, and each time they would say to us: he isn't here, he's in Ramallah, he's in Nablus, he's here or there. And so we came, my company commander summoned the father (of the wanted child), and one of the activists there who filmed the incident with

the flag is a young Palestinian man who organizes the community there, and the Company Commander cut a deal. He said: listen, we won't come to arrest this kid if you take down the flag.

**Are the incidents somehow connected?**

No, it was the company commander's initiative. He cut the deal just like a businessman. And they [the Palestinians] said 'fine,' and that's it. The kid isn't arrested, we stopped going to his house, stopped searching, and they took down the flag.

## 27

### **That's what really screws you up in Hebron**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

When you conduct a search in a Palestinian's home – it's not that you need a court order. You need to want to do it, and then you do it. It's not like with an Israeli citizen, that if a policeman wants to enter your home, he either needs a well-founded suspicion that you're committing a crime, or for someone to be in danger, or a court order stating that he has a warrant to search and get evidence. In Hebron, if you're a Palestinian, I'll enter your house whenever I feel like it, and search for whatever I want and I'll turn your house upside down if I want to. It's the same when you want to – I don't know, a foot patrol – and you want to rest on someone's roof and

scout the area. Or, say, every time we stop vehicles at Abu Sneineh which is the neighborhood adjacent to the Jewish neighborhood there, you always put a soldier or two on the roof to scout and see who's arriving from far off, who's throwing stones, where from, and stuff like that. You simply open up their [the Palestinians] home, tell them 'get out of the way, we're going up to your roof to scout.' You already know that they'll shout and object, [and] you know that it doesn't matter, because you're going to go up to the roof.

**What do you do when they start to shout and object?**

You shout louder and they get it. I mean, they're not idiots, most of them. They know you'll arrest them or you'll hit them, and in the end, you'll get on the roof. They won't stop you from going up to the roof.

**They understand who has the power.**

Yes. Listen, that's what really screws you up in Hebron. When you leave, everything just continues. It's not that it's a few months and then it ends, it's really people's lives.

As we speak, right now – if anyone were to hear this in the future – it's still happening. I hope it won't happen in the future. These things that I'm telling, they're happening right now. Right now, there's a soldier on a roof who argued with the owner of the house, and eventually got on the roof.

Many times, it's, say, a woman who stayed at home, a housewife, and she's scared to death because of the soldiers entering without her having anyone with her, and they go up through the house anyway. Wow, I actually never thought about how frightening it must be for these housewives. So in short, you simply enter the house and they have no... There isn't even any discourse of, like, rights. To have rights, you need a system that enforces law and order, and over there nobody even acknowledges them. The things that we completely take for granted. Like, any person would demand some kind of basic respect from a policeman. The privilege of being innocent until proven guilty – this isn't even part of the lexicon there. It's so far from it. It's light years away from the discourse there of... Really, like I said, whoever commands that mission at the moment is the village sheriff. He'll do whatever he wants.

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*"Listen, that's what really screws you up in Hebron. When you leave, everything just continues. It's not that it's a few months and then it ends, it's really people's lives. As we speak, right now – if anyone were to hear this in the future – it's still happening."*

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## An easy way to explain it to the soldiers

Rank: Captain · Place: Western Kasbah

During mappings we enter a home without any prior intelligence, there's no wanted [person] (for interrogation), nothing to do with any hostile terrorist activity or danger. You enter a house just to check, and you map the house – how many rooms there are – and move on to the next house. It's a situation that surely disturbs the family, it's unpleasant and nobody wants it to be done to them, but you do it. They send you to do mappings. And I also assume that all the houses were already mapped quite a few times.

### **Why do you say that?**

Because it's a small area, I'm not the first company [there], I'm not the last company. True, the Battalion itself doesn't currently have information on what the house looks like from within, but somewhere in the IDF or Shin Bet (Secret Service) they have the information when needed. When we talked to the soldiers, we told them that it's important for us to know, we need to know. On a personal level, as a Company Commander, it was important to me to enter all the houses bordering the Jewish community.

### **In the Kasbah?**

In the Kasbah, to see where there's a passage and where there isn't a passage, to prevent the possible infiltration of a terrorist – which doesn't necessarily mean that one of the family members is a terrorist, but that another person can enter their house, and do it through them. It has operational importance from the point of view of the soldier, the soldier is more aware of the terrain when he's in touch with the population.

### **Why?**

When he carries out these patrols all night and walks around there, then he knows the area well, and that's very important because someone, in the scenario of a lone terrorist, stabbed someone and ran back in [to the Palestinian area], disappeared, and now he's in the Kasbah. He was seen running in some direction, and now I say to patrol 30 (a foot patrol in Hebron's Western Kasbah) "Get over to Junction 10 as fast as possible and block it." He has to know the fastest way to get to Junction 10, so he must be familiar with the routes, which is why it's important that he patrols there all the time, including on the rooftops. Meanwhile, in regards to the [Palestinian]

population I felt that the army had a very strong desire, and an interest backed by the Jewish community, for them (the Palestinians) to know and see that the army is there all the time. The army is there, the army feels comfortable there, the army is on the terrain, the army is patrolling there. The moment you disappear from a certain place, it will be harder for you to get back in. Once you constantly have a hold on an area and you're present on the ground, if I regularly check IDs, then whoever's forbidden from being there will think twice before he hangs around there. It's a bit like placing a pole with red and blue [flashing police] light on the freeway. "I'm there."

**So basically, it's some kind of a control mechanism.**

Yes, when the mechanism works well – it's much easier to come when you have specific, precise information about someone.

**What's the goal of the mission?**

To get to know the terrain and bolster intelligence information, that was how the mission was defined. For future use, if needed.

**Who chooses the houses?**

I do, from within the terrain. But the choice is completely geographic, I mean, it's the area in which the houses weren't mapped. I sketch: "from this junction to that junction, that's your area for today. Enter all the houses in this area."

**Who gives you that order?**

It comes from the Battalion, the Intelligence Officer and even from the brigade, which houses weren't mapped. We always passed the information up to the brigade, because the regional brigade is permanently there, and the information is supposed to be kept there.

**The guys get back from a night of mapping, with all their sketches; they bring them to you? What do you do with it?**

They pass it on to me, I hand it over to the battalion, and the battalion is supposed to transfer it to the brigade. Now, part of the information remains with the soldiers

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"In regards to the Palestinian population I felt that the army had a very strong desire, and an interest backed by the Jewish community, for the Palestinians to know and see that the army is there all the time. The army is there, the army feels comfortable there, the army is on the terrain, the army is patrolling there."

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who were on the ground, and now they're more familiar with it and the content of the homes, and know from which house you can move to which house. In the Kasbah, it can be a maze. Second, it [the information] reaches the Battalion's Intelligence Officer who can keep, store and use this information if needed for some operation, and it certainly should be transferred up to the brigade. The brigade is supposed to keep this information.

**You said that these houses might have already been mapped quite a few times, how does that happen?**

In my opinion, they wanted the forces on the ground, the ones that currently guard, the ones who rotate every four months, to fully get to know the area down below, the houses. The way to do that is mapping. It's also an easy way to explain it to the soldiers.

**Why?**

Because when you say to a soldier, 'let's enter a house just to get to know it,' then it raises many more questions. You start asking yourself these questions: wait a minute, just to get to know it? Do I really have to get to know it now? Is it relevant? Is it irrelevant? Am I entering for no reason, At night? Not at night? When you tell him (the soldier) that you need it for intelligence information, to understand the interior of the houses, then it's much better received. I was also told we need the intelligence about these houses. I'm telling you that logically, if every company spends four months there, and it's such a small area, and so many companies were there, it's impossible that these mappings don't happen in each and every house.

**As someone who took part in officers' debates, is the harm caused to the population taken into consideration? Is there any thought given to the implications of this activity?**

In this case of mappings, neither the harm nor the implications were taken into consideration. There were other situations when they said: okay, if we do it like this now, we'll have a larger incident that will cause more damage and inflame [the situation] and may cause harm to more people, and we don't want that to happen. And then it is taken into consideration.

**How many mappings would your company do?**

I think my guys did 200 at the most.

**Throughout the entire deployment?**

Deployment, four months.

## 29

### **The Company Commander wanted us to mark all the roofs on a map for him**

Unit: Givati, Rotem Battalion · Place: Haret a-Jaabri neighborhood · Period: 2013

We had to do three or four patrols every day, for security checks. You have Zion [route], the Jaabri neighborhoods, above the Tomb [of the Patriarchs]. We would go, enter the neighborhood, and every time there was this thing where they asked us to go up on as many roofs as possible. They wanted us to be familiar with all the rooftops. The operational saying was that every incident could end by going up on a roof. The Company Commander wanted us to mark all the roofs on a map for him. A soldier enters peoples' homes and tells them that he has to go up on their roof.

#### **What does that mean?**

Simple, "Where's the roof, show me the roof," you go upstairs, look at the roof, from here you see this, from here you see that, I would mark it on the map. That's a mission I had for a while. They told us not to say 'to demonstrate presence,' and we stopped it, we didn't say it anymore.

#### **Who told you?**

One of the senior commanders in the brigade.

#### **The regional brigade?**

Yes.

#### **And how many of these houses did you enter and go up to their roofs?**

Dozens, dozens. I really loved it, because there's a really beautiful view in Hebron, from every roof you're on you see the Tomb [of the Patriarchs] from a different direction.

#### **Did it ever happen that the residents said no to you?**

No, I was never said no to. The objective is to walk around and do security checks. You stop someone, take his ID, and read it on the two-way radio.

#### **Just a person walking down the street?**

Yes, as many as possible. They demanded some number from us, 300 people a day, something we could never reach.

#### **Who demanded?**

The Company Commander. 300 people a day, because in principle the idea was to get as many people as possible on the database. You have people walking around who are wanted for interrogation or are suspected of something, and the army has

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"The objective is to walk around and do security checks. You stop someone, take his ID, and read it on the two-way radio. [...] as many as possible. They demanded some number from us, 300 people a day, something we could never reach."

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a database that the moment you insert the [ID] number, you press ENTER and then his status appears. Most of the people are OK, and you release them, and there are those for whom it suddenly appears that they're wanted, [so] you detain and take them with you. It happens very rarely, but that's the goal, to try to catch these people who are just walking around and then you call them and take [them].

**Did you ever take anyone?**

Yes, it happened to me once. Yes, it was a criminal thing.

## 30

### **You don't have to be a big genius to figure out if it was just a random house entry**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, Reconnaissance Battalion · Period: 2014

There are things I heard from a few officers that I think the army is not really concealing. They call it, "to increase the sense of persecution." It means that the basic assumption [is] that the more a military force enters some homes in the middle of the night, or a specific house, it will generate among the family, or [among] those whose homes you entered, a fear of being caught or of [the army] finding who-knows-what at your place. As far as the army is concerned, it decreases the possibility that someone will choose to hide a weapon in his house, because he'll know there's a fair chance that they'll enter his home and find a weapon.

**According to what are you saying that?**

I heard it from company commanders, from two or three officers.

**In which situation?**

When we reinforced a [military] force in Hebron, and we're now going to carry out an arrest and they're explaining [to us] what's going on. They didn't explain that it was the objective, but it was clear in certain situations that it's simply entering a

house for no reason. When there's actual solid intelligence and when there's a high probability that he [the wanted person] has a weapon, they usually explain how they reached that conclusion before the mission. Also, you understand, you know when your company commander was fishing for a mission and when he was really ordered to do something.

**You're told such things?**

We're told. Of course they don't reveal sources or stuff like that, but they explain the reason they have the information. Also, during a mission you enter a house and you know, you don't have to be a big genius to figure out if it was just a random house entry.

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"They didn't explain that it was the objective, but it was clear in certain situations that it's simply entering a house for no reason. [...] Also, during a mission you enter a house and you know, you don't have to be a big genius to figure out if it was just a random house entry."

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## 31

### To get to know the area

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Eastern Kasbah · Period: 2016

I did mappings once, which is defined as a patrol from the Eastern Kasbah to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. It's actually a very beautiful area, just... Things got a bit messy in Hebron when we were there, so they reassigned the areas, and my platoon got this area to patrol. So things were a bit messy but we would patrol. The directive was to enter the Eastern Kasbah and conduct mappings. What are mappings? Getting to know the people, seeing if there's any particular trend, conducting a census to understand who the people are. In my opinion, that was just my company commander's interpretation, when he gave that order.

**How can you get to know the people?**

You can't. You simply ask for their family names and try to create a picture of who lives where and which family is larger. Why? I don't know.

**That's how he explained the mission of mappings? to get to know the people?**



To get to know the area, to figure out the families, that's how he explained it. In the end it's just people walking into your home at 5 PM. It was during the day, not the middle of the night, at noon, usually afternoon. It wasn't in order to wake the people up in the middle of the night, but it was simply an order to walk around there and enter houses, to understand...

**Could you decide which house to enter?**

Yes. [In] every house you go up, enter the house, walk around the roofs.

**And the goal was to enter all the houses?**

Not all the houses.

**How many houses? Whatever you choose?**

Yes, and to conduct security checks in the area.

## 32

### The planet that is Hebron

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Western Kasbah · Period: 2014

One time, we caught a stone thrower and he wouldn't let us handcuff him, he resisted the cuffing. I remember myself well, that I wanted to solve it quickly and handcuff him. It's a story that is hard for me to tell, really. I came there to be the "enlightened occupation" that will save the situation and make it OK, with all the pluralistic values, and I said I will do it properly, like when young men join the army with moral spirit, saying: I'll do it differently. I just grabbed the guy and with all my aggressions and from the whole day – they're throwing stones at you all day and... Not that I'm excusing my behavior, but I'm explaining where all that aggression came from. They're throwing stones at you, you aren't sleeping and you want to be at home. You're also so angry at the adults who bring the kids to throw stones, that was the anger – I just grabbed the guy by the neck and started kneeing him in the chest and said: Either you let me cuff you now or... I'll kill you. I'll really, I'll kill you. I took my weapon and was like, do you want to die now? I continued to knee him in the chest, the face, and at some point he gave up and we cuffed him. And then when you look back at such situations, when you leave the planet that is Hebron and then you look back and you say, Goddammit, with everything I was taught, the most moral army in the world and all that, you can't avoid these situations because

everything there channels a person to... You're simply the sword of this system. It's these stories that after you're released, it causes you serious emotional unease, when you stop and ask yourself, what did I really do there.

## 33

### **They're best friends**

Unit: Engineering Corps, 614<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Shoter Checkpoint · Period: 2014

I remember there was the Friday riot. When you arrive, first of all you see the Shoter checkpoint full of stones from the other side, full of stones from all the Fridays, and settlers come to rile up the soldiers. A border police platoon comes there, too.

#### **The border police and the soldiers talk to the settlers?**

Sure, they're best friends.

#### **Do they see what's happening on the other side (the Palestinian side), The settlers?**

They walk up to the roof, there's a roof of one of our buildings right above the checkpoint, you walk up to the fourth floor and you stand on the roof and you see what's going on there.

#### **But it's the home of a Palestinian family, isn't it?**

I remember I walked up there a few times as well, there are steps leading up.

#### **Isn't it an IDF post?**

No, it's a totally improvised post. The directive is to go there once an hour, to stand there for a bit and see that they're not planning anything on the other side.

#### **During a riot, do you go up there?**

I think so.

#### **And shoot [tear] gas from there?**

Yes, tear gas grenades.

#### **So there are soldiers who handle the riot and settlers simply stand next to them and watch?**

Yes.

#### **And do the soldiers try to prevent it? Did anyone consider it improper, even on an operational level?**

It's a situation in which you're shooting gas, and the gas always flies back at you in the end. Also, with the wind – somehow you always feel that gas. You don't care, whoever stands there and gets the gas, they can drop dead, it doesn't matter to you.

**But weren't you told "keep them away?"**

No.

**The riot, by the way, do you know how it begins?**

I don't know, they never really briefed us on why it happens on Friday of all days.

**But nothing happened? no incident that led to the riot? There was just a riot?**

[On] Friday morning, you know that as soon as you come at eight in the morning, you see a crazy border police platoon with the craziest gear possible, standing there, waiting for the riot.

**It's a recurrent ritual?**

Yes.

## 34

### **He stopped resisting and then they continued kicking him a bit**

Rank: Lieutenant · Period: 2016

Our most severe thing in terms of violence was when we went to carry out an arrest in Hebron, deep in H1 (the area of Hebron under Palestinian civil and security control). I don't remember the circumstances, whom we had to arrest. What I do remember is that a riot was starting, and the arrestee was very violent, very violent, he hit soldiers and kicked and whatnot.

**After he was handcuffed?**

After. He was handcuffed, he released himself from the zip tie and continued. By then they brought a backup from the battalion and all that.

**Because he was violent, or because of the riot?**

Because he was violent and because a riot started. They brought the Battalion Commander or someone to deal with it. And then there was a scuffle between him and one of the soldiers there. And then he got in the Safaron (an armored vehicle used to transport soldiers) and really kept resisting and they continued beating him. Until he stopped resisting and then they continued kicking him a bit. He was

like, kicks as you're sitting and...

**When he was sitting in the Safaron?**

Yes, it lasted about a minute until it was over. But it was sort of... It was the most violent thing I ever experienced.

**Is that how you're expected to behave as a soldier?**

In the beginning, yes, when he was violent – and he was very violent and strongly resisted, and wasn't some minor – so yes, it's expected that he stop, to make him stop. But after he stops it shouldn't be continued. It's just this sort of sense of supremacy, especially as he – it wasn't as if he was sitting on a chair or something. He was lying on the floor.

**In the Safaron?**

Yes. In my eyes it seemed a lot like taking out and releasing pressure.

**On behalf of the soldiers?**

Yes, in their eyes it was just doing something.

**What does that mean?**

I heard the expression, "Finally we're doing something." You usually deal with kids you don't know what to do with, and doubt if they did anything: "No, yes, no, what color is his shirt," and the entire company is called up to arrest a little kid who threw a stone at a gate. The soldiers understand they're dealing with lots of esoteric stuff and daily repetitive policing tasks, and a patrol here, being there, initiated [operation] there, one after the other. You interact with many Palestinians, an interaction of, like, "Come on, pull up your shirt, turn around and Yalla, goodbye." Tons and tons of searches and zero-resistance from the Palestinians. This was really the first time there was Palestinian resistance, and that's why there was this sense that we're finally doing something. Ultimately, you also seek it out because you've been deployed there for six months already, and you're dealing with kids. So it's an arrest, and also a scuffle, and a very aggressive person who struck your friend, so you feel like you're doing something, it feels good. Because that's the only way that it gives meaning to what you're doing, in a very strange way.

**In these moments do you feel more as if you're protecting the homeland?**

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"The soldiers understand they're dealing with lots of esoteric stuff and daily repetitive policing tasks. [...] Tons and tons of searches and zero-resistance from the Palestinians. This was really the first time there was Palestinian resistance, and that's why there was this sense that we're finally doing something."

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No, I don't think it has anything, nothing, to do with with the homeland. It's simply about a personal experience, because you're also adding experiences to your collection. Ultimately, you're not just arresting a person for no reason, I imagine. I remember there being a reason to arrest him, something to do with explosives he prepared. It's perfectly fine to arrest him, even necessary. But patriotism doesn't mean you have to be violent toward him, though there are people who will take it there.

## 35

### **Sometimes they fired into the school**

Unit: Givati, Rotem Battalion · Place: Checkpoint 160 · Period: 2013

At the 160 Curve, where the Border Police's yellow gate is, near the Tomb [of the Patriarchs], they [Palestinian kids] used to throw stones. There's a school there. Every morning there was a downpour of stones in the direction of the cars taking the right-hand turn.

#### **From inside the school?**

From the school's gate.

#### **Who are they throwing stones at?**

Theoretically, they're throwing stones at the Border Police, but if they can get close enough, than [they're throwing stones] at the civilians' cars driving down.

#### **And how do the Border Police officers react to the stone throwing?**

By shooting stun grenades and tear gas at the kids. Sometimes they fired into the school, most of the time it would land in the school courtyard. Once someone fired into the school. The principal tried to assume control but it didn't really work. It was a bit of a sensitive situation... In the end, they're kids. Those throwing stones weren't any older than 12, 15 years old. It wasn't guys with face masks throwing Molotov Cocktails like they show in the movies. It was just little, obnoxious kids. The problem is, it can really kill someone and that's why it can't be treated leniently. We knew that the minute we caught some kids, their parents would make them stop throwing stones. It's the only way to deal with kids in general.

#### **What do you mean "that's the way?" That's what they told you?**

Yeah. The battalion that was there before us carried out an operation, came and

hid in the alleyways in the middle of the night. They [the kids] came to the school, started throwing stones, and they [the soldiers] were behind them and caught 12 kids at once. A fight started, this was a battalion of the Kfir brigade. That stopped everything, because the moment they arrested 12 kids, their parents....

**When you did that, did you catch children?**

Yes, we did.

**What do you do with them?**

We got there, too, did a limited operation. There was an alleyway that led directly to the school gate and there was an abandoned house there, so we went there at night, entered the abandoned house, stood guard. No one knows we're there, they're throwing stones and we are actually behind them. And then what happens [is that] a few [Palestinian] guys came in, started throwing stones, and all at once we start running towards them and then there's tons of kids running in all directions. They managed to catch around three children, 8, 9, 10 year-olds, something like that, and then we took them with us to the Red House (referred to as the "House of Contention" by the media, the "House of Peace" by the settlers, and "Rajabi House" by the Palestinians. Combines a military base and a residential compound for settlers), and it got messy because one of the Sheikhs came.

**How do you take them?**

Into the patrol [jeep]. Grab them, a kid, you know, some of them start to cry. In the end what happens with these kids [is that] we take them – because it's kids and it's stone-throwing, and everything is backwards in Hebron – so we take them to the Israeli police, I don't even know why. They took them to the police, their parents got a fine and that's how it ended, and then they released them.

**The kids were sitting in your post?**

Yeah. They sat there for an hour or two until the police car came. The Israel Police work very slowly, as you know. So until the police woke up, finished their donuts and came. And that's it. Obviously, [since] they were kids they weren't blindfolded. I just sat them on the chairs facing the wall so they couldn't see the post, not that it's a big secret, but nonetheless.

## 36

### **He put them up against the wall and photographed them with his smartphone**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Location: Checkpoint 160 · Period: 2016

We once brought a [Palestinian] kid to Givat Ha'avot [station], for a police interrogation. Afterwards the police officer simply told us: listen, don't bring me kids, there's nothing I can do with them.

#### **What do you mean by kids?**

Kids who definitely aren't 18, and definitely aren't 15, and might not even scratch 13. In another incident we received a report of stone throwing from a roof, by kids, and when that happens, we immediately rush over there.

#### **When is this? during the day or at night?**

At night. In the evening, and whenever something happens there, the occurrence involves a few kids together.

#### **You get a report of stone throwing on Zion route, Erez alley?**

Right, from above. There were a few kids there and I remember some of the soldiers went up to the house, to the roof, to tell them to stop throwing stones – and at the same time, a deputy company commander who was in contact with the operations room began to photograph them. He simply started to photograph the kids on his smartphone, and passed the photos onto the operations room to try and match the scouts' photos with those from his phone. He put them up against the wall and photographed them with his smartphone. They simply told all the kids: assemble here by the wall, sit down in the meantime. At the same time, I see that they're starting to take photos of the kids with the phone.

#### **The deputy company commander who initiated this, does he photograph the kids and send them home or does he keep them there until he gets a response from the scout as to whether or not they identified anyone?**

I don't remember exactly, but they just released the kids because there's really nothing to do with them, and you can see... even by looking at the kids you can see that it's ridiculous. They're being photographed and they're laughing in our faces, and some... You don't see that they're afraid or anything. It's a very strange situation and it's odd because I didn't think that it was severe or anything, it just seemed like a classroom party.

## We cause a bit of chaos

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Jabel Johar neighborhood · Period: 2014

### What are the initiated operations carried out in Hebron?

Initiated [operations] – we have a nice one every Friday at Jabel Johar. What happens during this initiated [operation] is that soldiers go, say five, six or eight, with a lot of riot-dispersal means, walk around and wait for someone to provoke [us]. You wait for someone to provoke you. And then, of course, the Hebron kids, their game is to throw stones at soldiers on Friday afternoons. They start throwing stones, riot-dispersal and all that mess begins, jokes. They throw a stone, we fire riot control [bullets or tear gas], [they] throw a stone, we chase after kids. You'll never catch them because you're fully equipped with a bulletproof vest and all that shit. We cause a bit of chaos, lots of gas.

### Who do you shoot at? If you say a kid throws [a stone] at you from some alley and goes back into the alley. At whom do you shoot the [tear] gas?

Like, at the street.

### Not necessarily at whomever is throwing the stone.

If you can't find him, then, you know, you walk into the alley and shoot. Usually there's more than one kid, and there could be teens or really...

### When you say kid, what do you mean?

I think there are kids that throw things from balconies, and in this case, you won't shoot [tear] gas into the balcony, I think. But then all sorts of teens show up, up to the age of 20 or so, and they start throwing stones, and then the ordeal of gassing an alley begins, simply so they'll run off – rubber bullets are also an option, to try to shoot someone.

### At the stone-throwers?

Yes.

### why do you actually walk there, on that route?

The rationale is to cause commotion there, to divert commotion from Worshippers' route (a trail that settlers use to go from Kiryat Arba to the Tomb of the Patriarchs).

### Is it a route where Jews don't walk at all?

No Jews at all. It's an Arab neighborhood.

### Is that the official [reason]?

That's the rationale. I don't know if it's written in a General Staff order, but that's what I know.



### **And the rationale is to simply divert attention from Worshippers' route?**

Yes, it's really stupid, but like, that's what I know. There could be a broader rationale, but you don't have... Why would you enter this neighborhood and cause a mess, like, for what? To hunt down stone-throwers? That's of no interest to anyone, you know.

## **38**

### **I wanted to throw up**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Worshippers' route · Period: 2012

During that time, we were [stationed at] Worshippers' route. When Jews pass through, the Palestinians have to pass via the other side of the wall. They know on their own, most of them do it automatically. There's no path, it simply means walking in diagonal [on] a leveled, very narrow and very inconvenient section [of the road]. Only after they pass the area where the Jews come from, can they go out onto the road. It was nighttime, and there was this family of a father, a woman, another woman and three kids, and they wanted to vertically cut across the route. They said, "Our house is just across the way," And instead of circling

the entire dirt road, they wanted to cross.

My Company Commander said, "Have them go around," and the father tells him, "I'm from here, this is my home." [The Company Commander] tells him, "Nothing to be done, these are the regulations, cross from around." He (the Palestinian) tells him, "These are little kids, with open shoes, let us through." My Company Commander starts yelling at him, "Yalla, go, get going, this is a waste of time." We escort them –

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**"When Jews pass through, the Palestinians have to pass via the other side of the wall. They know on their own, most of them do it automatically."**

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we're walking on the street and they're walking on the other side, and as they're walking the girl falls down and starts bleeding a bit. She started crying for real. Everyone stops, and the father looks at the Company Commander and asks him, "Sir, are you happy now?"

### **How did the company commander respond?**

He didn't. I think he realized he was being an idiot. I just remember feeling like I really wanted to throw up, that this was just really shitty.

## **39**

### **There's no room here for my personal judgment**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Worshippers' route · Period: 2012

In Hebron there's Worshippers' route and some other route, Erez alley maybe. There's the road and there's this low wall of sorts next to which there are mounds of construction debris, it's hard to walk there. I remember they told us to tell the Arabs to walk along the side with the construction debris and not on the road so that there wouldn't be any friction with the Jews. And I remember there were times when I told my commander that I won't. These are elderly people, it was a woman with bags and stuff, I'm not going to tell her, "Go cross over there now."

#### **And what did the commander say?**

He didn't stay with me at my post – we're each positioned a certain distance apart. When he passed by once, he told me that it's unacceptable to not do it, and that there's no room here for my personal judgment call. I said "OK" and kept doing my thing, exercising my judgment. And I remember being at some other place, also in Hebron, in some alley or something, there was this house where an old man was taking care of sheep in the house, in the house's yard. And I remember that settlers from Kiryat Arba came, about three or four, they looked about 25 years old, they came and harassed this old man, this Palestinian, curses, and they, like, slapped their butts, harassed him. He was really helpless and started to tear up a bit. I immediately told them, "Leave him alone," I stopped the situation a bit. I approached them, I tried to break up the situation. And then they said, "It's nothing, we're just having a laugh." I told him (one of the settlers), "What laugh? This is an elderly man, I mean, we're here so that these kinds of problems won't happen, and you come and cause the problems?" And then they left. This old man started tearing up and went back inside. When he came out, I told him that I'm sorry about the situation. He brought me some tea. He turned out alright. And then TIPH (international monitors who operate in Hebron) arrived, they spoke with him.

## 40

### **They walk on the side of the road**

Rank: First Sergeant · Place: Worshippers' route · Period: 2012

We go up [to Hebron] for missions, driving in an Armored Combination Bus to Worshippers' route, and my sergeant drops me off there and says: see you at the end of the shift.

#### **What was your mission?**

My mission was to secure the worshippers walking from Kiryat Arba to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and the specific order was that Jews walk on the road, the worshippers walk on the road, and the Palestinians aren't supposed to appear on the route. If they do appear – you ask them to go down to the shoulders. There's this very messed up situation in Hebron, endless friction, an encounter, sharing the street, making sure there are as few encounters as possible.

#### **The neighborhood you're in - is it a Palestinian neighborhood?**

Palestinian.

#### **Do settlers live there or just cross the neighborhood?**

If I'm not mistaken, the settlers, the closest place they live in is Avraham Avinu that's what I recall. The closest settlement is Avraham Avinu.

#### **How does that work? We're talking about a Palestinian neighborhood, and Palestinians aren't allowed to walk on the road that crosses the neighborhood?**

#### **How are they supposed to get around the neighborhood?**

Even when they're walking on the route, they walk on the side of the road. It's the kind of memory that was etched into my mind because there weren't that many Palestinians walking around there. Until an elderly Palestinian woman showed up there, that was a very serious issue.

#### **Why?**

There was this elderly woman walking on the road, and I said: come on, I'm not going to tell this old woman to walk on the side of the road, she'll walk on the road. Enough. A young man came over, a settler on his way to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and began shouting at me: you're not doing your job, you've gone crazy, she's an Arab, she's walking on the road along with the worshippers, shout at her, get her to the side, if I were you I would... And I'm: calm down, calm down, I'm doing my job, go pray at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, have a good Sabbath, leave me alone, go. He left and she continued walking on the road but I remember that

it simply reminded me of the holocaust, like Jews walking in the ditch next to the sidewalk. And I didn't understand how he doesn't get it, I couldn't figure out ... I said to him: listen, she could be your grandmother or mine, an old lady, she can hardly walk.

**And what did he say?**

He said: there's an arrangement, they're not allowed to walk on the road and we're allowed to during these hours when there's reinforcement, the hours of prayer. We're on the road and they don't walk here, or they walk on the side of the road, something like that.

**41**

**I'm not going to make such racial segregation**

Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Place: Abraham Spring · Period: 2014

There's the Abraham Spring in which many Jews like to swim. It's parallel to the Abu Sneineh cemetery, right at the ascent from Shuhada [street] to Tel Rumeida. Soldiers got the impression from somewhere, as did the squad commanders and everyone else, that Arabs aren't allowed to swim in that spring. They're prohibited from going to a spring that's in their own neighborhood.

**Who told you that?**

That's the thing, apparently it was like that with previous commanders or something. There were soldiers who used to go crazy every time we would sit there and see Arabs swim.

**The spring is inside a Palestinian neighborhood?**

It's right in between, right on the seam line. What I used to do is call the brigade operations room, and the brigade operations room would respond to a company's patrol around once every two years. So I knew they wouldn't respond, and I would ask what the procedure was regarding locals (Palestinians), and I would just wait for the Arabs to leave, because

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**"what is this that Arabs can't swim in this spring? It's, like, totally messed up. I'm not going to make such racial segregation."**

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I'm like a foreigner coming there, and what is this [that] Arabs can't swim in this spring? It's, like, totally messed up. I'm not going to make such racial segregation.

**What I don't understand is whether you received a command.**

The thing is, I never wanted to check whether it was a real order, because in my statist mind, if it was a genuine order, then I would have enforced it. I chose to play dumb and not do it. But soldiers would go nuts. And then, say, the Arabs would smile at them, and then they would say: How is he smiling at me, that Arab? I can't take it. Just like how a squad commander speaks about his recruits. This entire military vocabulary, it seeps right into the occupation, and that's how every soldier treats every Palestinian – as if he's his recruit.

## 42

### **If they resist even a bit, then you pin them to the wall**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Engineering Corps, 614<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Place: Shoter Checkpoint · Period: 2014

**What do you do at the Shoter checkpoint in Hebron?**

You check every person who enters (from H1 into H2, an area under Israeli security control). It was a really tense period and it was one of our soldiers and another soldier from 932 [battalion]. And every time someone entered, and if he's between the ages we like – fresh, between 20 and 30 – you give them a thorough security check: you spread their legs open with a good kick and forcefully search their body, and release them. There's nothing we can really do, you can't hit them so your revenge is in the way you search them, and how hard you search them, with how much force. If they resist even a bit, then you pin them to the wall and do the kick and release. There were photos of them and a list of who to arrest the moment they enter.

**And did someone pass through?**

Yes, one.

**And you identify that it's him and immediately arrest him?**

No, you don't identify him, but you check the ID. After that you look at the photo and you have the name, and you identify that it's him, reporting it on the two-way radio.

**And he's arrested?**

Yes.

**And what's done with him?**

He's passed on. They had a much more painful security check, like a direct kick and another kick and another kick, in order to search.

**43**

**You come with force and grab someone, and you pin him to the wall, so of course he hates you**

Rank: Captain · Place: Western Kasbah

On my daily routine I walked around with my soldiers in a standard patrol in the Kasbah, walking among the stores and stopping and searching people, and there are all sorts of ways to do that. There are commanders who do it in a manner that really angers the local population. You come with force and grab someone, and you pin him to the wall and you treat him this way, so of course he hates you, it's completely obvious.

**You walk around in a Palestinian neighborhood and decide that a particular person needs to be checked.**

**According to what?**

There are databases with names of people who are wanted for interrogation and they walk around. Sometimes it's according to specific descriptions that tell us to look for someone specific. Sometimes we have photos, sometimes we only have a description, sometimes we have a name, ID number and age group. I mean, a 50-year-old, I would never stop to check his ID unless I had a specific indication about a 50-year-old.

**Do you check only people who fit the description you received, or do you also check people randomly?**

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"To turn these checks into something routine, random. Not anyone, but it's aimed at specific age groups and descriptions."

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I think there were also random checks, and the random checks had an operational rationale that actually sent a message to all [Palestinians]: guys, if there's someone suspicious here, he can't just easily walk around the street and be safe. It means that somebody might stop and ask him [who he is].

**You mean a message to the Palestinian population?**

Yes. To turn these checks into something routine, random. Not anyone, but it's aimed at specific age groups and descriptions. But yes, I think that every patrol had to check a number of people every night, I don't remember how many, but you had to do a few.

**Every patrol set out with an order: you have to run 50 or 100 IDs through for a check?**

Yes, my numbers were lower, but yes, we had to run a certain number, yes.

## 44

### **The information isn't used by anyone and doesn't go to anyone**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Paratroopers, 101<sup>st</sup> Battalion · Period: 2012

**How do you actually choose [which Palestinians to search]?**

I think [they were] mostly young men. You look, and it's enough for someone you looked at to avoid eye contact – you ask for his ID and detain him for a second.

**But you're talking about Palestinian neighborhoods. It makes sense for them to be on the streets, doesn't it?**

Yes, they're on the streets. But the closer you are to the area of the Tomb [of the Patriarchs], there is less legitimacy for Palestinians to walk around, even if they're allowed there.

**In what sense?**

It isn't a regulation.

**I know, that's why I wonder what you mean when you say...**

When I'm near the Tomb [of the Patriarchs] and there's a young guy walking around here, it's more likely that I'll detain him because it's close to the Tomb. Or when there are patrols in the area of the Jewish neighborhoods – the closer it is, even if it's allowed, I, like, work more meticulously.

**When you say "detain," what do you mean? What's the procedure?**

Usually you stop (the Palestinian), check his ID and exchange a few words. And if someone arouses suspicion then you do a security check, too.

### **A physical check?**

Yes, but not that often, not anyone.

### **What do you mean by "exchange a few words?" You don't know Arabic.**

True. [It's] Arabic of sorts, or "checkpoint Arabic." Like: where are you from, where are you going? They usually know how to answer in Hebrew to such things. But again, I can't have any conversation with him.

### **So he says, I came from here and I'm going there.**

Again, I think that for most soldiers in Hebron, myself included, it means nothing.

### **So why do you ask?**

Because it's about the interaction, about someone asking him something. And then even if he is... First, he'll think before lying to me. And second, even if he wanted to do something, he [now] thinks that someone knows what he's doing. It's more a matter of, like... You could say, [it's more to] create a sense among Palestinians that someone is always watching them and knows what they're doing, rather than getting information that will actually help me understand something. I think that in no way has anyone ever told me about the security checks: "you're collecting intelligence," or anything like that. No. The information isn't used by anyone and doesn't go to anyone.

## **45**

### **The less you interact with the Israeli authorities – the better**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Period: 2016

There are very clear directives, that whatever you take from a Palestinian vehicle, you bring to the operations room. I once found in a car, like, license plates and some sort of club, a strange stick. We simply knew to bring it to the operations room, to leave it in the operations room.

### **What do you mean by "club," a baseball bat, a stick, or...? What makes something a club?**

It's not a broomstick that you can see connects to a broom head, it's a relatively thick and long stick, and like, we don't take chances.



**Could you think of any other possible uses?**

It wasn't something that you, like... It wasn't part of a bed or a sofa or an Ikea table.

**Did you ever encounter a Palestinian who tried to hit a soldier with a club?**

No, no. That proximity did not exist. That proximity is impossible.

**So why are we actually afraid of clubs?**

Because in our mind it's a means of causing harm.

**But you never encountered that. I also follow the news relatively closely and haven't heard of a case in which a Palestinian attacked a soldier or settler with a club.**

Yes, and it's also not smart, like, a soldier has a weapon. If he sees someone with a club then he immediately cocks [his weapon].

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"It's part of the reality you're entering. You enter a bubble wherein anything that shouldn't be in the hands of a Palestinian in Hebron – should be in your hands."

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**So why [take it] anyway?**

Because, again, it's part of the reality you're entering. You enter a bubble wherein anything that shouldn't be in the hands of a Palestinian in Hebron – should be in your hands.

**But don't you need some sort of probable cause to confiscate stuff?**

No, because ultimately, you have the backing. You're backed up, you tell the Company Commander hey, under my discretion as a commander I thought that

he (the Palestinian) shouldn't have this, and he'll back you up completely.

**And when you confiscate something from someone?**

In the end they'll leave, bummed out. They're bummed when stuff is confiscated from them, but on the other hand they'll just be happy that they've been let go.

**Are you obligated to give them any sort of document confirming that an IDF soldier indeed confiscated something from them?**

No, nothing.

**Let's say you confiscated something from a Palestinian, how can he later prove that something was confiscated from him and demand compensation?**

He can't. And any reasonable person would understand that it would be a waste of his time, it's a waste of his time to go and stand in line at the police station and wait.

**Why is it a waste [of his time]?**

Because unless you're a Palestinian justice fighter and you want to invest your resources in it, these are things that as a Palestinian – I assume – I wouldn't waste my time on them. The less you interact with the Israeli authorities – the better, I think.

## 46

### **Full friction with the population**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Infantry Commanders Academy · Period: 2014

#### **Can you elaborate a bit on the difference you felt between serving in Hebron and serving in Gaza?**

From the start, what suited me most, ideologically, was to serve in Hebron. You know, like, in full friction with the population. Why? Because I simply came with the mindset [that], 'it's better that I do it than if someone else would do it.' Seriously, with all the arrogance that entails. And as time passes, you understand that actually, you don't know how much you want to do it because it really impacts you, what can you do. It really impacts you and you can't... You don't have full control over what's happening. You have [some] control, you can change a lot through your approach, but these are things that I'm sure that if I stayed [in Hebron] longer would scar me even more, because of the difficulty, because of the complexity.

**I think I understand what you're saying because I served in Hebron, but try explaining to those who haven't served in Hebron what that scar is.**

Okay, I'll speak about the difference. In Gaza I felt that everything was much clearer [because of the fence]. I mean, even if the open fire regulations were sometimes unclear, ultimately it was my call – the thought process, the decision – or [of people] around me. And most things were

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**"You see the eyes of the people that you're hurting. The mere fact that I'm there hurts them, and I know it, it's clear to me at every moment. And the fact that you look into their eyes and know that you're hurting them, makes it much more difficult."**

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very clear. Meaning that if I see a terrorist... what's a terrorist? A person who crawls toward the fence with a weapon at night, then... Morally, I don't want to kill anyone, but the moment I was drafted into the army and understood where I was going, then yes, I would kill him.

**You're not a pacifist.**

Yes. I ultimately enlisted in a combat unit, what can you do, with everything that it is. [So when] someone crosses the fence [then] yes, restrain him, and yes, shoot, because what can you do, you can't know everything. But everything was much clearer. And the moment you're in Hebron and you're surrounded by a [civilian] population, things are less clear. And everything is denser and you're constantly ... What can you do, you see the eyes of the people that you're hurting. The mere fact that I'm there hurts them, and I know it, [it's] clear to me at every moment. And the fact that you look into their eyes and know that you're hurting them makes it much more difficult.

## **47**

### **The darkest place on Earth**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion · Period: 2014

**With what feelings do you leave Hebron? On a personal level.**

Crappy place. I went straight to Gaza from there, our deployment there was cut a bit short, [so] it's all mixed up in my experience.

**And now, when you think of Hebron?**

In my eyes it's the darkest place on Earth.

**Why?**

There's a really shitty atmosphere there. There's terrible tension there due to the military presence and the Palestinians there who have something restless about them. The soldiers have something restless about them, too, and it, like, doesn't mix well, And I suppose the settlers also don't help the situation. You feel like something bad is going to happen there. A dark place, I don't know, I have to think about it a bit, how I...

**Did the religious importance of Hebron speak to you when you were a soldier there? Did you ever think about it?**

What, like that the Tomb of the Patriarchs is ours and we need it because it's part of our Jewish culture? In that sense?

**Let's say so.**

No, it wasn't really our area, so you think about it less. Listen, in general the soldiers don't like the settlers. You have fucking Havat Gal (an illegal outpost situated in one of the Palestinian neighborhoods of Hebron) and at any given moment you have two to three soldiers [there] who could have been somewhere else. They screw with your workforce for some two Jewish weirdos who wanted to put up a caravan with a chicken, and that leads you to realize: who the fuck am I guarding here? It doesn't help you relate in any sense, unless you're a messianic soldier.

## 48

### **To show the Palestinians there's someone ruling over them**

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion · Period: 2012

I remember that before I was drafted it seemed to me that the army was the sexiest thing I could do with my life. Some sort of very good and moral vocation. To defend yourself. Suddenly when you get to the army, to these moments, then these things blow up before your eyes. I thought I was going to do things that I was educated to do in the youth movement, like [promoting] equality and tolerance, and suddenly I get to this place where these things are thrown in the trash. The added complexity is that if I don't carry out these orders, then I'll be punished. And that's something that really hurt me. The truth is that most of my time in Hebron I was suppressing. I thought about how I would go to sleep as early as possible to wake up for the next guarding shift. I began analyzing and processing the implications of the things we did there only after I completed my army service. I don't think I understood. Myself, or my friends, who were very aware of these things – it was very hard for us. There were also others whose hatred of the Arab population actually grew, because all the time we're told that they [the Palestinians] cause all the trouble, and they do the annoying things, they do the bad stuff. We're here because of them, because they're the troublemakers. We have to protect the Jews. In reality, there are many things that if I were to say them to thinking people, or those who doubt the existing reality, then they will suddenly

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"I remember even asking my Platoon Commander why we're doing what we're doing now. And he says: to demonstrate presence, to show deterrence, to show the Palestinians there's someone ruling over them."

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find themselves in a dissonance, in a very big confusion, because you say: this isn't the justice I came to serve in the army.

**Did they talk to you about who you're supposed to protect on the ground?**

Whenever we go out on a mission, we're told we're here for the Jews. We looked at every Palestinian citizen as a suspect, always. We had to be alert whether it was at the crossings, in the guard posts, look suspiciously at every one of them. We did a lot of things there that, really, to this day

I say, I believe that if I was on the other

side, I don't know if could have reacted with such restraint, [in the way that] the Palestinian population reacts to the army or the Jews there.

**For example?**

For example we had to do once a day or two a patrol in the Palestinian neighborhoods, even if they're as quiet as can be, just to give them the feeling that we control them, deterrence. "See, the army's here, don't even dare to cause trouble, we have soldiers stepping on your toes." We would walk around, enter shops, sort of like look to see that everything's OK, continue on walking. Even if nothing problematic was happening. I remember even asking my Platoon Commander why we're doing what we're doing now. And he says :to demonstrate presence, to show deterrence, to show the Palestinians there's someone ruling over them.

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"You're asking me where I saw violence in Hebron? That's like asking where I saw Hebron in Hebron. It's really at every corner. You just leave your post and you're already on the street that separates people according to their ethnicity or nationality, or whatever whitewashed language is used to justify what's going on there."

Lieutenant • Nahal, 932<sup>nd</sup> Battalion • 2014

**[BREAKING  
THE SILENCE]**