

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

Soldiers' Testimonies from the South Hebron Hills

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"In the South Hebron Hills, it was mostly about physical assaults. There's real violence out there, sometimes we concentrate more on the city, too much, but a settler brutalizing a shepherd - that's a classic in the South Hebron Hills, it happens there on a daily basis. Poisoning wells, that happens out there plenty. There was this story of some settlers throwing dead chickens into the Palestinians' well. It was Saturday. The Palestinians summoned us, we came... There was nothing to do. We brought them water tanks."

## **Soldiers' Testimonies from the South Hebron Hills**



## **Introduction**

This booklet contains sixty testimonies of both male and female combatants who served in the South Hebron Hills between 2000 and 2008, casting light on the direct outcomes of the military rule over the Palestinian population in the area, and the indirect effects on Israeli society. Breaking the Silence has been active in the South Hebron Hills for a number of years, primarily in the context of offering tours of the region to the general public. This booklet is intended to serve not only as a supplement for participants on our tours, but is also intended to contribute to the overall understanding of the nature and implications of the military control over the South Hebron Hills. Moreover, this booklet constitutes an additional aspect of the work of Breaking the Silence in endeavoring to increase awareness of the reality in the West Bank amongst the Israeli public.

### **About the South Hebron Hills**

The South Hebron Hills region is primarily rural. Most of the Palestinians who live in the region are concentrated in the town of Yatta (approximately 50,000 residents) and in a number of other large towns, with the remaining population living in small villages and encampments spread out over a vast territory. The town of Yatta is under the control of the Palestinian Authority (Area A), and thus friction between the residents of Yatta and the Israeli army finds expression mainly at the town's borders, and in focused military operations inside the town. The vast rural territory surrounding Yatta is under direct Israeli control (Area C), effectively placing the IDF in command of all aspects of the lives of residents in the area. A considerable portion of the Palestinian population living in the South Hebron Hills is poor, and they support themselves through agriculture and shepherding of flocks. For years, a portion of the residents lived in caves until many of them were destroyed by the IDF, and today, these former cave-dwellers reside in tents. A portion of the residents are refugees who arrived in the area over the course of 1948 and throughout the fifties from territory that is now part of Israel. These segments, along with the many Palestinian families who have been in the territory for hundreds of years, make up the population of the South Hebron Hills.

Given the fact that they live under the direct jurisdiction of Israeli authorities, Palestinian residents are dependent on these authorities in conducting all aspects of their lives. However, various requirements of their way of life, including the most basic necessities, have been left unaddressed for many years. For example, access to water has become a

daily challenge to Palestinian villagers and shepherds, and in the absence of a permanent solution, the residents rely primarily upon water cisterns which gather rain water. Many villages are not connected to the electricity grid, nor to other basic infrastructures. These villages are in constant struggle with the authorities of the Israeli security apparatus regarding their legal rights to the land and its resources (these issues often involve residents whose relatives lived on this same land for many years before the establishment of an Israeli presence in the area). Many highways connecting the villages to Yatta have been blocked in recent years on the grounds of security purposes. Moreover, in recent decades, many settlements have been established directly adjacent to and near these villages, where residents enjoy all the rights that have been denied to the Palestinians in the region (water access, electricity, building permits, etc.).

Over the years, and especially since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, many Palestinian residents whose lives had become intolerable, simply left their villages and settled in the town of Yatta. The extreme inequality between the Jewish settlers who live comfortably and the Palestinians who live in extreme levels of poverty and underdevelopment results in Palestinians perceiving the rural areas of the South Hebron Hills as a region where they are unwanted. Beyond the harsh humanitarian implications of this process, in the wider political context, the South Hebron Hills is gradually transforming into Israeli territory in every respect: The town of Yatta is becoming the sole Palestinian enclave as the number of Palestinians living in the surrounding areas dwindles, and Israeli settlers reside in their stead.

### **The Testimonies in this Booklet**

The testimonies contained in this booklet relate to the various facets of the interactions between IDF soldiers, residents of the settlements, and the Palestinian residents of the South Hebron Hills. Testimonies are told from the view of the soldier on the ground in the context of military rule in the South Hebron Hills. The testimonies relate to the array of issues which surface on a daily basis in this region: soldiers coping with restrictions on the movement of Palestinian residents, expulsion of Palestinians from their agricultural lands, confiscation of their property, the use of violence against bound detainees, passivity and selective law enforcement by the Israeli police in the area, operation of checkpoints, the arbitrary nature of on-the-ground policy determination, settler violence, etc. The testimonies describe events that occurred between 2000 and 2008, and they represent

a wide cross section of units that served in the South Hebron Hills during this period. Despite this breadth, sixty testimonies alone cannot provide a comprehensive picture of all that occurs in such a large area over a period of many years. The tours in the field offered by Breaking the Silence contextualize the various testimonies by locating them in the time and place in which they occurred.

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Despite the unique characteristics of this area, familiarity with the situation in the South Hebron Hills can teach us a great deal about IDF conduct and mechanisms employed by Israel all over the West Bank. We believe that familiarity with this information is necessary when evaluating the political and social realities in the region, and when making decisions on the future of Israel's presence in the Occupied Territories.

## **The local Settlement Security Coordinator defined our precise designated area**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2004

Already a squad commander, I was posted with some soldiers at the Beit Haggai settlement. Besides having to guard the outposts there, we went on night patrols, every time with a different settler. (...) There, too, we had the same story: The local Settlement Security Coordinator would come along and show me the exact span of our designated area. There was some spot at the very edge of the settlement and he would say: "Here, you see that spot? That line there marks the end of the settlement area, from there on..." There were farming areas out there, open. That settlement had no fence. "Palestinians are not allowed to enter past there." It's an open area, a field spread out down there, and the settlers said: "No entry for them there. They can't get close. Sometimes they show up with their tractor to till the land, but they can't. It's not their area." Okay, fine. One day he comes along, alerts me: "Come, quick, they're coming in to work that field." Now me, I'm just a young squad commander, so I come along, and he goes: "Here, fire some shots in the air to scare them off." The Settlement Security Coordinator is armed, but he's not using his gun because I'm the soldier and he's not supposed to. Okay, I fired a few shots in the air. They looked, sort of stalled, but didn't really stop. They were right at the entrance to the area of the settlement. Then along comes this reservists' patrol. They're more familiar with things out there, not afraid: "These guys will give you trouble." Okay, one came, took his gun, fired near them. The reservist, he aimed at the Palestinians, some meters away from them, like really showing them that we mean business. He said: "Come on over here." The reservists also began to go down towards them. They came, caught the Palestinians, brought them to where I was standing with the Settlement Security Coordinator. He said to the Palestinian: "You're not supposed to be here at all." The reservist also hit him, kicked him. I was in shock, I didn't know what to do, what to say. I felt something was wrong. And the reservist goes: "That's the only way they learn, so next time they won't dare come in here." And you think, maybe he'll really learn this way. And that's it. He let him go, saying "Don't come back here." So they left, mounted their tractor and drove away. That's what happened at Beit Haggai.

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**Didn't it cross your mind that perhaps that area didn't belong to the settlement?**

The truth is I wasn't thinking. I didn't doubt what he said, that it was his area. I don't know how the reservists happened to come along just then. Perhaps they just happened to pass by, or the Settlement Security Coordinator had called them. Reservists came along, the Settlement Security Coordinator told them what had happened, and then they took over and did what they did. (...) I know I wouldn't have beat up those guys.

**How do you know?**

How do I know I wouldn't have hit them? I'm not that kind of a guy, that's how.

It's a filthy thing to do...

**What, you never handed Palestinians over to the Border Patrol?**

So they would beat them?

**Yes. "We're the nice guys, our battalion, we don't do the dirty work."**

Others do it for us. If the reservists hadn't come along, I don't know how this would have ended.

**The Settlement Security Coordinator didn't shoot?**

No, no. He gave us our outpost briefing once, when we had just gotten there. Me and the soldiers. First for me, then for the other soldiers as well.

**And your platoon commander, \*\*\*?**

He didn't even visit. He was stationed at a different settlement.

**So your authority figure was the Settlement Security Coordinator?**

No. I was the commander on the spot. When you go on patrol, for instance, the patrol has a commander on the ground. Who is my commander? \*\*\* was in charge, but he was not with me at the same settlement.

**So you received your instructions from the Settlement Security Coordinator.**

Practically speaking he didn't interfere with matters such as guard duty and all that. He didn't come along every day and say "Today you'll do this and that, now come on, clean your weapons." We only saw him when we were alerted or things like that. It wasn't as though he was in charge of

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me. If he told me something and I didn't do it, I would not actually be refusing an order. I do things because he's on the spot and he knows the place whereas I'm only a squad commander and have come on routine settlement security duty for a week, so I don't have an inkling of what goes on around there, what's what where. So he's the authority and I listen to him.

**Makes sense that he would make up that part.**

Could be. Very likely. I have no way of verifying.

**Do you choose which positions in the settlement would be manned?**

Yes, I chose them. Most of the time we chose the usual positions.

**Did the Palestinians pose any threat?**

No, they did not. I never felt they were dangerous. You know, it's a matter of territory, the idea of not letting them approach the area. In the Territories any Palestinian is a potential terrorist. There's some border line that runs from the settlement – I don't know whether it would be legally defined or not – but there is a line, a certain distance, and if [Palestinians] would roam freely around the settlement it would be much harder to guard it.

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Testimony 2

## **Intelligence mapping**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2003

All sorts of activities are initiated, especially arrest missions and 'straw widow' procedures, day and night incursions, usually into the town of Yatta and its surroundings. We are positioned in the middle of a village, we carry out a patrol or something, and then we return.

**Doing what in the village?**

Putting up road blocks - you place a barrier in the middle of the street and begin to check people's IDs, vehicles, search them. There are house-searches, intelligence mappings, meaning you enter a neighborhood, inspect it one house after another. Who lives there, their ID numbers, names – usually it's by clan. Most of these actions were in Yatta, or in Dura. Our designated area was Yatta, the South Hebron Hills region, next

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to, what was it? Jabl Sindis and some of the Zaytoun neighborhood of Hebron, that was while we were stationed at the Beit Haggai settlement, right across the road. So you just go in, write down the names, who lives where, who's whose cousin, who's the father, the grandfather, the children, who lives there. In short – intelligence mapping. And house searches. You enter a house, and start looking for all kinds of prohibited things.

### **How does the search go?**

Depending whether it's day or night probably, but anyway it's more or less the same, what matters more is how you secure it on the outside. At night you just keep watch over the house and that's more or less it, all the neighbors are asleep. In daytime people move around so normally you'd need a larger force. You surround the house with teams of soldiers. You knock on the door, ask the owner to come out, he introduces himself, what's your name, this and that. He goes back in, gets everyone into one room, all the residents, children, older people, women – everyone practically. They are assembled in one room and then the troops enter the house. I mean, there's one team that starts to clear the rooms, making sure no one is in there and armed. One guy or several keep watch over the people inside the room. And there's usually more people who enter – or sometimes they stay on the porch, or sometimes outside – securing the place. So no one will enter while the soldiers are still searching. You go through one room after another, open closets, have a look through them, sometimes actually accompanied by the house owner, sometimes not. Usually we wanted to do it in his presence, or with someone who speaks Hebrew if there was such a person around because it's easier that way. Then you leave. Same way you came in. I suppose you know the procedure, with securing teams and all. If it's an intelligence mapping procedure then it's less of a search and more of a survey of the residents, and noting it down. If it's putting up a roadblock, you simply stop the traffic and begin searching inside vehicles. If a person seems suspect, you check his ID with the war-room and occasionally get a 'bingo', someone whose name appears on the wanted lists.

### **What are the rules of engagement inside the village?**

At first we used to move around with the magazine loaded into our rifle but no bullet in the barrel. Ever since the incident at the Sheep Junction [where three Lavi Battalion soldiers were killed in January 2003], however, we move around with a bullet in the barrel, or at least sometimes, depending on the nature of the mission. The rules of engagement: if you detect with certainty someone who's armed, you kill him. Shoot to kill. If

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you suspect someone, you carry out a suspect-arrest procedure: yell out "stop, stop!" shoot in the air, shoot at the legs, and if he still poses a threat, kill him.

### **No more than that?**

No. Some mistakes were made at times, but that's okay. Not in my time. They happened after my discharge. Guys were on an arrest mission, a fellow was standing on a roof, they thought he was armed and killed him. Eventually they found out he was up there with a broom or something. What was he doing on the roof? I don't know. But they thought they detected an armed insurgent and killed him.

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Testimony 3

## **Shot for holding a broom**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Years:** 2003-2004

There was this incident while I was with the auxiliary company at Adoraim. I came back to the base from home leave some Sunday, and on the way I heard that some terrorist had been taken down in Dura. I may have even heard it over the radio on the bus. When I got to the base I asked the guys what happened, and they said one of our platoons took down a guy who was holding a broom on some rooftop during curfew in Dura. The soldiers were closing in on a house at night, when someone saw some figure on the roof holding what he thought was a weapon, so he yelled that there was an armed man on the roof. The whole force opened fire and the guy was killed. Later they sent up his cousin or someone to check for weapons and he came back and said there was nothing. So they sent up the wife of the man they killed to look, and she, too, came back and said there was nothing there. When the soldiers climbed up to the roof they saw a broom next to him. They had come to arrest him because of some intelligence information about him possessing weapons and planning some terrorist attack. But even after they had turned that home inside out they found no weapons. One of the guys who had been there did tell me they found some IDF uniform and a forged entry permit to IDF bases.

I heard this story from everyone - the whole company was talking about it. This had turned into some kind of joke for a day or two. Every time anyone

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from the platoon involved in that shooting would pass by the sergeant-major's work crew, the guys on the crew would raise their broom in the air and shout – "It's only a broom!" Some days later everyone who had been on that arrest mission was invited to brigade HQ for a drink with the brigade commander, to be congratulated for a job well done.

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Testimony 4

## **Destroying farmers' terraces out of boredom**

**Unit:** Paratroopers **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

In addition to our checkpoint missions, we had to permanently block roads. What does that consist of? You get a huge Volvo wheel loader, a gigantic tractor, and are told to drive on Route 60, and block off every side-road connecting to Route 60. Okay, great. Never mind that some of these tracks access a home, because the Palestinian Authority, their public works don't really function, I guess, so no road was actually paved to access that home, just a dirt trail. Orders are orders. We'd block these access trails to people's homes. Pretty soon we got bored, and of course we had no officer with us, and the driver of that bulldozer was a bored reservist, so we began to do what people in the US call 'monster truck rallies' – you have those vehicles, with the huge tires - and started playing: what can the bulldozer run over and what can it lift. We'd approach some house, ask the bulldozer operator: "Hey, can you lift his car in the air? Wow, I think I can." Boom, he'd lift the guy's car in the air and place it on the trail, blocking off his trail with his own car.

### **And probably leave it there in that state.**

Yes, leave it there as it is. "Can you lift this guy's farming terrace? I don't know, listen, it's a large boulder." "You mean you can't?" Okay, I'll try." He goes ahead and picks up the stone of the terrace. Out of sheer boredom people's terraces would be turned upside down, their cars, jalopies, just playing around with that bulldozer. Think about it, I was just 19-20 years-old at the time. You give a 19-20 year-old kid a giant wheel loader to play around with, do anything he wishes with it, run wild. We ran wild with that thing. We moved boulders, blocked access to homes, tore out gates. Just simply went ahead and played around with that shovel.

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Testimony 5

## **A truck comes out of there... we force it to dump its cargo**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001-2004

### **Regarding the policy of the routes, traveling on Route 60 and on Route 317, do you remember what the policy was?**

It changed, quite a few times. I'm not totally sure when but there were many times when [Palestinians were] forbidden from crossing parts of Route 60, and some parts were permitted. Because it involves crossing the road. I remember that in any case a truck... There was a quarry in Yatta. Every time a truck would leave there and get on the road they would make it come to the barrier area and pour out its cargo. And normally, if it's a quarry then it's a big marble slab, a very sturdy block, and they would close up the breach that way, by dumping it on the side of the road. This way the road got decorated all along with these big marble stones. It's very convenient. Each one weighs something like 2 or 3 tons. Costs around 700-2000 dollars. It's nice. Makes for a fancy-looking road.

### **What other ways were there to enforce these prohibitions? Or is that what you remember about the trucks...for example, you are driving and you see a Subaru break through the blockade. What do you do?**

If you catch it breaking the blockade? First of all you detain it. If you are on foot, you report it to the company or to the nearest checkpoint. It won't make it half a kilometer, a kilometer, you stop it as fast as you can. Often you can stop it. Then you run a quick check. IDs of all the passengers, check their belongings, often they're detained on the spot. Look, what happens with the marble stones on the side of the road is that they just take their keys. They take their keys for 12 hours, sometimes 24. They're held in the pillbox. The pillbox that stops them, they are in the entrance to the pillbox, inside the pillbox. The drivers just spend the night next to the truck or in the truck. Eventually their keys are returned to them. There aren't many ways to enforce this. Bottom line, if they want to get on the road, a Subaru like that you know...

### **The thing with taking keys, IDs, are those things you've encountered?**

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Of course.

**In what situations?**

Taking people's IDs? I think only in cases such as breaking through checkpoints and stuff. Taking someone's truck keys also keeps him from working.

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Testimony 6

**"You're not going to beat me up, right?"**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank :** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003-2005

At that time, at Otniel, we did plenty of guard duty shifts on the base, and I was often up in the sentry post from 3 until 6 or 9 a.m. Suspects of criminal or terrorist activity would be arrested and brought in with shackles and blindfolded and left at the sentry post until morning. They would arrive, a doctor would check them to make sure they're healthy enough to be taken into custody and then they would be left at the sentry post until morning when they would be taken to the brigade headquarters, first so they'd be checked by the Shin Bet to make sure it was the right guy, a basic interrogation, and from there to the police detention center, at the Hill of the Forefathers. I remember they'd be left there at the sentry post and Hebron in winter is no light matter, it means pneumonia for anyone not used to such temperatures. We're talking here about 40-year-olds some of them, not exactly in their prime. Some ended up sick, you'd see the guy developing a cough. The first thing when I went up to the post, I mean not from the first time I went there but I would place the guy inside the post next to the space heater, as I was wearing a fleece jacket. These were detainees and they knew they couldn't ask for anything unless they needed to go to the toilet. First thing, I'd turn on the warm fan, second, I'd check whether there was a blanket at the sentry post and if there was, I would cover him. If not, I called the war-room for it. Sometimes a blanket was provided, sometimes not.

**Depending on what?**

Frankly, it depended on how much the war-room guy wanted a blanket to be brought. That already depended on his political inclinations. There was

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one war-room guy that I knew if there was an arrest anticipated for when he was on duty, just to be sure I'd bring my own army blanket with me just in case and bring it along.

**How many people did likewise?**

Some.

**Was this widespread in the company?**

There were people who did this. The norm was closer to what I did. Most of the time, when I arrived for a shift, I would see the detainee sitting, usually they would sit him on the black garbage bin so he wouldn't freeze on the floor, and there would be a heater next to him and a blanket. Sometimes the guy you're replacing runs away [at the end of the shift] and only when the sun comes up you see that the detainee has bruises and marks around his eyes.

**How were detainees treated, generally speaking?**

Generally, pretty normative.

**'Normative' doesn't mean anything.**

Mostly, when the detainees reached the doctor, they would leave the base, but sometimes they were beaten up. There was one guy who used to do this a lot, and when I saw him at it once I told him that if I ever see him doing it again, I'll bring it up at the highest echelons and take it up with Investigative Military Police. I don't know if he stopped.

**Can you describe this incident specifically – when and where it took place?**

The sentry post at the Otniel base, nighttime, I don't recall the exact date. It was when we were assigned to Otniel. I get there and replace him at the post, and I see the detainee lying on the ground, groaning in pain.

**How old was he?**

Around 25-30. He simply lay there groaning. I asked the guy I was replacing what happened. "Nothing, he's been like that for a while." "Are you sure? Did anything happen to him? Maybe he needs to go to the bathroom?" "No, no. He's been like that since he was brought back from the doctor. I'm going to sleep." He left, and after a while, the detainee who spoke a bit of Hebrew said: "You're not going to beat me up, right?" You put two and two together I was about ready to leave the post and beat up that soldier. You go crazy thinking about how this happens. You're told this is the most

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enlightened army in the Middle East, 'purity of arms' and all that. These are the things you remember later.

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Testimony 7

## **They cut down some hundred of their olive trees**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2007

### **Were there confrontations with settlers in the South Hebron Hills?**

There always are. Come on, they cut down – in Susiya it was, or around Beit Haggai – they cut down something like a hundred olive trees. A whole olive grove, which belonged to Arabs. So essentially no one knows who did it, right? But one hundred olive trees belonging to Arabs were, say, cut down about half a kilometer from Beit Haggai settlement. You can put two and two together.

### **Did you see those trees?**

Yes. They cut – think of a grove – they chopped down all of them. Listen, for me, as someone coming from a kibbutz, and there was another guy with me who was from a moshav [collective farm community], both of us were upset. We saw that, both of us distraught, we said: "These guys are no longer human. Really, I mean - that's it. To come like that and cut down trees for the hell of it..."

### **What did the Arabs do?**

They were very angry. What could they do? There's nothing they can do.

### **Were there confrontations with settlers over farm land?**

There's a field there called the Kaleb plot. It's right on the edge of the village of Bani Na'im. The first neighborhood is about 10 meters away from that plot. So there, you know, Jews have been working that plot, and lately the Arabs have been throwing burning tires over there, so they too cut some trees there, some twenty trees, Arabs cut down trees planted by the Jews.

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Testimony 8

## **South Hebron Hills was mainly beatings**

**Unit:** Civil Administration **Rank:** Lieutenant **Year:** 2001-2004

### **Were there many complaints about intentional damage? Lootings, theft, soldiers beating up Palestinians?**

Sure.

#### **What would be done about it?**

A 'blue' policeman would be summoned, he'd sit at the District Coordination Offices, Palestinians would come sit with him and he'd write down their complaint, the complaint would be passed to the Israeli police who would investigate it together with the Investigative Military Police. That's how it works.

#### **Isn't it easier to go tell the battalion commander that his soldiers are breaking into houses?**

That's done, too. But the question is what kind of measures you take against such soldiers. I can't, I have to work in both channels: tell the battalion and brigade commanders "Listen, so and so is out of line", and on the other hand, have the police investigate and arrest the culprits.

#### **How did the battalion and brigade commanders take it?**

It depends who. Around Hebron, for example, \*\*\* of the Nahal brigade was very nice, really decent. He would take care of things. If you went out to the South Hebron Hills, there was the Lavi battalion commander, \*\*\*, a real beast. "Come on, get out of my hair..." He would make trouble. Once I went along with him to demolish a terrorist's home in Dura. I went with him to blast the house, we enter, a DCL representative has to be present to officially incriminate the house, confirm that the terrorist really does reside there. I come out of there, tell him "\*\*\*\*, listen, the guy doesn't live here. What do you want me to do? I find no evidence of his presence, nothing at all." So he yells at me: "You're just a leftie." And there's nothing you can do. You call up the legal adviser and tell him: "Listen, I can't incriminate this house, not me. I don't do such things."

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### **The house would not be blasted?**

No. Because if he's not home, a connection has to be established between the terrorist and the house, you can't get around it. And there was no connection found. This commander was awful. So was his company commander.

### **What sort of complaints would you receive in the South Hebron Hills?**

In the South Hebron Hills, it was mostly about physical assaults. There's real violence out there, sometimes we concentrate more on the city, too much, but a settler brutalizing a shepherd - that's a classic in the South Hebron Hills, it happens there on a daily basis. Poisoning wells, that happens out there plenty. There was this story of some settlers throwing dead chickens into the Palestinians' well. It was Saturday. The Palestinians summoned us, we came... There was nothing to do. We brought them water tanks.

### **What other kinds of complaints would you get from South Hebron Hills?**

It was always confrontations with settlers or chasing Palestinians off their farm lands: "I was working my land and they came along and chased me off, sealed my well."

### **And what would you do?**

What would we do? Again, it's a police matter. We'd go over and check it out on the ground, because if a well was poisoned, that's already our business. First of all to make sure that well is legal. Sometimes it isn't. Most of those wells aren't legal and they should actually be destroyed, but wells are not destroyed mostly. For their benefit. I must say I don't remember us destroying any wells. We'd go to the police for this procedure. The police plays a major part in all of this, not really doing too much about it.

### **It doesn't do much, why?**

Ask the police. They'll talk about "a shortage in manpower". The Judea and Samaria Police doesn't know how to enforce the law, neither on Jews nor on Palestinians. Just as it doesn't enforce Palestinian law, it also doesn't enforce law over Jews. Hardly. And it doesn't know how to enforce the law over Palestinians, hardly. Only around friction areas. Intelligence. That's where the police is very strong. Cases of criminal or terrorist activity.

### **Were there complaints you lodged with the police which you knew would get handled properly, and others which you knew would get**

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### **stuck and lost in the paperwork or something?**

Yes, they get a ton of complaints. Complaints about Palestinians would not usually make it...it was not at the top of their priorities, what can you do. Anything that was published in the media is very quickly investigated by the police. You hear from the police chief right away, everything's fine. Anything that gets into the media. In the South Hebron Hills, anything that reached the media would be looked into, settlers would be taken in for questioning and eventually no one was actually arrested. But they were taken in for questioning and all that. But anything that did not find its way into the media, there was nothing you could do about it, the police... you have to understand that throughout Judea and Samaria, police are more tuned in to security connotations of criminal offenses, and this is not the normal police force.

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Testimony 9

### **“Dad, we’ve caught Fathi Najar, want to hear him scream?”**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

That same guy, after we went up to the front line, his name kept coming up in attack alerts and stuff, he was a really bad guy. His name was Fathi Najar. He wasn't a very sympathetic person, it seems. He was also responsible for a few shootings which killed some civilians, children, too. One of the days I was on some patrol, and all of a sudden we were informed that Fathi Najar had been captured, or something like that – no, excuse me, they told us to return to base, they put us in an APC, they told us we were going to Yatta, on emergency deployment. We went into Yatta, having no idea, just driving, driving, driving. They're sending us to arrest some guy. Up to that point, every time we were sent to arrest anyone, they weren't home or something, so operational tension was really at its peak, and we were young soldiers. We were in ecstasy: the first time we arrest a guy, and he's blindfolded and we're all getting our pictures taken with him. If you want, I have the pictures. And we kept on driving and then we heard on radio that Fathi Najar was caught in his house. And we were flipping out, literally. They caught the bad guy.

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### **You were one of those who caught him?**

No, we caught someone else, I have no idea who he was, no idea. We got to Fathi Najar's house, it was some courtyard there in Yatta. Fathi was in the hands of the battalion commander's radio man, I already see them beating him, hitting him, even the battalion commander's radio man, other soldiers - beating him and other guys who were handcuffed and blindfolded. Then they brought them to some open area with all the detainees, some six-seven-eight of them sitting on the stairs, all of them handcuffed and blindfolded. Tons of soldiers, nearly all of the two companies which made up the battalion were there, hanging around, every now and again some young soldier would walk past one of the detainees, mostly Fathi, kick him, punch him, slap him. In the meantime everyone was in this ecstatic state. Some car approaches, someone runs to it, shoves the barrel of his gun into the car and screams that if they don't drive on, he'll shoot. These people sped off for their lives, they almost slammed into another car that just got there. Then at some point someone came up to me, some friend from my platoon, and asked: Well, did you beat up Fathi yet? I answer: No. He says: "Well, come on, don't be such a leftie." Ok, so I go over there, kick Fathi, kick him in the back. You get it? Even when he is blindfolded and handcuffed I couldn't bring myself to do more than kick him in the back. He let out a kind of groan and I was very pleased with myself, like the rest of the people around me. At some point, the battalion commander arrives and asks the operations officer: "Tell me, why is Fathi Najar sitting on the floor?" So the operations officer asks him: "What do you mean?" He says to him: "Come on, why should he be so comfortable?" So the operations officer walks, and walks, and walks, and walks, and comes back with a pile of thorns, puts it down and makes Fathi sit on it, by the sound of his screams. Later they packed them into a Safari [armored military truck] and we were with them, me and some other soldiers, and we drove with them back to our company. From there, I don't know, I'm sure they were meant to transfer him to brigade HQ or something or the General Security Services came to get them, but first they had to come to our company base. During the whole drive the people in the Safari with me were beating them to a pulp, all of them, no exceptions. Until they gave someone a kick and one of the guys, one of the soldiers said: "No, don't beat him, he's the informer." Some of the soldiers called their dads, saying: "Here, Dad, we caught Fathi Najar, want to hear him scream?" and kicked Fathi Najar. At this point I was already really - again, without any kind of ideological agenda - I just couldn't hear the screams anymore, so I say to them: Enough's enough,

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stop it. So the guy says to me: "You stop being such a leftie, he's a killer, he's this and that..." We got to the company, the deputy sergeant major was standing outside, looking at us. The guys told him right away. "Yeah, we caught Fathi Najar, we caught Fathi Najar!" He goes inside, and beats up Fathi Najar. He kicks him or, I dunno, hits him. The truth is at this point I wasn't in the Safari any more, I just saw him go inside and heard someone screaming.

**Not the deputy sergeant major.**

No, no, it was one of the detainees, I don't remember. You could tell by... you could tell. He went outside. At that point, my platoon commander came, he went up and heard – he heard or I don't know, saw – that detainees were being beaten up. He went in and yelled at the soldiers, he said it's not ethical, and he told them that the last thing they want is for one of them to raise their hand against one of the detainees again.

**Who said that?**

My platoon commander. So that was that, end of story. No one dared raise a hand against him afterwards.

**Because of what the platoon commander said?**

Yes. And at a point, very quickly afterwards, I think someone came to pick him up, the Shin Bet or something like that. Or maybe I just wasn't there any more after that so I don't know what happened.

**What were people saying afterwards?**

People were euphoric. Generally speaking, people were...I would walk past rooms all the time, and I heard the chatting at checkpoints, people saying: "Yeah, I did this and I did that." And they told about some guy who some of the guys tied up, I don't remember what they did, they tied him up with stones, something like that, and made him run, a Palestinian. Another time they pushed him into a ditch and made him roll around in the mud and all kinds of stuff like that. But the talk was, you know, ecstatic. This wasn't something that eventually stopped. The detainees were systematically beaten also when no one knew what they had done. The incident with Fathi was the first time we captured a wanted man, the same with the guy we caught just before this.

**The same guy you caught was beaten right away?**

Yes, yes.

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## **He wasn't connected to Fathi?**

Maybe he was, we don't know. I don't know.

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Testimony 10

## **Someone comes along and establishes facts on the ground**

**Unit:** Karakal **Rank:** Second Lieutenant **Year:** 2008

### **What's your personal experience of the Occupied Territories?**

I was there in the professional segment of officers' training. We were brought there to guard the settlement of Susiya. (...) We didn't come out of the settlement. It's a strange kind of settlement considering where it's located. It raises many questions, like if there weren't all these things around there, it could even be a really pastoral kind of place. It gets you thinking. Every few hours you go on guard duty and you think, and then say in the first round of getting acquainted with the guard posts the local Settlement Settlement Security Coordinator tried to define for us a red line, a green line and so forth. Where it is okay for the shepherds from the village on the opposite hill to graze their flocks, where to stop them. Where the settlement begins and where it ends. It's a settlement without a fence. Both because it costs money and also it's a statement of sorts.

### **The Settlement Security Coordinator explained to you why they don't have a fence?**

Yes. First of all because a fence does not keep anyone out, it only delays entry, whoever really wants to get in can always find his way in. Second, because they want to feel that they do not need a fence. It is a kind of denial of the danger that is present. And the way he defined it, the lines that may be crossed, it was really not clear what was a part of the settlement and what was not. Even if he had said: "Here in the wadi, the settlement ends, still even if you see a person on the hill across the wadi, you have to keep him away." Like, on the one hand it's obvious why they're doing this, why it's like that. It's being extra cautious so no one will dare come into their settlement, and they don't want to have to wait until the person is actually at the perimeter. On the other hand, what gives me or

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him the right to tell a person: "Get off that hill"?

**What is the distance from the boundary that seems reasonable to you in the wadi – since that's a definable boundary, the wadi is a kind of separation line. So what is the distance from the wadi to the hill across it? How much area does that hill take up?**

About to the sky line, say. There were several posts. There was one post where he couldn't say it because their encampment – it wasn't a real village, just an encampment – was situated right across from the post. So there was the wadi and right above were their living quarters and you couldn't... It's like someone comes along and establishes facts on the ground, like this is my hill.

**The hill is where the rock cairn shows?**

Yes, where that water hole is.

**So you sit there, or was the rock cairn the boundary?**

The other way around... There was one post where the boundary was really unclear. The terrain there is lower, and actually the post only guards one family whose one member had been murdered.

**Jews?**

Yes. They're from the settlement. It's right next to their home. Because it had happened to them, the guard post was placed right there to give them a sense of security. It's on the lower end of the ridge. So the definition of where to not let people be is: everywhere you see.

**That's what the Settlement Security Coordinator said?**

Yes. He went as far as that...

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Testimony 11

**He had some 2000 liters of milk, it all went sour**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2003

There was one case which I think I regret the most. Throughout my service in the Territories, it's the worst thing I ever did, personally. This man was on his way out of Yatta, he crossed a barrier on his way to Hebron, to a

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dairy. His truck was carrying milk containers. I think Hebron was under curfew at that time. Anyway, he was not supposed to be allowed through. I caught him just as he crossed the barrier, and it was the third time that week that I caught the same person. The circumstances were different but he was the same person, more or less in the same place. I blew a fuse – I ordered him out of the car, all that stuff. He began to argue and raise his voice. So I did two things: shackled and blindfolded him, and took him to the sentry post in our jeep. I know it was somewhere around 10 a.m. He was released sometime between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m., and this was summer time. So he was held in custody all day. He had some 2000 liters of milk in that truck, and it all went sour. This was all day long, he simply sat in the sentry post, shackled and blindfolded. Looking back, I am ashamed for two things: first, of my behavior on the human level. To simply pick up a person and take over his life just like that? Take him, literally, shackle him, bring him somewhere and tell him: “Okay, you sit here.”

I made him my captive, as it were. And no one else was responsible for this. It’s not like I was following someone’s orders, right? No, it was my own decision. And by the way, this was the norm. As far as all my superiors were concerned, there was nothing wrong with it. You detained him, fine. There is also the financial aspect: I mean, there was milk there, something with material value that had been destroyed.

I mean, I made that person lose I don’t know how much money, but let’s say at least 500 shekels. And that’s only the value of the milk itself. Surely he had to clean out those containers later, I don’t know what else he had to do, but it was a loss, and in his life circumstances a relatively large one. 500 shekels in Yatta is a lot of money. Really. Okay, I didn’t actually pick the money out of his pocket, but what I did simply made him lose all that money. And for me this is even less significant than the personal attitude issue. It’s wrong. I mean, what’s the big deal? He’s no terrorist, no wanted man, not a person who comes along and threatens me physically, or points some gun at me. A regular guy. What did he do? He was at the wrong place at the wrong time? Perhaps on the larger scale that’s a fateful issue. Maybe, okay. But as for personal responsibility, what was gained by my actions? Nothing at all. Did they actually serve State security? No. This was pure and simple injustice inflicted upon a human being. And that’s wrong.

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Testimony 12

## **Giving the settlers a sense of security**

**Unit:** Paratroopers **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

This wasn't exactly checkpoint duty, it was road reinforcement. We were briefed by \*\*\* (the brigade commander). He explained our mission, saying: "This is road reinforcement procedure." That means floating checkpoints. Fellows take along a checkpoint kit, comprised of spines and two plastic barriers, place them somewhere along the road, Route 60, creating a checkpoint for some hours, then fold up and leave. What's the point of this? Naturally, by definition, since it's a temporary checkpoint, it's not going to stop terrorists because as soon as it's folded up, the terrorist will get through. The point of this specific checkpoint, which we carried out twice a day, was to give the settlers a sense of security. That's the definition: giving the settlers a sense of security. And we'd go on this mission. I was in command. You're out there, in the middle of Route 60, exposed in all directions, you know, while by definition you're only out there for the show, and you don't know what to do with it. It's winter in the South Hebron Hills, snowing, raining – something awful. You stand there on road reinforcement duty with nothing to do, you get bored, so you're... Listen, you know some of the things you hear, we didn't reach such levels of abuse, but when I was in the mood I'd let everyone through, and when I was in a worse mood, I'd run really thorough inspections, and if I wanted to get some laughs at someone's expense, I'd take him out of the car and talk to him or laugh at him or I don't know what. What do I know? Stuff. Like you've got nothing to do out there so very soon you realize there are no regulations, no rules.

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Testimony 13

## **Hunting shepherds**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2004

We weren't told - or sometimes we were told. Mostly we weren't - who we were going to detain. In some cases we were told, let's say there was

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a stone-throwing incident and it was sometimes 15, 16-year-old kids. Usually it wasn't, in most cases they were over the age of 18 at least by appearances. No, not appearances, we would find out their dates of birth.

**How were detainees treated? Was it part of the procedure to beat them up?**

While transporting them? Yes. When I was in Bet Haggai for example, beyond Otniel, I remember that almost systematically, always, someone was tied to the post gate. Even if the guy was driving, someone who had broken through a blockade, he would be shackled and blindfolded and placed at the post gate, sometimes for hours. If it was someone, I dunno, there was some story with some of the guys there, I dunno, who got into some kind of scuffle with a Palestinian and he pushed one of them, they slammed the butt of their gun into his face or something like that and he was tied to the post gate in the pouring rain. I think he was there, he pissed himself as they wouldn't let him go to the toilet. That was also something: every time they needed to piss, there were guards at the sentry-post and one of them had to take him. And there always was, you know, if it was someone merciful, he would stand them up, and whatever. If he was a guy who wasn't, he could make them wait for three hours, he wouldn't take the detainee out to piss until the end of his shift.

**How long would they be detained at the post gate?**

Sometimes for hours, hours. Some were held there a whole night. If they were brought in the evening, they might have had to wait until the next afternoon. Mostly it was for several hours, I think, but there were those who really...

Again, some of them were brought in by the patrol, some of them were shepherds caught grazing too close to the base. That was in the beginning for the most part, when the platoon commanders got bored. They would come back, go out hunting shepherds. That's what I call it.

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Testimony 14

**The settlement's Settlement Security Coordinator would decide what's allowed**

**Unit:** Maglan Special Forces **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003

I was on settlement security duty with my soldiers at Eshkolot and

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another settlement nearby. (...) It wasn't in Eshkolot, I don't remember which settlement, but we were there, and there's a Palestinian village about a kilometer or two away, and the farmers tend their land there, about 500 meters down the wadi. The settlement is on the top of the hill, and below, in the wadi the land is tended. What I remember, vaguely, was that once the Palestinians were working and suddenly – this was outside the settlement, although there was construction going on – we ran over to the construction site, and the guy was yelling at them, not shooting or anything, but simply chasing them away. I don't know whether they went away.

### **Who chased them away?**

The Settlement Security Coordinator. He came along, summoned us, me and the soldiers, said they were trespassing, observing, I don't know. Anyway, he yelled at them, I don't know whether they left. I remember him coming and yelling: "Go away, get out of here!" Later I was patrolling with him in the car, and he sees this little girl playing at the entrance to the settlement. On the road to the settlement but still outside the fence. This settlement was not completely surrounded by a fence, but it did come from below, in the wadi. He sees a girl, yells at her in Arabic, with his megaphone, something that sounded like "rasek" (in Hebrew as well: "crush"). I didn't understand. I asked: "What did you yell at the girl?" So he says: "If you hang around here once more, I'll break your head." Something of that sort. (...) Out there, in actual fact, your superior is the civilian from the settlement, telling you what's allowed, what's forbidden, where [Palestinians] are allowed to be, where they aren't. He's the one who gives permission to shoot in the air, although on principle I am the senior army commander on the spot – as senior as it gets – I give the firing order, I exercise judgment. But on the ground the policy maker is not some authorized army officer, company commander or local officer. It's the settlement's Settlement Security Coordinator who decides what goes. It's pretty ludicrous when you come to think of it, that in fact a civilian orders the army around, setting its limitations and rules.

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Testimony 15

## **Their wells were sealed and their caves destroyed**

**Unit:** Artillery **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

[The Jewish settlers of the South Hebron Hills] carried out plenty of actions out there. Sealing wells, they especially harassed the... Our battalion's mission was essentially to secure the Jewish settlers of the South Hebron Hills. Securing, meaning creating this ring around them, so not too many people would live there. They made the Palestinian cave dwellers' lives pretty miserable. Occasionally they'd just go over to harass them, question them, rummage in their belongings, and the peak was that these people's lives became unbearable – they no longer had any water. Their wells had been sealed, their caves destroyed, so they left. Later they came back, I think, under a High Court of Justice ruling or something like that.

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Testimony 16

## **Driving over wheat fields**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2004

We were on a week of APC driving training and suddenly we realized – I don't remember whether it was me or someone else – that we're driving over wheat fields.

I asked what was going on, it was still in basic training and you can't speak directly with the commander – and whoever I asked didn't know. He asked, I think, and we were told offhand that the Bedouin were taking over army firing zones, so the battalion commander gave an order – I didn't really know the terminology then – to do our training over their fields.

### **Were there tin shanties or tents?**

It was far from their dwellings, but there were all sorts. It's the area with the largest number of Bedouins in the country. It's close to the brigade training base, Krayot. Around it, at a radius of about 10 kilometers. That's a story that really touched me. I was dealing with Bedouins for a while,

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and I'm still very interested in whatever goes on there. This displacement is occupation by remote control. It's not Palestinians, so you don't hear a lot of talk about it.

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Testimony 17

## **As soon as someone tells you the truth, you cannot let him through**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003-2006

There was a hypocritical system at the checkpoint. If you stood at the checkpoint and a vehicle arrived, we're talking here about an empty commercial truck. Say it arrived empty, essentially they always came from Be'er Sheva. Our checkpoint, Shim'a, at that time was the southern-most checkpoint in the West Bank. There were two parallel checkpoints – ours and the one near Ma'on, and they both concentrated all the traffic: vehicles coming from Be'er Sheva, empty trucks driving into the Territories. If you continued on our road all the way you would get to Jerusalem through the tunnels. There was this hypocritical system – whoever said they were going to Jerusalem, that was all right, he would be let through even though everyone knew he was not going to Jerusalem but rather to Dahariya or Samo'a.

### **Israelis?**

Arab-Israelis, and sometimes Jewish Israelis. Whoever told you he was headed to an Arab village, you were not supposed to let him cross the checkpoint. You would tell him there's curfew and he must turn back. So if a guy told you the truth, you couldn't let him through and as soon as he lied to you – it was okay to let him cross. There was also this idiotic system whereby we had to write down the license plate number of the vehicle and how soon he drove back. If he returned after 40 minutes, loaded with cargo, apparently he hadn't gone to Jerusalem and had to be detained. Soon enough they got the hang of it, and they'd stick around wherever they went, get some coffee after loading their cargo, and move back after two hours so it would really look like they had been in Jerusalem. Everyone was tricking everybody else.

Testimony 18

## **The other soldier took the money**

**Unit:** Lavi **Rank:** Sergeant **Year:** 2002

We were on a road reinforcement (floating checkpoint) mission at P'nei Hever Junction, where the road goes up to P'nei Hever, Bani Na'im, and there were not always enough commanders at the time to send out a commander for this mission. I mean, as long as I was on squad commander training there just weren't enough. Three soldiers would be sent out on a mission, one of them was appointed commander. So they were at a roadblock and detained a Palestinian, without a squad commander present, just the temporary commander. They were checking out this Palestinian. One soldier checked his ID, handed it back to him. The Palestinian said – not to the guy who checked his ID but to the appointed commander: "I had some money in here." So the appointed commander went to the soldier who checked him and asked: "Did you take money?" "What? No way! You're going to believe the Arab rather than me? I did not take money." The 'commander' got back to the Palestinian and said: "Listen, he says he didn't take it." The Palestinian began to argue, I don't know, I think the soldier who checked him had hit him a little. By the way, you ask me what went on out there, I'm telling you this was routine. A Palestinian gives someone an answer they don't like? He gets beaten. Anyway, the 'commander' soldier walked around a little and saw some money thrown over a bush near where the Palestinian was checked. He found the money and gave it to the Palestinian.

### **Was it the exact sum the Palestinian said had been taken?**

Yes, exactly. He gave it to the Palestinian. Then he – who had actually done the right thing – when they got back to the base he reported to his superiors that he thought, though he didn't see with his own eyes, but this was what very likely happened. That the other soldier had taken the money, and as it became the subject of inquiry he threw it away. Finally the soldier who had stolen the money was grounded. I wasn't present. I was on staff at the time. So they come and the whole staff was saying: Okay, what do we do about this soldier? Because there was no proof that he had really done this, he denied it. And this whole business of problem-soldiers, what do you do about them? Throw them in jail? But you need the

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manpower. So you punish him severely and he goes crazy. And if you do nothing about it – that’s like saying it’s all right. If you do nothing it means you let him be because you need him to function as a soldier. In jail he’s no good because you get less manpower. As far as I know, that’s relatively rare. First of all, personally when I entered houses, and this didn’t happen just once or twice, when I was with soldiers I was very strict. If anyone took anything behind my back, I don’t know, but I really made sure that houses wouldn’t be trashed, no messing up closets or anything, and certainly not taking anything. Not only not stealing, but not breaking anything. Usually that’s how it was.

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Testimony 19

## **The idea was for them to realize there’s action in the village**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** Lieutenant **Year:** 2004

### **What were ‘mappings’?**

'Mapping' is a procedure that I believe the army has stopped using, which is a good thing. The mappings were in fact of some houses close to the road, I was platoon commander in the South Hebron Hills, any village you choose that’s close to the road, or sometimes certain villages that are isolated and we don’t get to them, right? There’s no army activity around the village. So you choose a few houses, brief the intelligence officer, he talks to the Shin Bet, clears it with them. Makes sure there’s no collaborator there and that we are allowed to move in. You have to confirm these things. You go, enter these houses, knock on their doors at night, go inside, look around, see what’s there, conduct a search for weapons, which it really isn’t. If you really want to find weapons you have to search for a good few hours and take the whole house apart. So you open drawers, look inside and leave. The idea is for the people to realize the army is active in the village and prevent any terrorist activity from developing there.

### **So what actually bothered you about it?**

It’s unnecessary, it’s unreasonable. You’re not going to enter people’s

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homes just like that because the platoon commander decided to stop terrorist activity – how does this stop terrorist activity? Anyone who possesses weapons knows very well how to hide them, okay? What are you actually doing? They’re going to be afraid just because you entered the village? Yes, it works on a certain level. I suppose. Again, you don’t see many of the results of your actions, and that’s a pity, perhaps. I don’t really believe that someone who wanted to become a terrorist and take action would refrain from doing so because you entered his house at night. On the contrary, perhaps, it would motivate him. That’s one thing. The other thing is that at least where I was involved, the mere idea, when I think of it in retrospect, and I am looking at the army, too, I mean the platoon commander can come along, decide he’s entering several houses just because he feels like it, whenever he wants – that’s not good, it’s not right, it will be the source of a thousand and one problems. I am not going to mention names and times here, but there was a case of someone stealing an old man’s cane and bringing it to the company base. He was jailed for two weeks, by the way. Again, at the time the battalion was commanded by someone who knew how to control things. But it’s not right. It’s also not right militarily speaking. You’re infantry, do infantry work. Lie in ambush, go on incursions, if you must conduct arrests, urban warfare. Just entering houses and talking with the population – that’s police work, not a soldier’s job. This seems to me the main problem of such actions.

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Testimony 20

## **“We stretch the law, the law will adjust itself to what we do”**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

In basic training, I was out on settlement security duty at the Avigail Ranch. We had a nice time there. Suddenly you have no commanders breathing down your neck, living with some six guys - it’s a kind of training ranch, a commune. What a view, it was really lovely. I had arguments with [the settlers], spoke with them about the settlements and all, with what right... I said to them: “Basically you’re outlaws, you violate the law, this here is illegal.” One of them said: “We stretch the law, the law will adjust itself to what we do.”

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### **Who said that?**

One of the guys at the Avigail Ranch. The Settlement Security Coordinator there. How did he put it? There's the regional council, I don't remember what it's called, I think it's the South Hebron Hills, and they said: "We've come here to create a settlement, give us a spot." They came out, looked around with officials of the Ministry of Defense. Pardon me – they said there was a spot but they didn't even have the necessary permits from the Ministry of Defense. They began construction and the permits would be issued sometime. That's it, and they begin construction and they're already out there. Now perhaps it's arranged but back then it wasn't, not with the Ministry of Defense. So as far as he was concerned that meant stretching the law: we establish facts on the ground and the law will eventually become whatever we do. Naturally there's a lot of silent agreement, lots of this kind of corruption with the settlement and defense systems.

### **What was actually out there when you were there?**

There was a water tower, two trailers, a house they had built and some deserted bus, and one woman who lived there with her five sons. Besides that, they were really nice guys, cool. They didn't seem to me the type that uproot olive trees and beat up Palestinians or chase them off. They just wanted to build a settlement and couldn't care less what damages they were causing. Direct doesn't mean aggressive. I only remember this Settlement Security Coordinator came and told me: "Here, this is our area, passage is allowed." According to his briefing to the soldiers: "We have trees here and sometimes on Fridays all sorts of social activists, organizations come here with Palestinians to harvest the olives, show that they are theirs. But it's not theirs, so they have to be chased off." If I'm not mistaken people did come there that Friday, and we chased them off: "Go away!"

### **Did you know whose olive trees they were?**

I didn't. I trusted the Settlement Security Coordinator.

### **You had a commanding officer, what did he say?**

I did. I got there, I was briefed by the Settlement Security Coordinator. I was the commander on the ground, and he was the authority on what was allowed and what was forbidden. You know, he didn't really give me orders. He defined things. He would say: "This here is our area." Practically speaking I saw nothing in writing. For me, what he said was the way it was.

### **What kind of defense briefing did you give the soldiers? As their**

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**commander?**

A defense briefing: We're here just in case of infiltration. We're here to defend the spot against any attempt to infiltrate it. For protection.

**Was there anything in your instructions about the olive harvest?**

No, just in general to chase Palestinians away.

**How did they react?**

When we chased them away? I don't exactly remember. But there wasn't too much friction around this. Really not much.

**How many people came out there?**

Not too many. A handful, perhaps ten or less. Not many. Yes, I don't recall much friction around this.

**How far is that grove from the settlement?**

Not far. 100 meters, not that far. It wasn't a large grove, just a small one. We were there to prevent any infiltration. We also walked around in the hills there to make our presence felt, we placed cardboard targets among the trees, all kinds of rookie nonsense. We built a fake post. But we had no serious confrontation with Palestinians or anything.

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Testimony 21

**He'd slap them around, nonsense like that**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003

We went to the auxiliary company post, after a week or two, I don't know, I was assigned to be the company commander's radioman there, or more, I no longer remember. And there was a company commander there, \*\*\*, he was all right. The deputy company commander was a terrorist. He was a settler, an Arab-hater, and they used to scare Arabs. They would approach Arabs walking on the roadside and suddenly honk, to startle them. All sorts of things. The deputy commander. A jerk, an idiot. A retard. Probably about two years older than us. But simply an idiot settler. A real idiot. Again, because he was an officer and soldiers looked up to him on arrest missions – there was one arrest mission where I was with him and

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he slapped some Palestinian right in front of his children, which was a very big mistake. Let's say that he wouldn't go ballistic near the soldiers, but he was a real idiot. He would do things just to harass people because he simply hates Arabs. Just like that. Things just for the hell of it. Like to people walking along, people he ran into. He wouldn't take too much trouble, say getting out of the jeep and stuff, he wasn't about that too much. (...) He'd catch Arabs and slap them around, stuff like that. Small scale things, even when no one was looking, because he was driving along with his radioman, and what would that radioman say. The driver was worse than everyone else, he really hates Arabs, so they'd have a great time together, those two. Again, that stuff where say... \*\*\* would keep telling him: "Go on, let him have it, what do you care?" [The deputy company commander] was calmer than \*\*\* but he still liked to harass them, he loved it. All those little things like suddenly honking at them. Driving along beside them while they were walking along Route 60, and if we'd be driving on it, he'd get closer to them, and boom, honk, or slam the gas pedal or drive really close to them.

### **And slaps?**

Not all the time, but yes, there was that too. People, inspections and all. Not beating them up, but yes, sometimes, depending on his mood. It's the fact that he hit a guy in front of his children during the arrest. That was enough. I mean, just slapping him right there in front of his kids and wife. That was shocking enough; you don't need more than that. His kids and wife were taken to another room. We would only talk to the wanted person, so they were in a different room. But it was open and they simply saw it. Instead of taking the guy out, I dunno, so at least they wouldn't witness it, because at that moment you produced another – there were three kids there? – three brand new terrorists.

### **That's what you thought at the time?**

No, I was in the swing of things. I knew it was wrong but I didn't have so much time to think about it. I changed in the army. From the moment I became a squad commander, my mind changed and I began to understand things differently and behave differently. Not that I brutalized anyone or anything. I did kick a person here and there, but when I became a commander it happened, I realize it even today. But I didn't understand things in depth as a soldier. I was part of the company, part of the swing of things, a young soldier. I didn't realize what things meant. I had no time to stop and think, wait a minute, he just slapped that man whose kids

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have seen it all. It didn't look right. It did something to me, I remember, that's why I recall it. Things I talk about are not trivial. I remember laughs from basic training because they were really funny, and that's something to remember. But if you ask me what we did in the company every day, I can't tell you. These things I'm telling you about now I do remember, and there's a reason for that.

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Testimony 22

## **A boy herding his flock was caught and taken into the jeep**

**Unit:** Anti-aircraft corps **Rank:** Sergeant **Year:** 2004-2005

### **Do you recall cases at the checkpoints or war-room which you found out of line?**

You mean routine incidents that seemed out of line? Things that commanders did, catching kids who were herding their flock, taking them into their jeep and driving off with them. We were on patrol. It should tell you something about the meanness of our procedures. A boy herding his flock out there was caught and taken into the jeep.

### **Close to his village?**

No, not close to his village. The soldiers found this shepherd. Those kids really have it tough. At that time, the separation fence wasn't really built yet, but they were on the wrong side. So as if to punish him, [the commander] made him get on the jeep and began to drive off. The kid was crying and all. Just a 12-year-old kid.

### **And where were the sheep? They were just left out there?**

Just like that. We asked him – "What?!?" "I want him to learn his lesson." We drove and drove, and the kid was crying. Finally he was let off somewhere.

### **How far away?**

A kilometer.

### **He was just driven off as punishment?**

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To punish him so he wouldn't go on herding his flock across the fence which was still just barbed wire at the time.

**He got back to his sheep?**

Yes. But it was really far. I don't know, actually, how he got back, I have no idea if he knew where he was. Just to harass him.

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Testimony 23

**A kind of cat and mouse game**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2003

When Palestinians were not allowed on Route 60 at certain places, they would break through barriers.

**What would you do then?**

Detain them. When we just got to the area, there were many cases of (soldiers) puncturing Palestinian vehicles' tires, so they'd get stuck. But the DCL found out about this and it stopped. It stopped pretty soon. Let's say this was something the DCL took care of relatively fast. They were no longer allowed to puncture tires. (...) People from the southern villages passed on their way to Hebron for work or study, stuff like that. So these were the two main checkpoints for the general population. Lots of people passed there every day, back and forth. (...)

**How many barriers were there in your designated area, along the road?**

Many. They (the Palestinians) would take them down and the army would place them again. I can't really count. Let's say less than twenty. Perhaps eight, or ten, something like that. There were these wheel loaders that would put up the barriers and they would break through. A kind of cat and mouse game.

**They would be detained for how long?**

An hour, two, sometimes three.

**And then – go home?**

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Yes. But get back to where you came from. The soldiers would take the car keys. The patrol would usually take the guy's car keys. They were not supposed to puncture tires so they'd take the keys. After a while they'd give them back. It was a sort of punishment.

**They'd take away IDs?**

Yes. IDs would be held for a longer time. Yes, usually they would be returned. But sometimes the Palestinians would disappear without their IDs, either they were afraid or I don't know what. They would disappear. So those IDs would be turned over to the DCL. There were cases where the patrol ended up with IDs at the end of the day. Not a pile of a hundred, but say there would be two or three left. They were afraid.

**Was there a tactic in your company of taking the fuses out of cars so the drivers would not escape with their spare keys? There's a fuse box in the car without which it can't be started.**

Yes, but sometimes when their car keys were taken from them and we'd come back the car wasn't there. No problem, they knew soon enough how to bypass the fuse box thing. If they wanted, they'd drive off. Usually when they didn't it was because of their fear of the army. Yes, especially those who'd been caught several times and gotten really irritated with the soldiers and realized it's nonsense or I don't know what, so they'd be rude and might get kicked by some soldier once in a while or so. I believe these things were done. Not by me, specifically.

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Testimony 24

**Their fields were ruined before they got to harvest them**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2005

(...) There's a kind of process of becoming aware, beginning to realize what this reality is, how it looks, what makes it up. The story with the APCs was like the tip of the iceberg. It was still in advanced training. We were out on an APC maneuver, I was driving, and we simply practiced moving in formations of four APCs, through wheat fields. It was very obviously wheat. Desert wheat, standing at about 50-70 cm tall, already ripening,

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yellowing husks. It was springtime, just before the wheat harvest.

**You couldn't mistake it for anything else?**

No. It was intentional. It was a kind of – I looked into this, because it really got on my nerves – there was this struggle over land between the brigade training base and the Bedouin in the area, and this was one of the army's sanctions, like destroy their fields just before the harvest. They don't lodge official complaints because their claim to the land is not official. The Bedouin in these regions have their own techniques of plowing and sowing, not like in the Territories, because in the desert you need an enormous area to yield even the smallest harvest, so they simply sow in plots that do not belong to them. Any valley or plateau that can be plowed. It's very common, not just in that specific area. That's it, that's what there was, and as far as I was concerned it was just for the hell of it, there was no real reason to drive over those fields. It was totally arbitrary.

**Were you ordered to do it, or did you decide on the spot?**

No, it came down from the platoon and company commanders. It was no mistake, and no momentary impulse. It was policy, I think. Yes, no doubt about it. Look, I tell it from the eyes of a rookie, what can you do? Eventually I became much more integrated into the giving of such orders. There I tried to argue as the driver. I was a very... I was a soldier who rarely followed orders blindly. I remember I was unhappy about it, it was a kind of a shock for me because it was so senseless, just for the sake of destruction. But you know, when I put it within... It was so primary, that's why I recall it so sharply, because it was like a first encounter with something that is connected with this, until then in theory you're only charging those hills. And this was a real encounter, touching on something real, so its etched in my memory. But I don't think that in the bigger picture it was a foundational moment. It was simply the first one.

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Testimony 25

**Susiya is the 'Wild West'**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2007

(...) Susiya is the 'wild west'. Everyone does as he pleases, and wants to be

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left in peace. The Arabs can be beaten up, the settlers are untouchable. More or less. I sat in the war-room, heard about many incidents. I just sat there. Listen, do you realize how many times there were incidents – for example once sheep were stolen in Susiya. Those Arabs over there. The Arabs stole. The guys from the Susiya settlement decided to go get them back. Raised hell.

**The settlers claimed their sheep were stolen and went down to get them back from where?**

From the outskirts of Yatta. And they did. There was a lot of violence in the area. It was a known fact, the Settlement Security Coordinator out there was a bit crazy. Some Frenchman, don't remember his name. A lunatic: "They have to be killed, we have to take revenge all the time, they're shits." They saw trouble, sheep were stolen, I don't know, and he said: "That's it, we're taking our revenge." Saturday night, something like that, suddenly all of the Susiya settlement went down the hill with flashlights. I was in the war-room (at company HQ).

**What is the procedure in such a case?**

We don't do anything to the settlers. Don't touch them. Don't beat them up.

**And the police?**

The police? The only thing it does – in case there's a leftie demonstration – is bring this piece of paper, a "closed military zone" order, throws them out of there, and that's that. So there wouldn't be any blows exchanged by settlers and lefties. And if necessary, beat up lefties and Arabs who come to demonstrate.

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Testimony 26

**One-hundred and fifty children around a house torn down by stoning**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2007

[The South Hebron Hills] is not...these are places where even as a soldier you don't experience the same friction as in Hebron. You're not inside

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a village or a town. You don't go there too much, except for once when we were on a rolling mission. Because the thing about walking inside a village for three days is you're really inside. From Beit Awa to Yatta. How many inhabitants are there, some 20,000? It's an enormous place.

### **What were you doing there?**

It was an action that, first of all, is not used anymore, the army has stopped this practice. Secondly, on these rolling operations you can't slack off. No such thing. There were investigations by company commanders and deputy battalion commanders. It's a lot more serious. Some of the action was undercover, some overt. We'd sneak up to some house in the middle of the night, carry out an arrest, detain the guy and enter his house, put up a 'straw widow' there, sleep in the house. Two are on the lookout, which is not at all like in Hebron. Two would sit at an observation point. The next day, they would go down and do a roadblock, then carry out another arrest the second night, and you'd go out the back door and walk through a fruit grove so as not to be seen. You'd sit among the trees for some hours not to be detected. Make another arrest, enter the house again. That's the plan, by the book. Practically speaking, after the first arrest, you go down to set up a roadblock or in the morning after the first arrest you already have 150 kids surrounding the house, throwing stones at it. You can't get out, nothing you can do. So then command jeeps arrive and alert squads to get you out and they get stuck too because the kids place burning tires and dumpsters on the road. It's one hell of a mess. There, it's a lot simpler. The soldiers are standing at the third floor windows, the kids are ten meters away from the house, you fire teargas canisters at them... In Yatta, Dahariya, Dura, Al Fawwar, everywhere. We fire teargas at them, and the occasional kid is hit directly.

### **Direct and indirect hits, that's not something you were strict about?**

No way. Nothing strict there. This had no rules. You cannot fire indirectly at a 10-meter range. Say this is the house, think of the door, where your car's standing now. Take another five meters back – that's where the kids stand. Really, this is the house, here they are. Throwing stones from neighboring roofs, too.

Testimony 27

## **Bulldozers and wheel loaders flattened those places**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

I think that while we were still in basic training, at Tel Arad, a settler was murdered, I don't remember exactly where. He was a shepherd. He had been missing since the afternoon hours [Note: the interviewee is referring to Yair Har Sinai who was murdered around Susiya]. His flock made it home without him. The goats and sheep made it back, he didn't, and we were alerted. It was already evening and various forces in the area began to survey the region. At the time, I was our company commander's signalman. We walked around with flashlights, not knowing what we were supposed to look for – anything, a piece of clothing. Finally one of my mates, without noticing, actually stepped on his body in the middle of the night, perhaps at dawn. From that moment, we waited at one of the settlements around there, and first thing in the morning, they came to speak to us. I remember it was the company commander who spoke to us. If the company commander speaks to soldiers in basic training it's already... He said the settler was murdered by Palestinian terrorists who were hiding in all sorts of places nearby – there are lots of not really houses but half-caves with shanties added on, all sorts of improvised tin shanties out of every piece of junk that can be used. The company commander told us that the local residents aided and abetted the terrorists to hide out, or I don't know what. One of the things I remember from this motivation talk which clarified for us beyond a shadow of a doubt that the residents really aided them and that there was all sorts of proof and tracks leading to them and stuff like that. Again, I think he knew it was not true when he told us this, because none of us bothered to doubt what he was saying. The army, the Shin Bet and intelligence probably know what they're talking about. He asked if anyone had any problem carrying out the mission and that if so, he should speak up now, or something like that, and it was followed by threats about refusing army orders. No one said a word. Actually we were out from the early morning hours, going through every place where Palestinians lived out there, and we secured bulldozers and wheel loaders that simply flattened those hamlets, and there were no men around. It was a kind of... Not exactly an encampment. These were tiny little shanties, the poorest you could imagine, usually containing a sack of rice, a few

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wretched pots, pieces of tin used as partitions, sometimes a little corral with some livestock. There are raggedy carpets... The men weren't there, only women and children, and we let every family have 10 minutes, no more, to take out whatever they could. Together with their kids they were on the run, dragging out everything they could manage to carry. In some cases, it went more smoothly because they must have been prepared. They didn't resist and we never used our weapons.

**How do you mean "resist"?**

Weeping, yelling, cursing. As soon as the men were not there, as it was only the women and children, a few dozen soldiers stood there around the wheel loader and went from hovel to hovel, there wasn't much to do. I remember the sealing of two wells, with a wheel loader. It simply came and covered it up with rocks and dirt.

**Did you see what happened to the people? Did they go anywhere?**

No, they remained. At the end of the day we depopulated some hamlets that were closer to small villages, all the localities were scattered in the hills and at places closer to villages lots of villagers came to protest our action. So all these people were standing very close to us as we stood guard. We were guarding that wheel loader, securing it, but in this case too there was no shooting. We just threatened them and there was nothing much they could do. It was a bit stressful for us as trainees that people were coming out, even if they were unarmed, but finally nothing more happened.

**How many hovels do you think you destroyed?**

Dozens. Dozens. That's the only event I actually remember from my basic training days.

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Testimony 28

**The settlers throw stones at them**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2006

There was always this thing with the settlers, who suddenly define some area as their own. Ma'on Farms, those guys were expert at it. They'd

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suddenly mark a trail: "They will not pass here. This is mine." Trails the Palestinians use for going to school, I don't know what. "They won't walk here, this is mine."

**Who would say that?**

Settlers. There's this one guy there, I don't remember his name, at Ma'on Farms, really screwed up.

**What do you mean, "they say"? Who do they say this to?**

To us. What do you mean "to who"?

**And what do you say?**

"They can pass here." Now we're supposed to provide security to the Arabs going there, but I mean the settlers throw stones at them and you're not going to stand there saying: "Throw them at me, I'm here." You say: "Please, don't throw stones," like some retard.

**Even if they would throw stones at you?**

Did you hear what happened in our battalion? With a guy from the auxiliary company...

**You mean while escorting kids? [Note: The army escorts Palestinian children walking to school on a path passing right next to Ma'on Farms following violent assaults by Ma'on Farms' settlers against the children.]**

Escorting, yes. He got mad that they were throwing stones at the children. He told them: Stop throwing stones already! He wouldn't let them get near, started shoving them, so they beat him up with stones, he passed out. Got hit in the jaw with a stone and passed out. Then one of the soldiers loaded his weapon and fired it in the air in the direction of the settlers. Those two soldiers were tried that very day, screwed them with 35 days in jail for shooting in the air. It was a long time ago.

**Both soldiers were jailed?**

No. The soldier who did not shoot was not jailed.

**The soldier who shot went to jail for 35 days for shooting in the air?**

The settler also said he had threatened him with his weapon. I don't know, I wasn't there.

**And the soldier who'd been beaten?**

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He was also punished for hitting a settler. I mean, it's as if he had started fighting the settler.

**So what punishment did he get?**

I don't remember. 28 days confinement to post. He was the commander.

**And did anything happen to the settlers who hit him?**

What? They hit. We don't hit settlers.

**Did the police arrive?**

What police? Do you realize what it takes for the police to arrive?

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Testimony 29

**Each commander who arrived had new procedures**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

Negohot is a more interesting and problematic place, in light of what went on there. The settlement started out as an army – Nahal – settlement that was defined first as a yeshiva, not a normal settlement. I understood that in Ariel Sharon's time, when he was still Minister of Infrastructures or Housing, he approved bringing in families, which didn't happen at first. Slowly, this was legitimized. I know that now, there is even an illegal outpost outside Negohot. It's a Jewish settlement in the middle of Palestinian territory, there is no other Israeli settlement nearby and the biggest problem there was that we were the regular soldiers posted there but the commanders of the base were actually reservists who kept being replaced... Each new commander had his own rules of engagement, where [Palestinians] were allowed to move and where not. (...)

**How often did commanders change?**

Every three weeks a new Reserves force arrives. At Negohot, there were two spots secured by the army – one inside the settlement and another several kilometers downhill, at the entrance to Beit Awa. A house there was commandeered for a long time. The whole time I was there, soldiers were in the house that was occupied. I wasn't there because it was not our own force. The family was kept in a small part of the house. This followed

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a certain shooting incident that happened there, so a strategic spot was taken over. We were above. (...)

**What was different about the rules?**

There were children there and a concrete slab roadblock so no one could get through, only the army. Not even Israeli civilians. It leads to Haggai and Adoraim, I think, and to Hebron, a road that I believe is open now. It was closed off with these concrete slabs and the children would go down in the morning, walk a few kilometers to school. It was parallel to the wadi. One day, a force arrived made up of settlers from the Mateh Binyamin area. It was not following a shooting, but they decided that Palestinians must not walk on the road and whoever walks on that road constitutes a threat, so they are only allowed to walk in the wadi. So the children had to walk to school in the wadi every morning. This was the decision of a lieutenant, not a senior officer. We were subordinate to the Nahal battalion commander but he was based in the Jordan Valley and would visit us every few weeks. The truth is that we could not complain to him because his promotion was being held up – in the First Intifada or after he had beaten up Arabs while he was in Duvdevan [an elite special forces unit] – that’s what we were told. He didn’t like Arabs and he never told us to do anything specific but he was not the kind you could complain to. This was a big problem. Every three weeks the reservists rotated and they could decide whatever they wanted.

**What kind of decisions saw major changes? Rules of engagement, traffic routes?**

Yes.

**Both vehicles and pedestrians?**

Look, vehicles had nowhere to go because the road was blocked so they didn’t show up. Apparently, during the Intifada there were several shooting incidents so the concrete barriers were put up.

**And not removed?**

Not for the ten months I was there.

**So the commander makes decisions, sets a new procedure and does not change conditions on the ground, doesn’t move the barriers?**

That was the regular brigade’s responsibility, so he couldn’t decide on that, nor did he care. We have no way to do it.

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### **The terrain remains the same, but the procedures are changed.**

Yes. The other problem about procedure is that the settlers were in charge. If they wanted something, they appealed to the army and it did anything they asked. For example, security-wise, Negohot had no surrounding fence, and that was because the settlers refused to have one, or settlers would call up the brigade commander and complain that we weren't doing a good enough job standing guard. There was a shooting incident and one of the guys there, who we thought was an extremist – he had been a Givati scout company commander – leapt at one of the soldiers and grabbed his weapon. He wanted that M-16 instead of his own Uzi. It wasn't the argument, this happened during an incident. The soldier was standing at a guard post near his house and this guy wanted that weapon. The soldiers were not combatants. We had strange incidents – two settlers are seen walking along at night carrying a large bag, and return from the wadi without it. There are no settlements for about seven kilometers around, and that bag is gone. They were passing by guard posts, had no shame.

### **How much later did they return?**

They come back without that bag, and you report and no one cares. Who knows what they did there. We brought the Palestinians food, to that house down the hill, quite a lot of it.

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Testimony 30

## **In the Territories, the battalion commander is God**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003-2004

### **What about blocking roads? Villages whose access roads are blocked – is that connected to the fence being erected?**

The fence was erected later. Now when I am on reserves duty in that area, it looks different. The road from Beer Sheva to Jerusalem, Route 60 in our designated area, was one that Palestinians were not allowed to travel on.

### **So how would they get to Bethlehem, for example?**

There's one crossing point at Junction 123, there's a pillbox there and they

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can cross the road at that spot. There's a cluster of Palestinian villages south of the road and all the other areas are to the north of it. If they want to get from Dahariya to Hebron, say, or north to Hebron, they must cross at that junction. That's a pillbox with four soldiers, and it's a junction. If there's any shooting, it takes a few minutes to respond. From the moment you respond, the junction stays closed at least until the end of the day, if not for a few days, and then there are 30-40 cars jammed there. After 1 a.m., the area is dead. Nothing moves.

**They have no other possible crossing point?**

There's a gate at Zif Junction, to the east. I remember that when I was there, it was closed nearly all the time. We'd be notified when there was traffic. By the way, this whole episode ended when the brigade commander discovered that no traffic was allowed on that road. He issued instructions that traffic is allowed, the battalion commander contradicted those orders, the brigade commander found that out and the road was opened right away. From that point on, Palestinians could use it.

**What do you mean, the battalion commander contradicted the order?**

For a while, Palestinians were not allowed to use that road throughout the regional brigade's designated area. A decision was made to change this situation, I don't know why. Orders came down from the brigade that Palestinians were allowed to travel along all the main roads, and only on our road they weren't. The battalion commander decided this on his own, and in the Occupied Territories, the battalion commander is God.

**How long did it take the brigade commander to find this out?**

Over two weeks. He probably went out on patrol, saw an empty road, and stopped to ask the soldiers at the post about this. Many things can be found out.

**The battalion commander was suspended?**

No. Perhaps he was discreetly reprimanded, but I don't remember hearing anything about it.

## **The father remained with the wagon and his son did not return**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003-2004

Once, for example...this is an example of boredom. We saw a taxi break through – this was while I was already a commander, a sergeant – we saw a taxi break through a barrier. We were in a Hummer, we chased the taxi. We didn't manage to catch it, we caught another taxi. It entered Yatta, of course we wouldn't go in there. There was another taxi. I stop the other taxi, and say to the driver: "What was that?" He goes: "I don't know." I say: "Listen, you aren't leaving here until you give me the phone number of the taxi driver that ran off." He knew. He gave me the phone number, so I use my own cell phone to call the taxi driver who ran off, and tell him: "Do you know who this is?" He goes: "No." I tell him: "It's the army, and if you don't come back..." Earlier I had asked him (the other taxi driver) where he lives, he gave me a general description of where the guy lives. I told him on the telephone: "If you don't come back here right now we're coming over to your house, we'll pick you up, this and that, I know where you live..." – I described for him what the other driver told me. He said to me: "I'm coming back, I'm coming back." Of course he didn't, and that was it. But that's an example of things that you do out of boredom. Or, once someone ran from us in some vehicle and his elderly father, or something, was left with the wagon, I know. I don't remember the story exactly. He had a wagon and a tractor or something like that, we caught the father and son, told them to show us their IDs. For a long time back then there was this policy that anyone who breaks through a barrier, you confiscate his ID. So we said to him: "Ok, hand over your ID." He said: "I don't have it here, it's in the village." So I said to him: "Good, great. You go to the village with the tractor to get it, your father stays here with the wagon." And his father stayed with the tractor and the son didn't come back. We took his father's ID. I think we left, came back, and his father was still there. It was already nighttime and his father was still there. He stayed there. We detained him, told him not to move, but of course his son didn't dare to come back.

Testimony 32

## **We would take car keys, IDs...**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2003

There was this whole business of trucks transporting marble. There are quarries around Bani Na'im and all those factories in Hebron, in the South Hebron Hills. All the drivers who don't have permits to use the road travel that road anyway, bypassing all the barriers. The battalion and brigade commanders were flipping out. The battalion commander comes through on the radio: "Why are there Palestinian vehicles on the road?" And he's going crazy. And you can't stop them. It got so that we would take their keys, their IDs – by the way, it's illegal to take away someone's ID or car keys. Still, you just cannot stop the traffic. And most of those people are just innocent people who want to make a living, right? There was this meeting where the brigade commander came to speak to the staff, and I told him: "I received an order that I cannot obey. If you really don't want any traffic here, give me one live ammo magazine, and an okay to destroy two trucks and shoot a guy in the leg. That's the price." He said to me: "What, how could you? It's immoral." I said: "Yes, that's true. It's immoral. But that's what we need to do if you want zero traffic. Give me tools. You issue an order without the means to carry it out and this is the price." This was when I had already been there for eight months. I knew my business, right? He said: "You can't do that." I said: "Okay. Then don't give me that order or don't go wild when you see trucks on the road." At least he was shocked. I mean, I wasn't proposing this seriously, I don't want to shoot a guy, but I wanted to shake him a little, make him realize that if he really means it, force has to be used, a lot of force. And he said: "Okay, we won't use force." The order was still valid, but okay.

### **That's where it stopped?**

Listen, this whole thing about Palestinian traffic on the Hebron bypass road is a cat and mouse game. Really. It's like you're watching Tom and Jerry cartoons. A guy comes out of here, so you go, and he goes, and then it got to the point of trying to disable trucks. As far as I know it didn't reach the stage of vandalism. Why? Because you stop a truck, take the driver's keys from him, take his ID, take out all the air from his tires, don't puncture them - just take all the air out, right? You even take the guy in. Sometimes

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you take him to the base, shackled and blindfolded, stick him in the sentry post for hours, right? That's someone who's bypassing barriers and driving the road without the necessary permits, etc. A Palestinian. Sometimes you simply take the guy to the sentry post, put him in there for an hour, half an hour, a day, morning to evening. But no matter, even if you take the guy, you go by where the truck was standing at the side of the road, right where you picked him up? An hour later, sometimes even five minutes later – the truck's gone. Vanished. Always. Never mind, you've taken the keys, locked the truck, no air in the front tires, they have this compressor so you take all the air out of that compressor, you don't cut cables, just open the spigot and all the air's gone. Cabin locked, engine off. He no longer has any way of filling the tires. You get back ten minutes, half an hour, an hour later, the truck's gone. Amazing. Simply amazing. Listen, when a guy is troubled, he's got to get bread on the table, he'll do a lot. It'll get to the point where if he's afraid his truck will go up in flames, if he's afraid he'll be shot – then he won't move around. The risk's too high. But if he's just going to have his ID taken away? Okay, let them take it, who cares. Keys taken? Fine, he's got ten spare keys at home. Or sometimes he'd start it up with a screwdriver. Those old Mercedes trucks, you know – a screwdriver or a nail, his motivation is high.

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Testimony 33

## **We see the Settlement Security Coordinator pointing his gun at two children**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2004

One thing that really left a very stark impression on me was our time in Otniel. What happened was that I was on the standby squad. We were alerted on the PA system, everyone got on the armored Safari truck. Where were we off to? We didn't know yet, the commander was inside the driver's cabin and we had no contact with him so we couldn't tell where we were going. We were southbound as far as I could tell. We get to Shim'a. There we disembark, there's this slope going down near the entrance. The Safari remained by the sentry post and we were climbing down on foot. Shim'a is built on various levels – there's the old neighborhood up high, and a newer neighborhood lower down. About 100 meters difference, a

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good couple of minutes climbing down. (...) I suppose that in emergency situations a vehicle could do it as well, if needed. We climb down and see the Settlement Security Coordinator of the settlement pointing his gun at two children, one who looked about six, seven years old, and the other nine or ten. In 2004 the settlement's surrounding fence was not yet completed. I mean, we couldn't figure out what happened, they must have gotten through where there was no fence, and I don't know whether they even realized it, but they found themselves right inside the settlement. The Settlement Security Coordinator got there first and pointed his weapon at them until we got there. As we got there, he gave them over to us and our commander said: "Let's take them to the base and the company commander will decide what's to be done with them."

### **The children were not questioned?**

None of us speaks Arabic, including the Settlement Security Coordinator himself.

### **How did he communicate with the children?**

He pointed his gun at them, that's pretty clear communication. Basic words such as "Stop, don't move!" I don't know how he even contacted the war-room, maybe it was by phone.

### **Were the children panicking?**

The smaller one was, not the older one. Perhaps the older one had already had such an experience and knew that it wouldn't end up too seriously. The little one was hysterical, or rather crying. We took them, there were Arab workers around there working on the fence, the paving, and the commander said that they were not to be shackled or blindfolded yet, just to get them inside the vehicle and there we'd shackle and blindfold them, so the Arab workers wouldn't see that. We got them on the Safari, shackled and blindfolded both of them and were driving towards the Otniel army base, some kilometers away. About a ten minute drive. We drive, we get there. The Safari is a tall vehicle with this ramp that opens down. The children have to be helped down. The little kid goes on crying and is not stable on his feet. I held his shoulder so he wouldn't fall. He really was not stable. The older kid was okay. The commander told us to unload our weapons and I said I would hold the kid up while the guys unload their guns, and then I'll be replaced so I can unload mine. They took out magazines and started cocking their rifle. Think about it, you're six years old, you're picked up, held, and then you hear rifles cocked. He broke down in hysterical crying, sure that he was going to be shot. There

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was not one Arabic speaker around. First thing, just to calm him down, I grabbed hold of him so he'd realize I was protecting him. I decided I'd pick up his blindfold so he'd see that no one was pointing any rifle at him and threatening him. Someone else held him and I showed him that I was unloading the magazine and checking that there's no bullet in the barrel, and put the magazine in my pocket. The older child began to cry, too, they were talking to each other and you don't know their language, you have no idea what is going on, both are crying. Some minutes later our company commander got out, I don't remember whether it was the commander or his deputy. I think the deputy, and he knew Arabic from home so he talked to them and explained and I was out of the picture then. He left them outside the base, calmed them down and explained what had happened, and that he didn't want them to be scared. Then they were released. Listen, let's admit it, a six-year-old kid who goes through something like that, no matter what he'll be told later, all he remembers is those sounds of weapons being cocked while he was blindfolded, so the harm was done I think. Later, they were released near Otniel. That's the most serious thing that happened to me. There were quite a lot of incidents at that time which, in hindsight, you don't believe how they could happen and everyone around kept silent about them.

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Testimony 34

## **All I'm trying to do here is reduce friction**

**Unit:** reserves **Rank:** Sergeant Major **Year:** 2006

I am not sure I can estimate whether there were fifty there as is written here, I think less, because they were also scattered around. People were sitting, anyway it doesn't matter. Say we were there in August. Everything was very calm. I think the reason was that many of the more fanatical settlers were down in Gush Katif (the Jewish settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip), in the second half of August. So we were on GPS and patrolling around. Not on the road. We were really strolling. Hanging around. When we were in the outposts we didn't see the outpost settlers, they were not there. Just their security people and some air force men on guard-duty. (...) Anyway things were very calm. We were strolling, splashing around

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water holes, having fun. Then with the GPS we got down to the edge of the desert and had some tea with the Bedouin and visited the people in that place, don't know what it's called. The encampment of Khirbet Susiya. We sat there and had tea with them. It was really nice. Now that I met them at the event, I recognized the old shepherd with the... meaning, there were lots of peace activists there.

**Did they tell you they were kept from approaching their own lands?**

Yes, they did. They started complaining right away. The problem was that they were speaking mainly Arabic, and we couldn't. We understood they were complaining about the settlers.

**The settlers or the army?**

The settlers. They didn't talk about the army. We were there in uniform and with jeeps.

**Let's get back to the incident.**

So in this incident, first of all we were summoned.

**What day was that?**

Purim... We were alerted and told that the settlement was being charged.

**In those words? That the settlement was being charged?**

We were told that Palestinians were charging the settlement. That Palestinians were climbing up from the wadi. I don't remember the exact report. Clearly it came from the Settlement Security Coordinator. Not the soldiers at the guard post. There were two of them at the moment. We got there. The soldiers were very relaxed. The Settlement Security Coordinator ran around them, very nervous. They looked sort of apathetic, the two. Didn't know what he wanted. He said that as soon as Palestinians start coming up from the wadi towards the settlement, even if it's just a few meters including in the wadis where they do their own farming, they have to be stopped, even with a suspect-arrest procedure including shots in the air. Those were the instructions the Settlement Security Coordinator was giving the regular soldiers right in our presence. I think they just got more confused and said, no way. And they didn't shoot in the air at any point, I can promise. Then a leftist activist came along, calling us to come quickly. Now, say this here is the central encampment, and we're here at the post, and there are Palestinians down here (shows the points on the map).

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### **Between the encampment and the post?**

Yes, in the main wadi. So this activist comes and calls us to come quickly, the settlers “are coming to beat us up and shoot us...” We were just a jeep with two soldiers, I mean a driver, an officer and two privates. A Hummer.

### **How many were you, four people?**

Yes.

### **No other men in the area?**

No. We had one regular soldier doing settlement security duty with us. One got back to the settlement, to their trailer. We had with us one regular soldier, a reservist and an officer. We got here to one of the higher plots in the wadi. This is what we saw: Above the field were something like five settlers, two adults and three kids. More or less. There were no more than four or five Palestinians hoeing their field. There were three to four photographers, large cameras on the side that were taking pictures. And there was Ascherman [Note: Rabbi Arik Ascherman of Rabbis for Human Rights] in the middle, taping it with his shoulder video camera.

### **Did you ever meet him before?**

No, I first met him at this incident. There were another two female activists there, one Israeli and one American running around there. And there was that nervous settler, I think his name is \*\*\*, from Susiya, the biggest Arab-hater around there. He had his long M16 rifle and was standing in the field, half a meter from Ascherman and the Palestinians. The other settlers were outside the field, some meters away. He was inside, nervously skittering around. As soon as we got closer to the field, not even inside, trying to figure out who’s who, at first I thought Ascherman is also a scary settler. But he had a camera and not a gun. I realized that was the sign... So this \*\*\* (one of the settlers) came out at us and began to verbally abuse us.

### **Swear at you?**

Not exactly swear, I mean he didn’t start calling us Nazi son-of-a-bitch, but he began... He even said simply: “Shame on you, coming here to protect the Arabs.” Things like that. I’m not quoting him exactly. “Shame on you.” This was before we even had a chance to figure out what was going on there. So there was no problem taking sides. He didn’t help us. The others were quietly working, and he was assaulting us and so a loud exchange started up between him and me and then the officer too, including real shouting.

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**The Settlement Security Coordinator was not a part of this?**

No. I moved back towards the post, and they went down from this wadi towards the main ravine. I don't know exactly how and when...

**They, meaning who?**

Everyone. Palestinians. I didn't follow the exact movement, but things got diffused. They went down towards...

**The activists or the Palestinians told you to do something about the settlers?**

Only that American activist came to us and said: "They'll beat us up, please help us, protect him." That's it. Then I walked over towards the post alone, and some youths from the local yeshiva and some adult settlers began to approach from the settlement and I saw that there were more Palestinians and peace activists and others down in the wadi, and they began to climb the wadis towards the settlement...

**Who began to climb?**

The Palestinian farmers. Saying they began working here in the wadi which is more towards the settlement and there was that older shepherd from Khirbet Susiya who began to walk around here with his sheep on the slope, and more youths and settlers in their 20s, and they were yelling and swearing at the Palestinians and at us for not chasing them away: "What kind of soldiers are you?!? You should be ashamed..."

**Only you were there? No reinforcements arrived?**

Not yet. We called for some.

**You walked over to the post to summon reinforcement?**

No, I had already phoned the war-room on my own cell phone and said: "You've got to send some more troops out here. Things are beginning to..." Wait, now I recall I'm really confusing two things here. Sorry. After this little episode we actually left. I didn't see any more settlers coming.

**You did nothing to get the settlers to leave?**

There was this feeling that... Wow, I don't really remember, it's been a while. Could be that another jeep arrived. At some point a policeman came. That I remember. We left and were summoned again so we came back. Here I'm a bit confused.

**You see Palestinians working in their own fields... and?**

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So anyway I'm standing at that post, the officer and the other soldier on the other side of the hill, no eye contact with me. There were shouts and curses. I realized there was real friction and later I was told even some stones had been thrown, young settlers had actually approached another field, not where we were, towards the main wadi.

**That was where the officer and other soldier were?**

Yes, and the policeman.

**Young settlers approached the main wadi?**

Not exactly the main wadi. The field where the Palestinians were working. There were verbal exchanges and curses and the settlers even threw stones. I went to the top of the hill and saw those were settlers.

**What was the distance between the parties: I mean the settlers, Palestinians, activists?**

Just meters.

**Not one Israeli soldier?**

Two, three. The patrol officer, another soldier and another regular soldier on settlement-security duty in between. They and the policeman. The policeman and the soldiers were arguing with the settlers, trying to push them back and explaining, while the Palestinians went on working as if nothing was happening. Perhaps sort of demonstratively or I don't know what, and photographers and peace activists hanging around there, too. All within meters of each other.

**Except for policing, were you thinking of anything?**

What do you mean, were we thinking?

**As an Israeli soldier, you're not supposed to be carrying out police jobs...**

What I think in such a situation, never mind my politics, I think that the ones who should be maintaining the order there are policemen or the DCL officials or something. We don't have exact instructions. I don't regard the instructions from \*\*\*, the Settlement Security Coordinator, as valid for myself, I don't want to enter a confrontation which might endanger me or force me to use my weapon and make the settlers use theirs and end up with casualties. All I'm trying to do here is minimize friction and calm things down, and attempt to understand things while not seeing any

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physical impact. Now there were about five-ten Palestinians, a policeman, and three soldiers. Obviously I would have been glad to have another ten soldiers there, and we did summon them and they got there eventually. It took time, but this was not some highly sensitive emergency.

**Do your instructions include minimizing friction?**

No, I don't think our written instructions or briefings mention that.

**So it's totally up to the soldier's good or not as good judgment, and with another soldier it could end up very differently?**

Yes. I can't say for sure. You know, I don't remember it all. But I really recall that in the two or three briefings I had there, such a situation was not mentioned in writing. An officer giving the briefing may have actually said, look there are such situations here, and the spirit of things in my own company was to minimize friction and summon police as quickly as possible. But those were not written instructions given in any orderly fashion. Such situations are not foreseen. They talk about what happens if you're shot at, what happens if a settlement is attacked, if there is an ambush on a road, fire opened at a vehicle. Things like this here are not mentioned...

It was a situation which you couldn't ignore. If the three soldiers and policeman were not there, it would have ended in beatings and casualties, I don't know how many. We couldn't just take off.

**Was it possible that another group of soldiers would actually do what the Settlement Security Coordinator said, which would have been to order the Palestinians away?**

It could even have been us, trying to get them away from there, telling them: "Guys you better leave," in a more or less assertive manner.

**Getting whom to leave? The Palestinians?**

Telling them to climb back down the wadi and telling the settlers to get back up to the settlement. When the Border Police finally got there, they split in two. One group went over to the settlers, talking to them and pushing them onto one spot, and the other group went over to the peace activists and Palestinians, pushing them around too. The Border Police were not getting into any explanations, just physically pushing both sides more or less equally. This was going on while I was standing at the cairn, there was a lot of yelling and I wasn't too familiar there, I saw more and more settlers coming down, among them youth from the Susiya yeshiva. I also saw that down in the wadi there were not just a handful of people but

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rather several dozen Palestinians working together with quite a few peace activists and several people with cameras, some of them Israelis, others Europeans, or Palestinians, I can't really be certain. When they began to work in the wadis going up towards Susiya settlement, the settlers really began to come down and swear at them, raising hell. I was standing there as a lone soldier because the others were on the other side of the hill. I didn't really see the sense of standing there yelling and pleading. Just my presence there with my gear and gun, you'd think at least that would deter both sides. So I stood there trying to be visible and wait until some more soldiers arrived as quickly as possible. And at this point they did, the company commander's jeep arrived, having been nearby. There was also a standby squad that was alerted. Guys were taken out of bed, on our base. A standby squad with an officer and another ten soldiers, and following that the police arrived, and the battalion commander's jeep so there were dozens of people from every direction, the gaps were closing and nerves were running high. I stood there and saw that from the left side of the hill where earlier there had been my officer and the yelling and all, suddenly a group of eight or nine settlers came along at a distance of 100 meters or so, I couldn't identify faces but in general I realized these were the adult settlers, no longer youths, people aged 25-30 or so.

### **You didn't recognize anyone?**

No, I did recognize \*\*\* (one of the settlers the interviewee referred to earlier) because he followed them directly. There were eight of them and then he came. Or seven and with him they were eight. They simply left the wadi and the friction point with the Palestinians, and climbed up the hill to the hamlet, to the Palestinian encampment. So I called the war-room right away and asked them to send more forces because it looked as though they were going to set the encampment on fire or something, things were happening. I was following this from across the wadi, a range of about 300 meters, a bit helpless, and saw they were standing there, really angry, right at the middle of the encampment, and I didn't see exactly but apparently someone came out of one of the tents and they grabbed him and began to beat him up. He was immediately down on the ground and I saw them beating and kicking him, something like a minor lynch. There was screaming at the encampment, probably in the tents, wild screaming, and as soon as that started different Palestinians and peace activists in the wadi ran up to the encampment and so did other settlers. This was the whole story, a minute or two of beating and they ran.

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### **The settlers?**

I saw a group of settlers going down the wadi and then going back up to the settlement and according to what I understood later two of them had run towards the archeological site and an army jeep caught them. I don't know if it was army or police.

### **Do you know who took part in the assault? Was \*\*\* one of them?**

\*\*\* was in that group. On top of the hill. I can't say with certainty that at a distance of about 300 meters, say, I actually saw him kicking, but since the whole group was surrounding some Arab who was lying on the ground and everyone was assaulting him and I saw the kind of nerves and craziness in \*\*\* even earlier, I cannot imagine he'd just be standing around picking his nose. I also told all of this including his name to the policeman who came to question me a day or two later, an investigator from the Hebron (Israeli) police. He wrote up about three-four pages. It took about an hour. He said he'd bring in video tapes that I think the peace activists had taken, and he'd show them to me so I could try to identify people. I told him that two days later my reserves duty would be over, and he didn't reach me in those two days. In the end, he didn't get to me.

### **So he hasn't gotten back to you to this day and perhaps he didn't identify...**

I don't know how this ended up.

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Testimony 35

### **We'd enter a house, just as a show of force...**

**Unit:** Field Intelligence **Rank:** Lieutenant **Year:** 2004-2006

We'd go on these missions... join some infantry company or provide them with a crew of our men. They would enter a house as a show of force, okay? To provoke, which is a mission with its own kind of logic, but in practical terms, you're simply harassing the population. The idea was this: the infantry crew would take over some house, covertly so that no one outside knows anything, and noisily take over a house across the street. Same street, one here, one there. They make a lot of noise, to provoke a

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protest demonstration. And then tires were burnt there.

### **The soldiers would do that?**

No, the Palestinians. Because the soldiers took over the house demonstratively, putting up flags, making noise, throwing concussion grenades. That was their mission. And we were across the street, secretly. It was daytime. We came there at night, and all the action was in daytime. The idea was that perhaps some armed insurgent would arrive and we'd manage to take him down from the house we were in, because we were there covertly, from another angle. No armed man ever arrived, okay? And their house was destroyed. Burning tires were thrown at it. It was an innocent house, just picked off the map by the Shin Bet who'd checked it out and confirmed there was nothing there, just innocent population. That's what they check. And those people's home was ruined. Windows were broken, stones thrown in. That's it. Their house was ruined.

### **Where was the family?**

I think it was chased out. This was in Yatta. You get it? That thought to begin with, you sit there with the brigade commander looking at the map. It looks good. You take that house with a show of force, you'll be hiding there, an armed man will arrive, all fine and dandy. In actual fact, you've destroyed a family home and left. That's it. And it happens every day. All the time.

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Testimony 36

## **I fired a flare and it ignited a field**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

We were training in the South Hebron Hills, and something happened, and I realized – only in hindsight – how bad it was. Practice shooting at a locality. Every force that arrives practices what it has to do.

### **Incidents and reactions?**

Yes. Once a force arrived and said they were doing a 'wet' drill (i.e. with live ammunition) but at "60 degrees" (i.e. shooting in the air). The entire designated area was blasted with thousands of bullets fired towards the east, to Palestinian villages. We even got phone calls from division

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headquarters inquiring whether we were under attack. No one cared that this fire was over houses. I don't know whether anyone got hit because we didn't get any reports, but once we carried out such practice, specifically I was there and I fired a flare and it burnt a whole field. I think it was just weeds, but no one brought anything to put it out, and the Palestinians had to put out the fire in their field.

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Testimony 37

## **One of my soldiers used to slap Palestinians around**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003-2004

The usual, everyday things, the humiliations at Shim'a, the slaps that soldiers gave to Palestinians on patrols, that's something that I can't even describe. It even happened when I was a commander, let's say, there was one soldier I had a hard time controlling. He would slap the Palestinians even before I had a chance to yell at him. Once I came with soldiers to testify – not to testify, to transfer detainees from brigade HQ to the military court near Ramallah, at Camp Ofer.

### **That's far.**

Yes, quite a chore. Originally we had nothing to do with this, but were sent to deliver them. And I said to the soldiers: "Don't beat up the bound Palestinians. Also don't be stupid, they are going to court now, they'll tell the judge what you do to them." And that soldier who would always give slaps was in the back [of the transport], and apparently they did beat up those Palestinians. So we got to Camp Ofer and of course one of the detainees said he had been beaten and described how the guy beat him up. It was clear to me that he did it, without a doubt. And the judge turns to me and asks me if I'm the soldier who brought them. I said yes, but I was up front with the driver. Yet I have no doubt that my soldiers didn't do anything, but I don't know for a fact.

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That it's somewhat absurd that instead of, I don't know, I mean many of them (the Palestinians), at least at night, say we're on an ambush

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somewhere, either they're busy with terrorist or with criminal activity. No one, even if he lives in a village ten kilometers away, has any reason to be there at night. I mean just being out there means he's doing something wrong, say. Either he's in a criminal gang or in a terrorist cell. So you get this absurd situation where you have to defend these people or such who are suspect of these things, no? (...)

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Testimony 38

## **Showing them who's the strong side here**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

### **How do you create disturbances?**

I think by our very presence. We would go in, announce our presence on megaphones. There were for example places where every time the Safari would pass through, it would get hit by stones. So as soon as the first stone hit we would go out and start shooting right then. It was usually a Safari. You know, all that nonsense about making our presence felt, when you go into a Palestinian village that in fact has done nothing wrong, like Samo'a, and you go inside there. There really was one time we went into Samo'a really to make our presence felt. We went in, you go in, you get off the vehicle, you scream, one guy who was with me, for example - we went into stores: "Close the store, close the store!" A friend of mine knocked over a shelf, you know, packed with merchandise. Lots of people did it. You know, you knock over something in the store to create a stressful and chaotic situation. Everyone quickly-quickly-quickly closes the place down. You stand there, start walking around, at some point the kids start throwing stones at you. That same time, that specific time, we didn't have permission to fire at all. So they would throw, some kid threw a stone, and everyone ran after him, and that was it pretty much.

### **That was making your presence felt?**

Yes, that for example was making our presence felt. You do it many times. That same encounter at the Sheep Junction, where those three guys were killed [Note: the witness is referring to an incident at the Sheep Junction in January 2003 where shots were fired at a Lavi-battalion force on a foot patrol. Three of the soldiers were killed.] – that was also a show of

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presence. The soldiers marched from Route 60 into Yatta, and a [terrorist] ring which it seems was intending to shoot on Route 60, caught them going in to Yatta and ambushed them and killed them. But we would do it a lot in Yatta, also really in the area of the Sheep Junction.

**What was the rationale behind it? What did you say to yourself? It's thuggery?**

I have this theory that you can't always be on the defensive, and that these things create intelligence data, and when you go into a village – like when we would carry out 'straw widows', for example. You go into a village, occupy an inhabited house and wait for armed insurgents. So you say, you are in their territory, someone comes with a weapon, you will kill him. That was the rationale.

**And what about making your presence felt?**

I don't know. Literally, to demonstrate presence, to show them who is the stronger side. It's not called a show of force. Shows of force – that was a concept that even when I was there was already, you know, not really politically correct.

**Because of the incident at the Sheep Junction.**

No, could be it was something that only came about afterward.

**But it was used earlier?**

It was also used later on.

**Demonstration of presence – you knew why you were going.**

It was briefed as a routine patrol in an inhabited area and you deal with it less. What was the objective? The objective is always identical in every briefing. The objective is for the Lavi battalion to locate, thwart and prevent hostile terrorist activities. That's the objective, that's what they tell us.

**And the mode of operation? Closing shops needs to be planned in advance. It's an order.**

They went with it, the first one who did it, a few others did it, and that was it. I don't even remember what happened, how we got to that village in the first place, what we did there. Maybe we were on a patrol outside. I don't know, I don't remember.

That was the operation, but again, it was the one time that I remember we went in and people actually knocked over shelves.

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### **And how did it look the other times you went out on operations like that?**

I don't know, I didn't go on this again, it wasn't an operation we took on, we weren't assigned to do it. It was a part of something, maybe we were even on a patrol, it was the guys on the patrol jeep who'd done it. We were on a Hummer or something. I don't know what our mission there was in the first place, but this was not something we did on a mission. We were never sent, except really for that one time when we were assigned to close that little road in Yatta. Maybe there were other times, but I don't remember that we did things like that anymore.

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Testimony 39

### **There's a terrorist attack so the road is blocked off for a month**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** Lieutenant **Year:** 2005

#### **How long was the road closed to Palestinian traffic?**

It could be for a period of a month sometimes. I don't want to just give any numbers but it could be a long time. There is an attack so the road is blocked off for a month.

I can tell you, I don't remember what the story was there... It's the same story, ok, it also works for me chronologically. It was when I became platoon commander, I arrived as a platoon commander with my soldiers to the front line. My first time as a platoon commander on a deployment. It was on the Otniel line, the South Hebron Hills. A week before the whole company went up to the line I went up there for some briefing. On that day, there was an attack on Beit Haggai, a Palestinian fired shots from a vehicle. It was a drive-by shooting, basically, at hitchhikers. Two 17-year-old boys who were standing at the hitchhiking stop were killed, the vehicle could not be traced. As a result of what they did there, they said: Great, Palestinian vehicles are forbidden on this road, vehicles with green or white (Palestinian) license plates are forbidden to drive on the road, it will be for Israeli traffic only.

#### **Then all the villages are blockaded?**

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Yes. Then what happens basically is wheel loaders and stuff come and you block the...there are all these dirt trails which run from all the small villages into the main road, and they were blocked off. Your objective is basically to put up a lot of roadblocks to prevent people from getting on the road. But it happened in a few other instances, where explosives were placed on the road, things like that. Now, this is a road which runs North-South, a route considered essential for the army in the Territories. Meaning, if there is no Israeli traffic on this route, if Israelis think they cannot use it on a regular basis, then that would be the failure of the army's basic objective there, to create a normal life style.

### **Then one day the road is just opened?**

Yes, the army just decides. They make some, there is a period of calm, there are no attempted attacks, there is a drop in the number of warnings by the Shin Bet, and the road is opened. You might want to pose this question to a higher authority than myself, on the level of a battalion commander. Battalion commanders generally know these procedures better. I was a platoon commander at that time so there were other things which were more critical for me at that time. But yes, I imagine any battalion commander can answer that question with just the facts.

There were a few other times when the road was blocked. Every time there were explosives on the road, basically every time there was a security reason for blocking the road. Every time they...every time they tried to attack the road or someone traveling on it. It's closed on decision of...generally less than a month. A month is the longest that I remember. It was around a month. I think it was a month, I don't know exactly how long. Generally it was for a few days, a week or two, something like that. But yes, it happens a lot in that sector. At least in Summer 2005 it happened a lot.

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Testimony 40

## **We took over the wheel loader and used it to put up barriers**

**Unit:** Paratroopers **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

When you put up a barrier, it's opened within a day. [Palestinians] have

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wheel loaders, too. So I remember my friend and I were terribly annoyed at them for opening those barriers. I come by and put up a barrier, worked on it for hours, and dammit, a day later it's opened. Once we were on patrol with our jeep, and suddenly saw this JCB wheel loader, so we stopped and said: "Okay, now you're coming with us to do some work." I don't know where he was headed, but for about two hours we took over the JCB and used it to put up barriers.

### **Took over a Palestinian wheel loader?**

With the Palestinian operator inside, and told him: "Now you go ahead and block all these trails." We went on and put up all those barriers again, kept him at it for two-three hours, I don't know how long exactly. It was my friend's idea, and I went along with it. Just like that, out of pure boredom.

### **Who was commander at the time, you were?**

Yes.

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Testimony 41

## **Basically we have no authority when dealing with settlers**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2004

Once near Susiya - we actually got there because of clashes between shepherds and settlers - I saw the settlers from Susiya beating up the Palestinians. And we tried to prevent it but it wasn't possible, they didn't care at all. (...) We were like little kids running between them, trying to stop the settlers, and every time some settler, you know, goes around me on the right: "Don't you realize he might have an explosive belt?" Boom, he throws some old Palestinian on the ground. Gets around me on the right, a big guy, in fact a guy physically much stronger than me so I really couldn't use force against him in any way - because I couldn't, and anyway I wasn't allowed to.

### **Where was it? The Jewish settlement of Susiya?**

Yes, but next to Susiya, not inside. We exited the settlement and went up in the Hummer, we had to drive on the hilltops. They got there on foot, both

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the settlers and the Palestinians. It was halfway between what looked like ruins and the settlement of Susiya. I don't know whose land it is there.

**How many Palestinians were there and how many settlers?**

Four or five, one of them elderly, another who I think was his son, some elderly woman who was screaming, that was about it. And there were about four settlers, those Hilltop Youth, you know, with their skullcaps, and they were, like, scary.

**How can you stop them?**

I can't stop them.

**You arrest people, you confiscate their tractors.**

But those are Palestinians, they wouldn't dare. You don't have authority over the settlers at the end of the day, that's the issue. You don't, you try and separate [them] and then another jeep comes with officers and at the end things calm down, but bottom line, if he does something? There is nothing you can do about it.

**It's like a fight in a pub in town?**

Yes. Exactly the same thing. You can try and separate them and try not to get hit. Anything else you do, you don't know what will happen. You don't know if you'll be backed up [by the army], you don't know whether you'll end up being punished. You don't know.

**But what about slaps?**

Whoever hears about those? A settler will lodge a complaint about you to the police. At most a Palestinian will bring a complaint to the DCL. And the DCL, half the time they had a problem looking into it because it was inside the brigade, it was on Har Manoach. Where most of the time there was no public reception time. Often clearing someone's ID with HQ we'd be told the guy has to report to Captain \*\*\* on Har Manoach (DCL) on such and such a date. And the man would say to me: The last two times I went there they told me and he wasn't even there. They just send the guy there in order to harass him. The DCL wasn't there half the time. I don't know, but again, I didn't have any interaction with this. Maybe I'm totally mistaken. I heard it mostly from the Palestinians, and from what I saw when I would go to brigade HQ.

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Testimony 42

## **The synagogue was theirs but we had signed for it**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001

Negohot is this hill with trailers, this is the settlement itself before heavy construction was started, and later infrastructure was installed. There were ten caravan trailers at the most, young families, not many children, 30-40 people. We were friendly with some.

### **The synagogue itself was a trailer?**

Everything was a sort of mobile structure, there weren't any concrete buildings. We didn't have many confrontations with these people. Only when they complained to our brigade or battalion commanders that we weren't guarding them well enough, and that annoyed us. They didn't want to have a fence around them but said we weren't guarding them well enough. But no confrontations, there was no sense in that. We celebrated holidays with them occasionally.

### **Can you describe the place to me?**

The main thing the settlers receive from the army is electrical power. We had a generator. It used to fail every once in a while...

### **How much power did it generate?**

I don't know, but enough for the whole base.

### **How many soldiers were you?**

Around twenty, without reservists, and they numbered around fifteen, something like that. I don't recall exactly. The settlers used the power and the water tower.

### **The army's?**

We used the same water tower, but it's like the synagogue – the army brought it first. This settlement had a basically military ideology so we had a lot in common. They also used our escorts to travel in and out.

### **You have your own dining room?**

Yes, our own dining room and kitchen. They have their trailers.

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**They don't enter your dining room?**

No.

**You have your own recreation lounge?**

Yes, they didn't come into our area, it didn't interest them.

**Whose was the synagogue?**

Theirs, but it was all very close and small, not more than 500 meters from their end to ours. The synagogue was theirs but we had signed for it.

**And the generator was yours?**

Yes, and they would use it. But maybe I'm wrong. There were two generators... One burnt out. The other was theirs, in fact, but the fuel was ours. The army supplied them with fuel, too. There were two generators providing for everyone but the fuel came from the army. One generator was army issue, and the other I don't remember.

**The army one was burnt?**

No, theirs was.

**At some point the burnt generator was replaced?**

Yes. I think so. The fuel came in army tankers.

**Regularly?**

Yes. Every time it ran out, I called and asked for a supply, as the commander. A tanker would come along to supply fuel, and I don't remember whether the generators were separate because we needed one for us and one for the settlement, but I do remember that if they failed, both soldiers and settlers came along to see what happened.

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Testimony 43

**This kid continued to dance so he shot a rubber bullet in his stomach**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

When we were in training, at some point we were sent to enforce curfew in Yatta. Now Yatta is a village of I think some 100,000 inhabitants.

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### **Some village...**

Yes, or 70,000. And there were very few of us assigned there. Now, the way we did it was first thing we went in with vehicles and used megaphones to order them to shut down the shops and go back home [Note: standard IDF announcements are made in Arabic when enforcing curfew]. Finally we positioned ourselves somewhere, I think we closed off something like a street and a half, that was what we could manage logistically, and that was curfew in Yatta. Now, that street and a half really was under curfew, we sealed it completely, no one could leave their homes, and stones were being thrown. Now, for us this was the first time we were ever in this situation, it was very early on in our front line assignment, and there were stones thrown at us. Mostly by children. We fired massive amounts of rubber bullets and riot control devices, whatever. Once, one of our commanders saw some kid dancing, waving at him from a roof, and he aimed his weapon at the kid. In most cases the kids run, this kid kept on dancing. So he shot him with a rubber bullet in the stomach. The kid falls down, and they are standing there waiting for the kid to get up, and he says: "Oh no, I hope I didn't kill him." At some point they saw the kid, I don't know, he got up and left there bent over or something. But, bottom line I'm trying to remember highlights of that week and a half, because it really was like a shooting range for a week and a half.

### **What do you mean? A week and a half of demonstrations and disturbances?**

Yes, but not really disturbances, it's rather, I don't remember one moment of feeling actually threatened, that the stones really hit close. It was kids, it was from afar. But we fired riot control devices, tear gas, rubber bullets, and we didn't take aim, I don't know if anyone really aimed. Without wounding. Not many were wounded, it was essentially at long range. At the end of the day, it was kids from afar, so indeed the stones didn't reach us but neither did we reach them with the rubber bullets. It was a week and a half of disturbances. Again, as I told you, most of the incidents, we are talking about specific incidents because for most of my service I was on peripheral patrols, essentially what I did was eat at the Shani settlement and go out on patrol and harass Palestinians, check their IDs, and go out on arrests missions every now and again.

### **So why were their demonstrations specifically in that week and a half?**

Because we were in the village, we were inside Yatta.

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### **For a week and a half?**

Yes, even longer, the battalion was there for three weeks. We relieved the second group. It was after some shooting attack and what we were told was that curfew was imposed only on that area, in order to create intelligence. Now at some point we were there and had no idea what was happening, why we were there. At some point, the division commander arrived. I remember he came, sat over the maps for five minutes with the battalion commander and the curfew was lifted. He sat, they looked at maps, and we left. But we had been there for three whole weeks.

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Testimony 44

### **The fellow flew out of the jeep and rolled on the ground like some stiff**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2003

I had a thing in the auxiliary company with \*\*\*, when I was with him on the front command squad where he was a radioman. He'd caught some 17-year-old Palestinian, opened the back doors of the command vehicle.

#### **Who? The Palestinian?**

No, the jeep driver. Stood him up, sat him on his knees, shifted the four-wheel-drive vehicle to first gear, door open in the back, the Palestinian blindfolded and shackled, and then the driver hit the gas pedal, in first gear. The Palestinian simply flew out of that jeep like some stiff. Just rolled out, you know. He wasn't killed. I took off his blindfold and shackle, he was a bit hurt in the head. He was screaming, and ran back to the village.

#### **Why did they do this to him?**

He didn't do anything.

#### **Where was this?**

At the entrance to Dahariya. We were without the company commander, just myself and \*\*\*. He knew I wasn't, you know, so he said he wanted to leave me at the base, in Otniel, and finally he didn't...he let me stay in the car. He brought this person to the car, tied him up. After he was tied up and all, I'm sitting in the vehicle, suddenly I realize the guy's in back.

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The driver got in, slammed the gas pedal. After he stopped I got off to look and saw the Palestinian rolled up there. So I took off his shackles and blindfold. The truth is I said nothing to the company commander, and that was a mistake I regret to this day. I should have told him. The guy could have been killed. But that soldier, he's one of the worst ones I've run into. Not human.

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Testimony 45

## **Ordered them to unload a truck filled with gravel or sand**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2003

When I was already assigned to auxiliary company, before I went to squad commanders training course, we were positioned at a pillbox post near... what's that place called? They called it 840. I no longer remember where it was, but it was east of Yatta somewhere. And this pillbox post looks out on to the entrance of the village just across. Bottom line, it didn't do anything. And there was some story about a stone embankment put up there so [Palestinians] wouldn't be able to reach the village on tractors from the road, so they would break through the barriers every now and then. So often when we were, say, in the pillbox or we were out on patrol, I know that other commanders would do this, but my commander who is the present auxiliary company commander there, he would always make us stop a Palestinian vehicle, force its passengers off, and make them pick up rocks and put the barriers back together again.

### **Were they somehow connected to this?**

No.

### **Just as punishment?**

Yes. I was very much against this, yes, again, but he was the commander, I was his subordinate, he would tell them what to do. I couldn't say to them: Listen, don't do it. Often he made Arab trucks, Palestinian trucks carrying boulders, these huge limestone boulders, you know, each worth thousands or tens of thousands of shekels, I think, he made them take

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them down and use them to put the barriers back up. The Palestinians were told: "You broke through," even if it wasn't them at all...The soldiers didn't say anything, just ordered them to unload, say, a truck filled with gravel or sand, spill it out on the spot where the barrier had been breached.

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Testimony 46

## **He would be sent out to bring candy and stuff**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

### **So you get to Adoraim, what was it like there?**

It was all right. Still a bit of a shock at the start of our time there, seeing Arabs for the first time.

### **How old were you?**

How old was I? Eighteen and a half? Nineteen, almost. We began to get assignments, get the hang of things. Patrols, we had checkpoint duty, at Shim'a, we had to do an RR at Junction 123, on Route 60.

### **RR, what is that?**

Route reinforcement. Three soldiers and a commander are posted to places where Palestinian and settler traffic mixes, in order to prevent friction and secure the settlers, as well as making our presence felt, so we had to stand there and check people's IDs. (...) I think certain parts of Route 60 are open to Palestinian traffic. In that part it was. Much of it is open to Palestinians. There is a separation there between the southern and northern sectors. Anyone wanting to cross had to be checked – every group of people that seemed suspect according to the commander's judgment, which was often just arbitrary – was checked. We were not allowed to check women. Sometimes let's say we did check women, in spite of it being forbidden, because there were all kinds of...

### **Physically? Body search?**

No, not an actual search. We had to check their ID and detain some, all sorts of things. Eventually, as we were a rather small company, we began to go out on these assignments on our own, without commanders. That means three soldiers, hardly two months into this kind of service, on their own in

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this place. (...) At first, the soldier who seemed more responsible would be in charge. But in this company, within a few weeks this fell apart. It didn't work. Soldiers wanted to do as they pleased there, at the checkpoint. We had to get going, we were alerted there at the beginning. After a few days, or weeks, there were not enough vehicles in the battalion. It was a battalion new to the area, it didn't have a sufficient number of vehicles so we were told to patrol on foot. Namely, walking along the route, some fifteen minutes to the checkpoint. There was an abandoned house on the way. One of the times – our platoon, number one, replaced platoon number two – we entered this house to check what was there, and saw all kinds of munchies and Coke bottles and stuff. Then, when we got back to the company base, we asked the soldiers we kept replacing about this. They told us there's this Arab kid whom they send out to bring stuff from the shop. There was a shop nearby so they'd send him out to bring them things.

### **A Palestinian shop?**

Yes. They'd send him off to bring them candy and all sorts of things. They were bored. First they gave him money, nearly always. But by the time it got – Platoon 2 was known to be pretty extreme with rather stupid people – there was this case, no one made it public knowledge, but once they went out to this shop because the kid didn't come or I don't know what. They came to this shop, pointed a gun at the head of the storekeeper and said to him: Empty out – like it's a holdup – empty everything you have into a bag. And they took it. This is how they stored stuff there in that house, and then when we went by we simply saw it. Now, no one breathed a word. They wouldn't dare bring the stuff to our company base. The Coke and candy have Arabic writing on them. If one of the commanders or the company commanders would have seen this, they knew it wasn't acceptable so they hid it in that house. How often did they do it? I don't know. I know there was a lot of food over there. Not a huge stock, but a bag. I remember there was this holdup, and a huge bag got there. I don't believe everyone knew, but guys knew. Let's say this holdup specifically was known. Most soldiers knew. (...)

### **The guys who did this at the shop also did such things at checkpoints?**

I don't know, I wasn't with them at checkpoints. I have no idea. I believe these people, I mean I know what went on with them afterwards, I'll mention it in a second, but that's why I'm sure they were involved in other incidents, I don't even want to know (...) Beside what I said before about them robbing the guy, and I don't know what they did otherwise, they

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were really a dumb bunch. There were three guys there, three. Something really bad. Most of the people in this company were okay. There were a few rotten apples... The thing is, no one talked. Today, in hindsight I'm sure I would have talked and got them kicked out.

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Testimony 47

## **“You don't touch settlers, no matter what.”**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2006-2007

At Susiya, the main trouble was with settlers. I was there as a deputy company sergeant major. Not long ago, not for very long. Four months ago. I already know the stories. Say some lefties arrive, settlers don't let them through, and two minutes later the army produces a 'closed military zone' order and the lefties leave, right? It's always like that. I had soldiers in that situation, and once I got there with the front command team. I didn't go out on the ground too much, but I'd sit there with the war-room staff once in a while, we'd laugh around, hear all sorts of bullshit on the radio. Listen, I know about Maon Farms [outpost], they always mess around, go down, beat up the Arabs there. We were always told there that they...

### **Who told you?**

I have a good friend who keeps me informed about the place. He'll be discharged soon...

### **What did he tell you about Maon Farms?**

That they are always making trouble. Beating up Arab children on their way to school. You can't imagine the stories he's already told me about that place, how much he hates the settlers.

### **He was there the same time as you? 4 months ago?**

No, he's been there a lot, I don't know exactly. He used to tell me, every time. Let's say there are summer camps for the Arab kids, and they go, and the settler kids wait for them with stones, throw them at the kids and the soldiers keep having to come but they must not touch the settlers, only the Arabs.

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**That's what he told you? Who told them they weren't supposed to touch settlers?**

It's a standing order of the army. I know it, too.

**Where did you hear it?**

You know how many times I heard it in the army? How many times I heard it in Hebron?

**Who said it?**

Everyone, the commanders, everyone.

**Company commander? Battalion commander?**

Everyone. It's a well-known definition. Company commander: "You don't touch settlers, no matter what."

**Who do you touch?**

Arabs. That's our job. That's what he told us.

**That's what he told you: Our job is Arabs, not settlers?**

Yes.

**In what kind of situation did he say it?**

Plenty of situations. Now at leftie demonstrations, \*\*\* told me things about it. I heard about it in Hebron, do you know how many times we were told this?

**At briefings?**

Outpost briefing. We were told: "Listen, settlers, that's not your job. You're supposed to protect them, not harm them. Your duty is to protect them. If Arabs do anything, that's your job."

**And if settlers do anything?**

No, regardless. If the Arabs react to them, you have to do something.

**If a settler throws a stone at a Palestinian?**

I must not do anything.

**Summon the police?**

Nothing. You think I'd call the police? He'll say: "Good for him."

**That's what the company commander told you?**

Yes.

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## **And in the South Hebron Hills?**

\*\*\*, if you'll hear his stories, it'll blow your mind. \*\*\* tells me that on the way [to Maon Farms] the battalion commander tells him: "No matter what happens, you don't touch settlers. The settlers are not your job."

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Testimony 48

## **Kids come around at Purim, play around in the bunker**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001-2004

You can say it seems a little strange that we were in P'nei Hever since it's a post that's topographically inferior, and because of this, it was later closed. It was inferior both because of its means and because of its sanitation. It doesn't have strategic altitude and it's next to the settlement itself and in the settlement itself, like in every settlement, the children of the settlement walk around in the post itself. Because they know that it's permitted for the children of settlers to go into any place, which created a situation where kids came on Purim and played in the bunker. I definitely remember \*\*\* grabbing a kid by the ear because he went into the tent in the bunker and took out a grenade. A grenade! Everyone was going "happy holiday happy holiday", he comes, goes into the tent, it's a bit much... The intention is very nice and everything but I definitely remember things like that which I didn't like so much there. And of course you can't say anything to them.

### **Did someone try to say anything to them, talk about it with the commanders?**

Not that I know of.

Testimony 49

## **The police couldn't care less**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2006

(...) We were down in Susiya. Suddenly as we go down, we get a report that settlers are cutting down olive trees. That place near Route 60, where there's that exit always blocked towards Yatta where olive trees grow. You're at the Susiya Junction, left of there. After a while, there's this village to the right of the road, don't remember its name. Al Tawane. Right there, on the left. One day, we get this report that olive trees were cut down. I said: "What are they fucking about? Who's the maniac who'd do such a thing?" I went out there with the company. It was one month into our time there. We got there in our jeep. I couldn't believe something like that could be done. I said: "They must have cut down a few branches." We get there, and I see those trees all bare.

### **And settlers?**

No. We could have caught them. We just saw their vehicle ride off and knew exactly where to – the Carmel settlement close by. I was thinking: "What had they done, after all?" But I got off and had a shock. I said: "How can people..." I wanted to kill them. An appraiser came along with the army, the next day. I said: "What is this? People tend these trees for 30 years, I don't know how long."

### **How did the trees look?**

Terrible. Really cut through and through. Incredible. The next day I was there on patrol again. I went to the Arabs, said to them... "I understand you, I've got land too. I tell you, if someone did this to me, I'd go off and carry out a terrorist attack the same day." And he says: "What, you're telling me to..." I said: "No, I'm not telling you to do it, but I'm telling you I'd be just as pissed off as you." They were already fighting each other about what should be done. I told the commander: "If I get hold of the guy who did this I'll beat the hell out of him." Let him fight Arabs as much as he wants, why hurt the trees? Poor trees. The commander says: "There's nothing we can do..."

The army sent appraisers to estimate damages. It's inestimable, really. The police only came the next day. We reported to the war-room. The war-

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room passed it on to Hebron police. That got there only the next day.

**You reported it, saw it, and left?**

We saw it. What can you do at night? Get pissed off. They did the cutting in the evening. I was really pissed off, I said: fuck him, I was all nerves. It really got me. I went back there the next day. There were appraisers, one of them told me: "I estimate the damages," and so on and so on. I asked: "How can you? You think you can estimate this as simply the price of a tree? These people have been tending it for 30 years. It's worth 20 times more than what you think." "No, I checked with the nursery," he says. I cracked up when I heard it. I said: "Obviously you're no farmer, you haven't the faintest idea. Talk to the Arab man, these trees are like his children." He goes: "Nothing we can do about it. That's the way it is."

**The police came the next day while you were there?**

Yes. The police couldn't care less. They noted stuff. That such and such damage was done. And they left. I'm telling you they couldn't care less. They said "okay", wrote it down, and that's it, they left. The police in Hebron is good for one thing only: to stand by at leftie demonstrations, wait for the 'closed military zone' order, and that's it.

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Testimony 50

**This is no longer a demonstration of presence, it's called something else**

**Unit:** Nahal Brigade **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2004

**Were you called to the Territories during basic training?**

No. We were on settlement security shifts, I was posted at Adora. Nothing besides that. One thing. We weren't called, but I think it was our first event. There was an operation called "short fuse". Our deputy company commander initiated it on a Saturday I think, or some Friday afternoon. At the Jinba hamlet, a Bedouin encampment near the brigade training base. Briefing, alert, carefully chosen task force, the works. Nonsense of mid-basic training, a month and a half into army service.

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**All of you were excited, I assume.**

Yes, at first. They didn't talk to us about it, it was this hush-hush thing. All the serious guys were taken, we were placed in some commander's room, first time we'd ever been there, we were shown a briefing on the company commander's computer, boost our egos and stuff. Anyway, something really stupid, about something that was stolen from one of the hilltops out there. So our mission was a demonstration of presence. I don't know exactly.

**Did they say explicitly 'demonstration of presence'?**

No, not in so many words. Although we heard that often in our service, 'demonstration of presence'!

**They said that, but?**

Someone asked, is this a 'demonstration of presence'? So they said it's not really called that anymore. It's got a different name now. I don't remember.

**Was there a standard name given to this kind of demonstration of presence?**

Sense of security, something like that.

[...]

No, it was permanent. But we very often heard this idea of a demonstration of presence. We didn't really register that it was no longer in use.

**So what is "short fuse"?**

Enter the (Palestinian) encampment and search it all, take everything out. We were really new and had no idea what this was. We hadn't even done our M-16 training week.

**Not practiced firing yet?**

No. We had target practice but had no skills at all yet. We had no idea what it meant to detain a person, to handcuff him. We had no idea. We had never pointed a weapon at anyone. Anyway, it was just to mess up that encampment and look for army gear, like sweaters...

**Did you find sweaters?**

We found "scabies" blankets [army-issue wool blankets] and took them, and some ammo crate, metal. There were army issue things there just like in any Israeli home. Maybe one jacket, I don't know.

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**You took their blankets?**

Yes. We took those. That's something that happens every day in the Territories. Very often.

**How many blankets?**

A few. Maybe ten, or eight. Something like that.

**How many people were in this encampment?**

That was a big encampment. Several families live there in tents. No, it was a real operation, half a day of searching. Hours. And making them all stand aside, separate the men from the women. And it's Bedouin, it's not like...

**You came there in daytime or at night?**

Daytime. Friday, noon.

**You were briefed and on your way?**

Yes, in time to get back for Sabbath procedure. That's what I remember. It started around ten o'clock in the morning. Something like that.

**Who was the commander?**

Our deputy company commander. We were briefed. There were two squad commanders and a platoon commander too.

**At the briefing you were told you were going to separate the men from the women?**

No, it's the officers, the deputy company commander and platoon commander who did that. And the squad commanders perhaps. But we had no idea. We were told what to do but we had no idea yet what it meant.

**What were you told?**

To give cover, this, that. We had not had any urban warfare training yet.

**Giving cover is very general. Naturally you have to give cover.**

Yes. Anyway, we had no idea what we were doing. We were told on the spot: you keep watch over this. We were in these buddy teams. No, maybe we had some kind of practice beforehand.

**Did you know what the encampment looked like?**

No. You can't know. It's Bedouin, one big mess.

**The tent is immediately messed up?**

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Everyone is ordered out. You go one tent after another, there are some three groups of tents, and everyone is taken outside, all the women here, all the men there, going from tent to tent with someone, like you do in the Territories. Walking along with a local and actually pulling and throwing stuff out of closets.

**Are these tents or tin shanties?**

Sort of half-half. Shanties improvised with all kinds of cloth sheets.

**How did the people behave?**

They seemed a bit in shock, it's not something that happens to them every week. But they gave us no trouble or anything.

**Did anyone check IDs?**

We may have checked IDs. The talk about this mission – I remember this was the part that bothered me – was that because there was no separation fence in this part of the South Hebron Hills at the time, terrorists take shelter in the area, there's that danger. And the point was to make sure no one was hiding out there. But practically speaking it was a mission, our superiors mixed it all up into one mass and that was our mission. Both responding to the theft of military gear and checking for terrorists. Both operational objectives and totally non-operational ones.

**What's non-operational?**

Checking whether there were any army jackets in there. What's operational about that?

**Were you told to look for jackets or for ammunition, weapons?**

No, weapons were not mentioned. We knew the point was stolen metals.

**Didn't it seem strange?**

No, we were even arguing when we came back whether it was right or wrong. That it's not right for them to steal metals. Often as a soldier you try to justify what you're doing because you don't really think about whether you should be doing this at all. You say: "Wow, it's wrong for them to do that," or like the stuff you do with the police, like what we spoke about regarding the Jordan Valley. There is a lot of military activity which is actually police work. So there are lots of things you justify, saying: "Good thing I did that, because they are out of line." As a young man you don't give it a second thought.

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**What were the opinions in that argument? Some said it was all right, or not?**

Yes, whether it was right for us to be doing that. I don't think we even gave a thought to...

**Administratively?**

No, value-wise. If it was right to trash their home just to bring in that military gear and deter them.

**What did you do with the gear?**

Nothing.

**Did you use it?**

It was probably trashed. Old woolen blankets.

**Were there snow suits? At least that.**

No, it was really bullshit. I mean, what are those old flea-bag blankets? Is there a shortage of those anywhere? Bullshit. But the interesting thing is that it's this story that came up, as if it really...

**Wait, we're just getting started.**

Yes, but it's really like an antithesis, we weren't even thinking whether what we were doing was even legal. It was only that we were uneasy in the situation, getting people out of their dwelling like that, rummaging around in their stuff. We were a bit in shock from that.

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Testimony 51

**Some fifteen tractors just stood there, that were confiscated**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002

There was also this one time when we were still at an early phase of our training, when in order to solve the problem of barrier breaches by the Palestinians, the battalion commander instructed us to go, sent out the patrols, and they collected a lot of tractors at the entrance to Susiya. I don't know, some fifteen tractors just stood there, that were confiscated from the Palestinians.

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### **What did they do with the tractors?**

Eventually they were returned to the Palestinians. I imagine that it wasn't some order handed down from...

### **Was there an order to pick up tractors?**

To collect tractors.

### **Where was this checkpoint?**

It wasn't a checkpoint. They were picked up at Susiya, the patrols collected them.

I imagine some of them were seen breaking through the barriers, because bottom line, the patrols didn't go into the villages. Some of them worked, let's say a lot of times the Palestinians really, their wheel loaders would work beyond the barriers. So they would just be picked up. Like, they didn't catch you doing it now, but you definitely did it earlier.

### **How long were the tractors held up?**

A few days, I think, or maybe even one day. I remember it was like a day or two that the post was surrounded by wheel loaders.

### **Who gave the order?**

I think it came from the battalion commander, but again, I was just a private so I have no idea who gave it.

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Testimony 52

## **It was very convenient to apply violence to a shackled person**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2001-2004

### **Are you familiar with this phenomenon of detainees at the sentry post? I mean detainees placed there by soldiers who had arrested them...**

Often detainees arrested at night would be held as a 'stop over' at the army post. Whether they need to be checked by a doctor – the doctor goes on rounds of the detainees at least once a night, between posts and

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detainees, so a lot of times they waited for the doctor – or they waited for the Shin Bet vehicle to pick them up, or whatever else. They were detained there. Not necessarily at the sentry post, sometimes in other places. They were also given some of their basic needs. They were not detained there for more than four hours. The most I remember is maybe five, six hours which was a brigade operation where they arrested more than fifty people. The whole brigade, nine battalions, every company had five detainees, indulging themselves over a whole neighborhood, arresting fifty people, it just took time to clear out everything... There isn't any other way to do it. They brought a Safari just to take out detainees. If you are asking if they raised a hand at specific detainees when they waited at the sentry post or nearby? I can't say. I didn't. I can say it was very convenient to apply violence to the guy. Bound, inside the sentry post, out of the commander's sight. Naturally a guy waiting outside for three, four hours needs to pee. Especially if they catch him in the middle of the night...In most cases they would tie their hands in front, release the plastic binding and let them pee. They wouldn't always do that procedure and would just say to them – piss. It was a bit of a gray area. But whenever they took them to the side to pee it would be in the presence of a soldier or two.

**Wait, but what does that mean? They didn't take off the binding and told him to piss, what does that mean? That he should piss in his pants?**

Yes.

**And do you remember instances where that happened, where a detainee needed so badly to pee and the soldiers wouldn't remove the shackles so they just let him piss himself in his pants?**

I recall a few people who pissed their pants. I also remember a few people... [suffering from] performance anxiety. Their blindfold wasn't removed. You don't need to see where you pee you just need your hands. So a lot of people... performance anxiety. They weren't able to pee, as much as they needed to, in the presence of a rifle pointing at them. I can't say that it's simple to pee in a situation like that... you aren't relaxed enough. It's tough.

Testimony 53

## **All sorts of kids stand there holding stones**

**Unit:** Karakal Battalion **Rank:** Lieutenant **Year:** 2008

By the end of that week we – me and the other girls with me – were no longer clear about whom we were guarding from whom, it became... We took our guard duty very neutrally. We were told this was the boundary; no one was to cross it. So we took it to mean that no one from the Palestinian village could cross there.

### **Were there incidents?**

All the children.

### **And adults?**

Not adults. But there was this incident on Shavuot [Feast of Weeks] about which we got only news: on the eve of the holiday, settlers went down to the village and beat up people there, and one woman was hospitalized even. Shocking.

### **That happened at Susiya?**

Yes.

### **And you read about it in the news? But you were there during that holiday.**

Yes, but they must have gotten out from the other side.

### **You didn't notice?**

They did not take the usual route. But all kinds of kids stand there holding a stone or a stick waiting for us to turn our backs, I don't know why. We told them to go away.

### **The Jewish children?**

Yes. It was mostly the children. I was really sad because until then I always thought that if there is any hope for this world at all, it lies with the children. And there you see five- or six-year-old's who cannot even dream of a different reality. It was very saddening.

### **You stand guard duty and see the children come to the post? Do they**

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**bypass it?**

They come on their bikes, try to bypass, checking us out, checking our boundaries, whether we'll let them cross or not. They advise us to throw stones the way the previous soldiers did. You don't know whether they're lying to you or not, but...

**The Jewish children are telling you to throw stones?**

Yes. Stones. At the shepherds. Children.

**How old?**

Five, six, seven, twelve – all ages.

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Testimony 54

**Using stun grenades at night**

Unit: Lavi Battalion Rank: First Sergeant Year: 2002

**Were the incursions into villages made with a very specific purpose – an arrest, an inspection – or would you sometimes go in just for the sake of entering?**

There were patrols. Demonstrations of presence. There are places I remember even at 2 a.m., I recall going in with the tactical team, with the second company commander in the back and the company commander in front with the driver. The company commander handed me a stun grenade: "Here." Two in the morning, in the middle of the street.

**And ordered you to throw it?**

Yes, for practice. The objective was to make our presence felt.

**Meaning what?**

Driving at certain times of day, and night, at points X,Y,Z and display high intensity. Sometimes among other things, this includes using stun grenades at night, or firing blanks in certain places, not in the middle of the village, but like...to demonstrate presence.

**So they'll know you are there.**

If it's right or not right to do it...I think that's the thing lowest on the list...

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## **What is first on the list?**

Violence, degradation, humiliating human dignity.

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Testimony 55

## **We were told: “No Arab vehicle travels this road”**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2004

We had checkpoints but not permanent ones. I mean they were fixed but not anything like Qalandiya.

### **There aren't enough people in the South Hebron Hills for a checkpoint like Qalandiya.**

Yes. But they tried anyway. So it was basically because...I often asked what the point of the checkpoint was that we were manning. What was that stinking checkpoint called? Come on...Shim'a. The Shim'a checkpoint. Next to the Shim'a settlement. We were often told it was for the settlers' sake. And we had, throughout our service, very often on our patrols we had to make a check-post once or twice on the road, to create a temporary roadblock. But Shim'a was a permanent checkpoint. Now at Shim'a, there was no possibility for a real security check. There were four soldiers there, and there really wasn't any way to inspect trucks or tractors or actually any other vehicle. And once I asked the battalion commander, when I was already a commander, he came by in the jeep and I said to him: "Tell me what's the idea [behind this]? If I can't inspect a truck, then what's the point of this checkpoint?" So he says: "I'll look into it," and he came back after like two hours and said: "Great, any vehicle that you cannot inspect, doesn't cross into Shim'a." So I started turning trucks around. Turn around meaning that they would go to Tarqumiya. I don't know what the distance is between Shim'a and Tarqumiya, but it's at least an hour and a half, two hour drive. And in cases they would say to me: "That's not right, Tarqumiya is already closed now, I can't cross now at Tarqumiya." But I was in the logic of soldier and commander and I said: "If my duty is security, I'm going to make it security." Really not a flattering thing. There were those who came in pickup trucks and I would say to them... there was one guy who came in a van, and the van was loaded with equipment and I said to him: "Go to Tarqumiya." He said: "There is no way I'm going to Tarqumiya,

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I'll fall asleep on the road." I said to him: "The second option is we lay everything out now." I said to him: "I'm telling you honestly, I can't inspect any other way than spreading out everything." He said: "Spread it all out." Ok, we spread it all out, it took like two and a half, three hours I think.

**What did he have there?**

Nonsense. It was an Arab Israeli.

**He was an Arab Israeli?**

Yes.

**With a blue [Israeli] ID card?**

Yes.

**So why couldn't he cross?**

Because inspection is inspection, he was arriving from inside the Territories. Carrying Palestinian goods. So again, I did have the attitude of yes, trying to be ok, so you know, I said to him for example: "You can sit down." I asked him if he wanted a drink of water. Of course he refused. And that's it, that story took a couple of hours, three hours he stood there looking at us. After that, he managed a permit and was allowed passage. OK, another story.

**You prepared them in advance?**

I swear to you I haven't, it just pops up, I start thinking and I remember all of a sudden. Actually if there is something that I've done since my discharge from the army it's to try and not think about it too much, not to think about the things I was a part of.

**Regarding Shim'a, do settlers cross at that checkpoint?**

Yes. Everyone needs to do it. Yes, they have to wave. Sometimes we would stop them, say 'hello'.

**Legally, they also have pickup trucks and a blue ID card.**

Do you want me to respond as \*\*\* the soldier or \*\*\* the normal human being?

**Both.**

As a regular person, \*\*\* it's clear, this is an apartheid state, it's not surprising. Route 60 was closed to Palestinian traffic. There were days it was even closed to traffic of Arab-Israeli vehicles, where they said to them:

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"No Arab vehicle can go on the road. "There – how didn't I think of it – and it was totally out of bounds for Palestinian traffic. It was even forbidden for them to cross from Yatta to Hebron, you understand? Localities like Yatta and Samo'a were totally closed. They didn't open up to anywhere because all of Route 60 was surrounded by blockades and they couldn't leave from there. They would break through the barriers.

### **There weren't any side roads?**

There were times like during the hudna (ceasefire), let's say, where they were allowed passage at the Sheep Junction during certain hours. So they crossed. If they were allowed, they crossed.

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Testimony 56

## **Our battalion commander slapped some kid**

**Unit:** Lavi Battalion **Rank:** First Sergeant **Year:** 2002-2004

It was like, the thing about slaps and stuff like that, it's something that you can't even put your finger on. It would happen, again, a lot less when I was a commander, but as a private I encountered it quite a few times. The first time I saw this I think was when our battalion commander slapped some kid just because he was walking around at night while Yatta was under curfew. Some kid just walked by on the street, the battalion commander grabbed him, slapped him, and told him: go home. It was a hard slap. Just a ten-year-old kid. It made me sick, already back then, instinctively...

### **And from then on everyone would slap people around?**

No, I don't think it came to that. It wasn't common, but it did happen. And when it did, no one really cared. I didn't encounter someone who was really hit. There were the bullies, but I didn't get to see them. There was one, the company commander's radio man. He was a sadistic shit. He had this thing, really, he was a terribly sadistic settler. He would always drive, say they handcuffed someone, they put him in handcuffs and blindfolded him, this guy would drive and slam on the brakes so the detainees in back would slam into the seat. He would always do stuff like that. He would beat them up and stuff, I don't know. That one was definitely like that. There were those who did it but again, from the moment that I became a

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commander then not anymore, except for a soldier here and there, really things I wasn't able to prevent, I wouldn't allow it. But it did happen. I would hear about it all the time, I was witness to it more when I was a soldier, but it wasn't something on every patrol with every Palestinian and everything, it's the reality of it. It was like the reality of, I don't know, at some point it was done with the same freedom as I don't know, a father beats his son. Like they were just not accountable to anyone. That's what they felt they needed to do at that moment and that was it. (...) Yes, for the most part yes. Because again, the complacency was total. Professionalism, at least when I was a commander, was shocking. It was terrible. Because nothing happens, it's hard to internalize discipline for the once in a blue moon when... when someone gets hit with a bullet or dies or because of the once in a while that...that it's – it wasn't anything substantial enough to get the soldiers to sense any kind of tension. So that, too. It's also a reflection of the fact that they were bored so things like this would happen, they were looking for action everywhere they could. Both commanders and the battalion commander himself.

### **Everyone was looking for action?**

Of course, they were totally bored. At the end of the day, the battalion commander needs to prove himself. And how can he do that? First he needs, you know, for the settlers to like him, so there need to be all kinds of floating [surprise] checkpoints, demonstrations of presence, so they'll see us. Put up checkpoints at points that place us in some danger, things like that. Beyond that, there's also initiated operations.

### **What did the operations include?**

Inspections, really like patrols either in vehicles or on foot, actually inside Area A. Once there was a real entry, serious entry on a regular basis into certain towns like Dura or Dahariya. I think that's about it. I don't know how many of those actions were just out of boredom and how many were, I don't know, arrest missions and planned incursions.

