

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Soldiers' Testimonies from Hebron 2008-2010

... I'll tell you that within a very short time I began to feel that I was much busier protecting Arabs from the Jewish settlers than protecting Jewish settlers from the Arabs.

How is that manifested on the ground?

I don't know what Hamas does inside Hebron, but whenever there was tension in the mixed neighborhoods, or mixed streets, I never witnessed a situation where Arabs harassed Jews. I mean, there was no violence on the part of Arabs, they didn't harass the Jews. I think this was mainly out of fear. Because whoever was there before us handled them very roughly. The Jews, however, would really drive the Arabs crazy. They'd throw diapers full of shit into their gardens, throw their garbage into their yards. If an Arab kid was walking in the street and ran into three Jewish kids, they would beat him up or just harass him and all. There were lots of such harassments.

Breaking the Silence

This booklet contains the testimonies of about 40 Israeli soldiers who served in the city of Hebron between 2008 and 2010. With this collection, we aim to portray the military occupation in Hebron during periods of “normalcy”, of which an understanding is of utmost importance. In the absence of political prospects, the occupation in Hebron and other locations operates as a stable rule, itself unlimited in time, yet exacting severe limitations on those Palestinians who are forced to live under it.

Background

Hebron is one of the largest Palestinian cities in the West Bank, with a Palestinian population of approximately 175,000. In addition, about 750 Israeli settlers live in Hebron, a fact which greatly influences the character of military rule in the city. Since 1997, the city has been divided into two asymmetric sectors – H1 and H2. H1 includes about 80% of the city's area and is under Palestinian rule, while the remainder of the city, H2, is under direct Israeli rule. Tens of thousands of Palestinians live in H2, the sector which also contains the Israeli settlements. The impetus for settlement in Hebron is principally religious – Hebron is home to the Cave of the Patriarchs, the burial place of the three forefathers and three of the fore-mothers according to the Biblical tradition.

Protecting the Israeli population of the city constitutes a complex military task. More than 30 Israeli citizens have been murdered in the city since the founding of the settlement during Passover in the spring of 1968, and 17 members of Israeli security forces have been killed there since September 2000. The crowded, urban setting greatly complicates efforts to protect Hebron's Israeli population. In addition, Hebron is populated by some of the most violent and extreme settlers, who also serve as catalysts for the violence in the city. These factors define the experience of the soldiers who testify in this booklet.

In order to understand Hebron today, we must return to the mid-90s, to Purim in late February 1994. On that day, Baruch Goldstein entered the Cave of the Patriarchs and murdered 29 Palestinians while they were praying, wounding an additional 120. The massacre greatly influenced the dynamic between Palestinians and Israelis, while also bringing about a completely new conception of security dominant still today, based on the “Principle of Separation”. In accordance with this principle, the settlers who live in the center of the city near the Cave of the Patriarchs “enjoy” near complete segregation from their Palestinian neighbors. This is implemented by placing severe restrictions on Palestinian movement in various ways, including the complete

prohibition of Palestinian vehicular traffic on certain roads, the closure of hundreds of shops by military orders, and even the closure of roads to Palestinian pedestrians, forcing them to find creative routes to their own homes. The “Principle of Separation” changed the face of the Hebron's Old City – thousands of Palestinians have left the center of the city in recent decades, leaving a ghost town behind. Yet this principle is not the only determinant of the city's character today. The direct military rule in an urban setting over thousands of residents who do not desire this rule also plays a major role in defining the city's character. This necessitates a form of control which relies on a constant show of military presence, in order to deter the local population from challenging the existing regime. Of course, this sort of military authority does not (and cannot) distinguish between a Palestinian who seeks to harm Israeli civilians or soldiers, and a Palestinian who simply lives in the area under Israeli rule. Therefore, all Palestinians who live in the areas surrounding the Jewish settlement are privy to recurring and random night inspections conducted by the military, with the aim of maintaining the sense of control over the Palestinian population and the sense of security for the settlers in the city.

Beyond this, the settlers play an active role in defining the dynamic between residents of the Old City, as well. Near daily occurrences of abuse of the Palestinian population by settlers, including humiliation and physical attacks, are part and parcel of the lives of those Palestinians who still live in H2. Even worse, twisted norms of law enforcement in which two different populations are subject to two different sets of laws – one military and one civilian – creates a situation of selective law enforcement at best, and complete lack of law enforcement over the residents of the Jewish settlement at worst.

At the edges of this booklet, one can see a new phenomenon, one which was not expressed in earlier years – the unarmed Palestinian struggle against the occupation, often joined by Israeli activists. The soldiers in this booklet also testify about these protests, and the military's methods for dealing with them.

Hebron since 2008


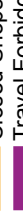
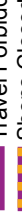
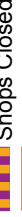
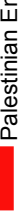


This booklet is the third published by Breaking the Silence about Hebron. The first described the experiences of soldiers serving during the Second Intifada, who went on to found Breaking the Silence after their discharge from the army. The second described the years following the Intifada (2005-2007), and portrayed the transition from control over a population during a period of combat and violence to control over

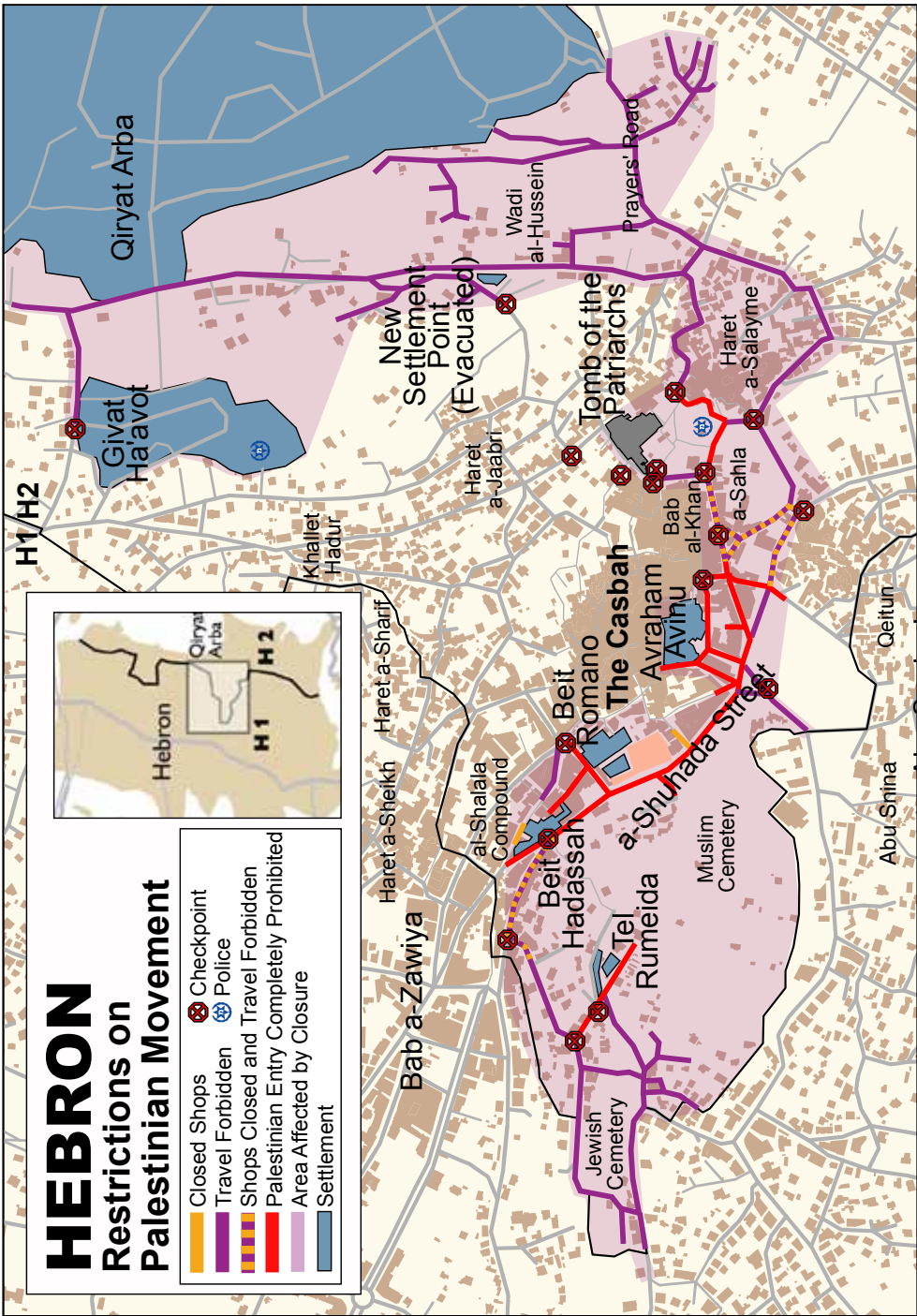
a population which does not present much opposition. The present booklet contains testimonies from the closing years of the last decade, 2008 to 2010, years in which the city has become completely absorbed into the method of control over it to the point that it is difficult to perceive any intent for change anytime in the foreseeable future. It is difficult to remember a more calm period in Hebron from a security perspective. Even the more significant incidents in recent years, like the evacuation of the "Disputed House" (a Jewish settlement point which was erected between Kiryat Arba and the Cave of the Patriarchs), and attempts at terrorist attacks inside Hebron, stand out as exceptions in a city which has maintained relative quiet. Many Israeli commentators advertise this quiet in order to prove just how much the situation in Hebron, and the Occupied Territories overall, has improved. Israeli society, fed by these commentators, is sure that its sons and daughters are being sent to a city which operates properly. It is against this backdrop that we publish this booklet, with the aim of portraying daily life in Hebron when things are "quiet".

It is imperative, and especially during such a period, for Israeli society to heed the voices of its soldiers. The stories included here are told from the point of view of soldiers who served in the field, and they constitute a call to Israeli society to turn its attention toward the troubling reality in its own backyard. We must understand the significance of our actions and the responsibility we have toward their impact, internalizing the fact that when one digs deeper beyond the perception of "quiet" in Hebron, one finds the harsh reality of military rule.

HEBRON

Restrictions on Palestinian Movement

-  Closed Shops
-  Travel Forbidden
-  Shops Closed and Travel Forbidden
-  Palestinian Entry Completely Prohibited
-  Area Affected by Closure
-  Settlement
-  Checkpoint
-  Police



Testimony no. 1, 2008

There's nothing we can do about it

Another event I remember well took place while I stood guard at the post on a Saturday and it was...It's exactly at the point where Jews and Arabs travel along the same road. An Arab woman came from one direction. A young Jew – I'm not even sure he was from Hebron – with those side curls and skullcap and all, comes along and spits in her face. And this was all during the period when we weren't allowed to do anything. I yelled at him: "What are you doing? What do you think you're doing?" And he says, of course: "You'll see, you'll find out." She proceeded to the Cave of the Patriarchs. He also went in the same direction. I reported it to the Border Police, of course, because they have more authority than we do with civilians, but nothing happened. I wasn't even allowed to touch the kid, not detain him, nothing.

What are you allowed to do?

Basically I could detain him, but what does that mean? If I say "Stop!" and he continues walking? He walked right on.

Did you speak about this with your officers?

I did.

And what did they say?

There's nothing we can do about it. At some point we were given a real okay to detain them. To really detain them.

To catch them?

Yes. If I could have back then, I would have. I was so annoyed. I couldn't understand how a person could do this. It's unreal.

When you did have permission to detain them, were there such cases?

I didn't myself do it but I heard of some. When I was in the war-room I did once call an officer to go out to a site.

To a place where soldiers detained civilians?

One of them. At the 4-5 army post. There was some incident. A settler kicked the mute woman's child. Ever heard about the mute woman? There's this mute woman at 4-5, she can't speak. Her son Ahmad was this mischievous child. When a settler walked by he'd go: "Fuck you..." Of course to... Then the settler kicked him, so he [the settler] was detained.

Didn't the police show up?

What could they do about it?

Testimony no. 2, 2010

He went ahead and did what he did

The front command, the company commander... they were always talking about how they would beat up Palestinians for fun, the whole time. Both on their patrols and... It was a constant, but there was one story that became 'the main event' for me on the ground... One day we were alerted. An announcement came through on the loudspeakers: "Front command group to David [army jeep]!" We all jumped up, began to load up gear, the medic and I were there, preparing, and the company commander opened his office door, came out and said: "Get out of here, only *** and me are going." He told me to take down the gear and go as I was. He wasn't wearing his [bulletproof] vest or anything, just his weapon and uniform. We drove to "Pharmacy", the checkpoint there. There were two, three children there who wouldn't go through the metal detector. We stopped, the commander got off, took a kid inside the alley.

One of the kids who wouldn't go through the metal detector?

Yes. And then he [the commander] went ahead and did what he did.

What was that?

There was... I recall – it's etched in my mind like a movie – he faced the kid, the kid was close to the wall, he stood facing him, looked at him for a second, and then choked him with the... held him this way with his elbow.

Against the wall?

Choked him against the wall. Then the kid went berserk, the commander was yelling at him the whole time, screaming and screaming at him in Hebrew, not in Arabic. Then he let go, the kid raised his hands to wipe his tears, and the commander went *boom!* so the kid lowered his hands to stop rubbing his eyes. He left them hanging at the sides of his body. Then the slapping started. Slap, slap, slap, slap... Incessant hitting, and constant yelling. Then the kid began to really scream out, it sounded scary so people started to come out and gather around the checkpoint, peeking into the alley, and I remember the commander coming out and telling them: "Everything's fine." Then he yelled at the kid: "Stay here, don't go anywhere!" He came out, told them everything was fine, called the squad commander at the checkpoint, and stood facing the kid, saying: "They have to be treated in such-and-such a way." Then he

gave the kid another two slaps and let him go. It was an insane thing. I remember sitting in the vehicle, watching this and thinking: "I waited for this situation for three years. From the moment I enlisted. I enlisted in order to stop such things, and here I am doing nothing, choosing to do nothing. Am I okay with this?" And I remember answering myself: "Yes, I'm fine with this. He's hitting an Arab and I'm doing nothing about it." I was really aware of the fact that I wasn't doing anything because I was really scared of that company commander. What? Should I jump off the jeep and tell him he should stop, that what he was doing was stupid?

How old was the kid?

A teenager. Not 18. Like 13, 14, 15 years old.

And how long did this go on?

The hitting? I don't remember.

10 minutes? An hour?

It wasn't... Something like 10 minutes of hitting. Then he called the squad commander in.

The squad commander at the checkpoint?

10, 15 minutes. Then he got in the jeep and rode off.

And tell me, did you happen to speak about this with anyone, with another officer, even with friends?

I remember when we came back to our post, everyone disembarked and I was ... I got off, went into my room where the whole platoon was, and said: "Listen, you wouldn't believe what a crazy thing just happened, he [the commander] just started hitting." That's it.

Didn't they say anything?

The point is, me and the deputy company commander were on really good terms, I spoke with him about it after he was discharged, and after I'd been transferred to the brigade training base. I told him about it and he said, already as a civilian: "Why didn't you tell me? You know we would have done something about it. You know we would never have let that pass." That's the way it is.

Testimony no. 3, 2008

They're supposed to feel totally safe

Describe Shuhada Street for me, the main drag.

First of all, visualize walking up from the Cave of the Patriarchs, nearly all along – first you've got the large cemetery on your left, and further up the small cemetery, also on your left. On your right, almost at the end, you've got Palestinian homes, covered with chicken wire. Further up, there's our outpost and after that you arrive at the Beit Hadassah compound. In the middle there's Gross Square, with a sort of large pillbox army post in the middle. That's the visual description. Of course, it's not a bustling street, there is only the occasional vehicle or two, occasional pedestrians but never Palestinians. I'll make this more broad and say that apparently also never Arabs, for fear that they're actually Palestinians.

Are there people still living in houses on this street?

Yes, but there's only an exit in the direction of the Casbah, and even there, on the doors there's graffiti that shows the Star of David or says "Death to Arabs" and things like that. But those doors are no longer in use. Some of them used to be shops, others entrances to houses that are now blocked. That's it. Only Jews can go on that street. There's no chance. It's only on extremely rare occasions or in cases that actually shouldn't have happened, that Palestinians end up there. They don't go past 4-5 Post, no way. That's it. It's a Jews-only road, and they're supposed to feel totally safe there. I don't think there's much more to add, but it's problematic because even in the part which is supposed to be used by both Jews and Arabs, in actuality that section is divided by these iron barriers designating the part of the road that Palestinians are supposed to go on, ridiculously narrow compared to the part where the Jews can go. That's it, that's the road.

Testimony no .4, 2008-2010

A kid at the briefings

In your time out there, did the settlers living inside the base enter through the same gate [as the soldiers]?

Yes. One of the problems was that a third, fourth grader would always be standing around during our briefings, with a [bulletproof] vest and a toy gun. You should see this some time. Every single day. He comes to the briefings all ready, with a vest, knee-guards, wearing a huge helmet, stuff the army gave him, and a toy gun, standing there with all the soldiers. He knows everything by heart.

So children hang out inside the army base?

That's it. I suppose that... Yes, they hang out there. Not all the time, but yes. They do pass through. If we're playing volleyball and one of them happens to come along, he joins the game. The Chabad people, too, for them it's like South America [where they do religious outreach]. Soldiers come back from their shift, totally dead, finished. And these guys come in: "What's up, bro'? How are you?" and then, "Why don't you come in, read something?" With former youth movement members [from secular backgrounds] it's a bit more difficult, but I can see how it works, you know? It's a freezing night, and along comes this Chabad guy with his guitar...

Testimony no. 5, 2010

Illegal demonstration

Saturdays they'd always come around, always at noontime. These guys would come stand in front of Gate No. 1, the crossing point between the Jewish and Arab sections of the city, sing some chants, hold up some signs. Usually there was a small-to-medium percentage of [Israeli] leftists. I mean, there were demonstrations when they weren't there at all, and sometimes there were these groups of "anarchists", as they were called. I never really got into definitions, I didn't care, but mostly Israelis, and a larger number of tourists from all over the world – there were Japanese, some Irish, lots of people, and one Arab who would always show up, he was there both as a sort of organizer, and also so they would hear someone chanting [slogans] in Arabic.

Sometimes there would be kids, Arab kids, they'd enjoy being let out at the last moment, and everyone would be happy, and sometimes more people came along, but that also died out. At first they were more numerous, but at a certain point I think they got tired of it, they're aware that our battalions keep being replaced, so they'd come at first to show themselves, be seen, make their impression, and since a new battalion is in, lots of people come to demonstrate. And after a while, there wouldn't be anyone left. On Nakba Day¹ the demonstration was a bit larger, more people came and brought balloons, and that's it. There were no demonstrations during Ramadan.

Were you okay with this, or was there something special? What happens?

We come, close off the area. At first they would stand almost at the gate, then we said: "Let's move them a bit further off so they won't touch the gate, won't get too close, to avoid trouble." Then at some point we'd just go in. Same size of force assigned to the [settlers'] patrol [in the Casbah], only all front command groups would show up at the demonstration anyway because it's the most interesting thing happening there on a Saturday.

Why is it interesting? What goes on there?

Because there's something to watch. Like, you stand there, waiting for them to chant, until they give up and leave. Sometimes they would make a fuss a bit longer, leave and then come back 20 minutes later, so again you have to show up there and it's a bother. For us it was pointless pestering, it meant having to spend a long time on this hot, crowded road. Most of the time doing nothing. At some point – I don't know what brought on the shift in attitude – but it was decided we were going to detain all the Jews, the Israelis. Because they were the only ones we had any basis for stopping, they entered enemy territory and that's against the law. They also come by way of all sorts of crossings, not through the IDF checkpoints, stuff like that. They come close enough. It's very simple to get to the Territories around there. So at some point they decided to detain them – the Israelis – so we would sort of block them, and we'd say: "This is an illegal demonstration." Then at some point the square became included, the junction would be neutralized and they couldn't be in it, so as not to hamper traffic, and to keep the demonstration under control.

Why was the demonstration illegal?

I don't know, for no reason. It was simply stated: "Illegal demonstration." At some point that junction was declared an area forbidden for demonstrations, something like that, some kind of regional commander's orders. But at some point they stopped going there. We simply blocked the way from the junction and then they wouldn't

come, they would stand in one of the neighboring streets. Then it would be declared an illegal demonstration. A Border Policeman would announce it on a megaphone in Hebrew and Arabic: "This is an illegal demonstration. You have five minutes to disperse or be arrested." Of course they wouldn't stop after we said that. It was obvious. So at some point the battalion commander or his deputy would say: "Okay, this is it. Now we'll arrest them." We'd choose this guy and that guy, just the people who stood out most.

Chosen at random or did they do anything?

No, half random. Those who looked more familiar to us. There was this one woman who always showed up, older, I don't know, around 50 years old, gray hair, who'd always show up. So we'd say: "Okay, we'll arrest her." Now, we'd arrest the Irish guy because he was a nuisance.

How are they arrested?

We'd decide to do it and then we'd say: "Okay, take that one." And we'd simply go ahead. Usually all the soldiers were lined up so whoever is closest simply goes over, grabs and pulls.

Did they resist?

There were many people who didn't resist. You'd say: "I'm taking you in." And they go: "What? Why? What do you want? What did I do wrong?" and then come with you without any trouble. There are guys you'd grab, especially tourists, and they'd try to prevent you from taking them. So you had to pull hard, create a buffer and move them out of the Casbah.

Were there any beating incidents?

No, most of the time it was just moderate physical force.

What is moderate physical force?

It means you simply grab someone and pull. You don't hit people. It was very clearly defined, so we don't slip into those things. We were told not to hit anyone, not to hit with our weapons, not push people down to the ground or kick them, not to try to grab their cameras. Because we aren't allowed to do that. As Israeli soldiers we are simply not allowed.

Testimony no. 6, 2008

Spread an Israeli flag across the porch

Did you enter homes?

Not if there was no need to. If there isn't a good enough reason, we don't. Sometimes we'd enter gardens, on the patrol we'd enter yards, but let's say you have to be on the lookout. Then you have to go up to the roof. Sometimes we were on porches. The family would go out, see that we're on their porch, they were already used to this, and they'd go back in. Or a family would sit watching TV in their living room and we'd look from upstairs and there's a football match going on at the same time. There was this one time, during Passover, we needed to take a house which was at the center of Jabal Rahmah, it was the time around Land Day²... The house is in the center of the neighborhood and we needed to spend two, three days in it during the events, to lookout from its porch over the neighborhood.

What events?

During Passover many Jews come [to Hebron]³, and there was this event held by the Arabs and we had to be there for two, three days. This means the family had to leave the house. We get there at 6 a.m., our platoon commander – who does not speak Arabic – comes along and tells the family that they have to leave the house. They don't understand what he wants, they don't want to leave, they're a whole clan inside, the place is full of people. He yells at them and it's sheer stupidity. There's an army guy who understands Arabic, the liaison officer who knows Arabic comes along to talk with the Arabs to explain to them that we're not throwing them out of their house for life – still this is shit, making them leave for 48 hours. What would they do? Go to the neighbors? So this officer [who speaks Arabic] arrives only four hours later. They stand there frustrated, quarreling with us, and have no idea what we want. The liaison officer isn't there yet, there's a quarrel and shouts and they're forced out. Finally the younger son probably wanted to shove the platoon commander, and the father – who's already seen it all – tells him: "Let it go," and they come out, heads hanging, and we sit there in their home for two days. Now, this annoyed me: It's in the middle of an Arab neighborhood and the army's instruction is to spread an Israeli flag across the porch. Not only does the whole neighborhood now know we evicted the family for 48 hours, now they've also got an Israeli flag in the middle of their road. And this is not a Jewish neighborhood, it's in the Arab area. You can fly an Israeli flag, you can do lots of things...

How many family members were forced out of that house?

I think it was the mother and father, their son and his wife and some kids of theirs, perhaps eight to ten people in all. Something like that.

And they simply waited downstairs for the Arabic-speaking officer to arrive and explain things to them?

Yes. They waited downstairs, they yelled, sat at their neighbor's, got angry. Yes.

You held an observation post inside that home?

Yes. One soldier stood outside in the street, two guys downstairs, two on the porch and one soldier slept on the floor, exhausted. That was it more or less.

Why this particular home?

Because it was central, second storey, had a good lookout over the central square. So its location was advantageous.

Was the lookout from there over the neighborhood itself or towards the Jewish settlement and the Cave of the Patriarchs?

The lookout was over the neighborhood plus the street you had to cross if you wanted to get to the Jewish settlement neighborhood. Meaning, if you wanted to move from Jabal Rahmah to Tel Rumeida, you'd probably have to cross that road. It controlled the roads but also the area in that neighborhood that was closer to the Jews.

You remained there for two days?

Something like that.

Testimony no. 7, 2008

Big action

... There was a really crazy story that happened with them there. Our patrols would enter through the Police Checkpoint, and the thing is that they would always be standing there.

The Palestinian policemen?

Yes. I remember coming back from our post. Now the army posts in Hebron are really something, they're tough. They wear you down, all the time. Anyway I'm on my way back from the post... Later I'll tell you about the arrests, we were constantly carrying

out arrest missions, every night. There were two weeks of nightly arrests, they had assassinated the guy who did the terrorist attack in Dimona – it wasn't us who did it but after he was assassinated, everyone went into Hebron. So I get back to base and right away we're gathering up, and... super stress! We're going out right now, there's a briefing, the company commander comes, there are Palestinian police standing there, the problem with them is that they break the agreement and keep standing right in front of Police Checkpoint which they are actually not allowed to do because it blocks the traffic, so we go in, catch them, confiscate their weapons and bring them in with us. In terms of "action", that was really the peak of action, in terms of the feeling it gives you. You enter the Police Checkpoint. Ever been inside? There's a square and then a right-turn and another large square. The Palestinian Police HQ is there. Some of us are instructed to stand in the road and prevent the Palestinian policemen from reaching the central square which is right opposite the Police Checkpoint. I don't need to tell you that in one second flat, we've got hundreds of people circling us and throwing stuff, roof tiles are flying at us, seriously. This was during a period when things like this weren't happening, at this point in my service I hadn't seen such things, and now here were tiles being dropped from the rooftops. We get there and I see some really tough Palestinian policemen running and my heart is pounding like I don't know what, and he's holding his Kalashnikov like this. In the chaos I catch him and he looks into my eyes really scary and alert with his gun, and I kept telling him in Hebrew or in my lame Arabic that there would be no firing. It was scary, it felt close. Also because the whole city could sense that there was something serious going on, and some of the policemen tried to resist and I don't know what else. It was really scary. We were shoving each other. And I no longer knew how to cope with this on my own. Where do I draw the line? I didn't know what to do. Some of the time I was blocking him. A subordinate of his – he must have been the superior officer – stood behind him, and my friend pointed his gun at him and he was scared and did nothing.

He was still armed with his Kalashnikov? All the Palestinian policemen still had their Kalashnikovs?

Yes. He is scared, and not advancing – that Palestinian policeman. So in the meantime, as I keep trying to look him in the eye and tell him there would be no firing today, I don't recall how that specific incident ended. Suddenly there were shots – later I learned they were shots in the air by the company commander who was already being mobbed. Then I somehow see him kicking people. But that was his critical mistake because at any moment those shots... According to the rules

of engagement, they said earlier: "If you feel threatened, you kill all the Palestinian policemen." Those are the instructions. Whoever points a gun at you, you shoot. And I really thought, that poor fellow with his hands like that, I heard shots, what do I do? Shoot him? Kill him now? Thank God I didn't, but it could have come to that, too, in such a tense situation. So anyway I think we dragged two Palestinian policemen out and took their vests and some Kalashnikovs. But it caused a riot that lasted for hours. We dispersed from the rear, with teargas from the Police Checkpoint and we also went up onto some houses. So we did shoot teargas from there, constantly, and they threw stones, and the whole area was on edge. That was the event of that tour of duty.

Was rubber ammunition used as well?

I don't remember. I do remember lots of teargas. All the time.

The two Palestinian policemen you mentioned arrived from their HQ?

Yes.

Not the ones the army wanted to take?

No, those were taken.

How many Palestinian policemen were there?

Two, and they were taken out.

And what size was your force?

Really small. That's the point. Just guys who weren't on posts at the time, I don't know, maybe seven men and another seven from another platoon. Even guys who hadn't been on such missions. It wasn't an organic force, it was a motley crew.

15 soldiers, more or less?

Yes.

And how were the Palestinian policemen behaving?

The two I finally saw outside were scared.

But you said some beating started.

Yes, I see it all in a flash, during the event. We weren't there for a long time, 20-25 minutes. But everything boiled up around us. It's stressful. The whole street comes out to see what's happening, especially after shots in the air are heard.

And you see a Palestinian policeman approaching you, holding a Kalashnikov?

Yes. He looked tough. Had this tough-looking moustache. Really scary. I won't forgive my company commander, those shots in the air were a real mistake, we were a millimeter away from everyone shooting everyone. Because this is what we were

told, that's why it's so thrilling. Maybe we can kill some people today?

So how do you cope with this? You find yourself standing unprotected in the middle of the road facing two armed Palestinian policemen, two servicemen...

We orchestrated the whole incident from the Police Checkpoint and from the rooftops.

The situation developed gradually. While you're still inside, the riots are not that bad yet?

That's right. But I remember my company commander beating up various people who came up and tried to stop him. There was this circle around him, there was an old man who came along and tried to grab his hand, so he kicked him. I don't know what he was trying to prove, but he was... He was that kind of person. When we were in Gaza, too, sometimes you'd walk around the middle of the company base and see three men handcuffed crying in the middle of the base. He would relate to them, I don't want to say he'd beat them up at 'zero-range', but he was totally tough in that respect.

He was a part of the team that tried to detain the two Palestinian policemen?

Yes, yes.

And they resisted?

I didn't see it, I told you, I left right away. I saw them outside already.

And outside the battalion commander already took them away?

No, it took a while. They stood with us, we talked, we looked at their Kalashnikovs.

They stood there cuffed and blindfolded? Or they were standing with their Kalashnikovs on them still?

No, no way. Their weapons and vests were already in our hands, but they were not cuffed or blindfolded.

Just standing there? On the Israeli side of the Police Checkpoint?

Yes. Standing with us on the Jewish side of the Police Checkpoint. I don't remember. It was a totally insane situation.

Testimony no. 8, 2008

We sealed the whole house

Once we closed off a [Palestinian] house. We blocked it off because it was constructed illegally or something. Activists from a bunch of organizations came to try and prevent the eviction by standing in our way and swearing and stuff, anyway we weren't supposed to talk to them.

Where was this?

It was opposite the Jewish settlement. But I'm trying to remember which road. There's the main drag of the Casbah.

The Casbah or the one connecting the settlements?

The Casbah. There's the main street of the western Casbah, separating the Avraham Avinu settlement and the Arab houses, so among the Arab houses adjacent to the Avraham Avinu settlement, there was some construction [by Palestinians]. According to procedures – I don't even know what to call it, it's not procedure, it's certainly not a law – according to the brigade commander or the regional command, the Arabs are not allowed to build or renovate there. If they do, there's an okay to evict them, to block off the houses. So that family who'd lived there for years renovated or something, so the Jews from Avraham Avinu settlement informed on them and forces were brought in to evict them. So the organizations like TIPH⁴ and all those guys tried to prevent the eviction and there was quite some chaos. Finally the houses were blocked off.

You only provided security during the action or did you actually carry it out?

We secured it, we did everything except seal the...weld the door. We did everything.

You also took the family out?

Yes. A policeman came along, who spoke Arabic, but we did it.

How did it take place? I mean, they probably have furniture, stuff, you say they've lived there for years.

We sealed the whole house.

With everything inside?

Everything. All the contents. Perhaps they took out several things, but everything was left inside. At some point it was opened for them, about a month and a half later. I personally had to check and see that no one broke in, that it was still welded shut and untouched.

And who opened it a month and a half later?

I believe it was the DCL, I don't exactly know what the story was out there. It was a totally sick story. You know, you feel something's not right, that things are not being run properly, and it's not because the army is doing it, but because there are those Jewish settlers there who are behind it all and they film and document which is also problematic in itself.

Testimony no. 9, 2008

“Try to ignore them”

Because of our background, we're not guys who are out looking for brutality. Ethically and politically it was difficult for many of us to be there. We had a hard time with the settlers. We were in the middle, we had the center of the Casbah and the middle of the Jewish settlement and much of our trouble was with the settlers. Most of the violence we experienced was not with the Palestinians, they didn't have a chance. There is nothing they can do facing the soldiers. It was the settlers who were violent. Throughout my time there, I kept a notebook in my pocket and every time settlers would swear at us or behave violently, I'd note it down. I also interviewed other soldiers and wrote about it.

How many such incidents do you have recorded?

Lots. About 20 to 30. It was important to me to note down things I witnessed myself, or that close friends told me about. I didn't want stuff that I... It was important for me to record violence of all types, whether verbal abuse or actual assault.

What's an actual assault?

One of our missions in Hebron is to prevent friction. Separate routes were designated for Jews and Arabs. One of our “favorites” was the [settlers'] Casbah tour on Friday afternoons. They would spit at people in the face...

The settlers would enter the Casbah on Fridays?

Yes. One of the tour guides living in the Jewish settlement there would regularly lead such a tour and we had to provide security for them, let alone the fact that we'd need double manpower to do it, and that was the most humiliating of all. It was less about us, more about what they'd do... There was swearing, and confrontations that we

tried to prevent. A whole street had to move aside so this gang could get through.

What was the procedure regarding the Palestinian population during such a Casbah tour?

One force would secure the area on the rooftops, another force below with the company commander or his deputy would surround all the settlers, move the residents aside. We tried to make it “clean”, “sterile”, so as to disrupt their lives as little as possible, although you cannot help disrupting. I don’t know how long it lasted.

Did you run into real violence on the part of settlers, beyond the swearing?

No. I think that even if they slapped someone, the mere fact that they’re there is violent, the way I see things. What does it matter whether he shoved someone, or swore at him or slapped him? It’s this lording over the Palestinians that is so hard.

Did you get a chance to show your notebook to any of the officers?

No. At some point we had a conversation with the battalion commander. He was a frank, honest man and he told us to bring up stuff we saw or if he had done something, he wanted to look into things. He told us he looked into things he knew about. We told him about our confrontation with the settlers, that there’s this constant feeling that we are unclear about the army’s demands from us, where the limit is. We’re not civilian police, we have no police rights and the settlers don’t regard us as an authority. When it’s convenient for them they’re with us, and when it’s not... Then he said: “Even if they spit or jump at you, try to ignore them.” He was conscious of the problem, but he too was limited because it’s a political issue.

What were you told about your authority regarding the settlers?

We were told that we could stop them if something develops, but in actual fact it’s very hard. The general feeling was unclear. The police is very low on manpower and I want to believe that they wanted to handle these things but I know how hard it is for them with the number of incidents happening there.

Testimony no. 10, 2008

Left there, cuffed and blindfolded

Were there more cases of detaining people who you were supposed to bring to an army post or to the police?

Arrests. But that's obvious.

Not arrest missions, say on a patrol, but someone who was rude or suspect?

Oh, metal thieves. That was a weird thing, of all the things they would break into the Jewish settlement for – cross over rooftops or I don't know where – they'd break into the Jewish settlement to steal metal from their former shops on Shuhada Street⁶ that had become prohibited to them. So they'd go in, suddenly some lookout would detect them on her surveillance monitor, and report: "Metal thieves". At some point it became unbearable for the guys. Once we caught them ourselves. They simply put them there. Sitting around the 4-5 Post, waiting for the police. Now, I mean really, what would the police do with them? For the 15th time. This would happen day after day, they'd come to steal metal and we already knew that the police would slap them around, and say: "Don't ever do that again," and let them go.

Where did they try to break in?

Behind 4-5 there's the road, right? There's this V-shaped set of shops where the two roads connect and in the middle there's these... So they would simply try to enter those shops, or not necessarily even enter. I remember that on one of the patrols we stood there on top of the roof and suddenly realized where they were going into. We went in and saw merchandise that was still there from...that had not been put away in storage yet. Hats and straw stuff. But everything was upside down and broken.

How old were those kids you would catch?

Young. Sixth graders and such.

Preteens.

Exactly. Let's say they can already tell right from wrong, what's allowed and what's not, let's put it this way. They choose what to do. There were some slightly older ones, ninth graders.

The police would show up in the case of the metal thieves?

After a very long while. I remember that once, or several times, the company commander said: "We already know what the police will do, they'll let them go after about three hours, so let's just do it ourselves." The police wasn't summoned, they were left cuffed for five hours near 4-5. I remember shift changes and a briefing when

to let them go because the police would have already arrived. They were simply left there cuffed and blindfolded, and then released.

Testimony no. 11, 2009

The biggest event – over nothing

One event comes to mind. I remember it was Land Day² and we were told that below the Mitkanim⁷ post, at the entry gate to the Casbah, “38”, a demonstration was reported. We got there and saw 20 to 30 people with some Arab Knesset Member. It was a quiet demonstration, nothing extraordinary, signs and such. We talk and the company commander said: “Okay, one hour and that’s that, they’ll get tired and go home.” Then I remember the Hebron brigade commander comes along and says: “No, they have to be dispersed forcefully. It’s a closed military zone and they must be dispersed.” Border Police was summoned and they began to shoot teargas and rubber ammunition. Just like that. Over nothing. As soon as they did that, photographers came out. I say look how the army screws itself over nonsense. For something that would have dispersed had we waited for half an hour. I remember the mindset there: “We show them!” That was the biggest event we had there. But over nothing. I didn’t recognize any sort of danger from them. Just an event with some wounded and pictures that were unflattering to the army.

Palestinian wounded?

Yes. Nothing serious, but teargas was shot. For nothing. I thought of the stupidity of it. That right away the commanders get swept away. The commander of the spearhead company at Tel Rumeida started spraying teargas. That was one event. Besides that, it was relatively quiet back then.

Testimony no. 12, 2010

Special relations

There was this person who arrived one Saturday and decided it was forbidden to open the post gate at Mitkanim⁷, that it should be left closed throughout the Sabbath.

Someone from the Jewish settlement?

Yes. Living right next door. In the Mitkanim neighborhood. He came along, got angry, yelled, swore, and pulled at the electric cord of the gate so it wouldn't function.

Was the police summoned?

Yes. They picked him up.

Detained him?

Yes. There was some story there. Then he came back. He was eccentric, always like that.

Did he really sabotage the gate?

He simply disconnected the cord from the electricity so we couldn't open and close it. At some point, after this incident I think, a gate especially for pedestrians was installed. On Saturdays the larger gate was closed, for vehicles, while the pedestrian gate was operable without electricity, and still the main gate remained closed. On weekdays, the gate was simply closed all the way. That's it, there weren't too many incidents with these settlers living next us. There was this idea that there shouldn't be too much close contact with them, we shouldn't get too friendly. Because if a situation arises and some Arab goes by and this and that, and the little kids would feel privileged because they're your friends and here they're already standing with you at your post, and on one of your shifts they would suddenly feel they can pick fights with the Arabs there. "What, why are you stopping us? You're our friend!" I don't know. Like they'd take advantage of their special relations with you to raise hell.

Testimony no. 13, 2008

To pass the time

Let's talk about the patrols. You said you'd enter deep into [Palestinian] Hebron.

It was so cool, because you actually got to see the city.

You would just drive around? Or you would conduct searches?

Yes, yes.

How would you do it?

We'd check vehicles. It was just like checking vehicles at the checkpoint in and out of Nablus, checking cars inside Hebron. We'd go in on patrol, put up a roadblock in the middle of their street, and actually check vehicles.

You check that there's no bomb in the back seat, or you'd stick a knife between the door and the wall? There are all kinds of ways to check a car.

Not taking the car apart, not that, but it depended on the soldier. There were cases where just to pass the time, people would take cars apart.

What do you mean by taking them apart?

I remember this more from the Nablus area, but you know, the little compartment under the steering wheel.

The fuse compartment?

Yes.

You were supposed to take out their fuses?

No, just the compartment.

And when you did that, you'd get a traffic jam in the middle of Hebron?

Yes.

Testimony no. 14, 2010

In the middle of the night, in the middle of the street

There was one tour, it was a particularly special settler tour. They had these sort of rounds where they sang atonement prayers, but not really. They walked only on the main road, too bad I can't remember the name of this tour. One guy was there, not the one who regularly guided them, a different fascist who lives right next to the army post and he was there, with lots and lots of children. It was a children's tour, with a few adults. Mainly children just hanging around. He walked – it took about an hour and a half just to cross the road which usually takes about three minutes. So he walked, stopped at about eight to ten spots along the road, I don't know. And he didn't just say relevant things; he kept reading stories out loud every time. I don't even know about what.

What was he reading?

It was a narrative about someone who came to Hebron which supposedly belonged to Arabs and there keep being...I don't really remember what the story was about, because I wasn't really listening. It bored me and I had work to do. After all I was on duty. But there were all kinds of descriptions such as: "I was gripped by an Arab with the stench of a cadaver," and just these very graphic descriptions that reminded me of Nazi propaganda. I don't know, totally demagogical. Finally I asked the kids: "How did the story end, what was it about?" "We don't know, we weren't listening." They weren't even into it, they just came with lots and lots of shofars⁸, and every time he wasn't talking, during the short walks between the narration stops, they blew the shofars, and this was around one o'clock in the morning. Walking around, blowing the shofars, and he brought this music-mobile and had music on in the middle of Hebron, full volume.

In the middle of the night?

Yes. In the middle of the night, in the middle of the street.

Did you know that this was planned for the tour?

I think so. I remember telling ***: "How can this make any sense? Would anyone in the world find this logical? And it's happening right now!"

And what did he say?

He just said: "There's nothing to do about it. We can't really change it."

Did residents come outside? Say anything?

No, not at all. I don't even remember seeing people in the windows. Perhaps a few, but no, not even that.

How do you explain this?

First of all, they probably knew what was happening and preferred to avoid confrontation. But I don't know, even if we did see anything, once in a while on those night tours we did see a few people. One or two, nothing major. They, too, see the group and walk away. They're not interested. They don't care about this tour now. They see soldiers and Jews, and they don't...

How many children were on that tour?

Quite a few. Around 50, something like that.

And each of them blew the shofar?

Not all of them, but many.

So there was noise.

Yes, definitely, thank God! You could hear it all the way to the Cave of the Patriarchs, to the Wailing Wall...just kidding. There was plenty of noise. There were guys who really came just to make noise, they weren't listening. As soon as he began to speak they went aside, talked amongst themselves, they were tired of the whole thing, wanted to get back, get out of the Casbah, stuff like that. But they made tons of noise, as much as possible before he resumed his storytelling.

How many soldiers are needed to secure 50 children on such an affair?

I think it was on the scale of a normal settler tour of the Casbah, something on the order of 20 guys. There's a set routine: One force secures them from the rooftops. Both on the longer and the shorter tours, they know the route. One force goes in front, another force comes up from behind, and there are guys flanking the tour. That's it, the front command jeep usually goes along in front. Everyone is clear about their mission. Every time they pass a door or a house corner, a pair of soldiers stops until they are replaced. It's very orderly and you know exactly what you're supposed to do. Routine.

Testimony no. 15, 2010

Military zone

There was another experience – right opposite Gate No. 1 there's a toy shop, located between Gate No. 1 and that building, say three, four meters away, considered a military zone.

Is there an official army order?

General's orders and all. There was this shop belonging to an Arab who used to sell all kinds of trinkets, toys. GSS⁹ guys came along with the unit that welds things shut. They told him: "You have until five o'clock to evacuate the place."

You escorted them? You were with the GSS?

Yes. We entered with them. It wasn't exactly GSS, it was a unit that does these things and they're also Arabic speakers, I don't exactly know what they do.

Did they tell him why he had to get out?

Yes. They didn't really explain, they said it was now a military zone. They showed him the official document.

Just like that, out of the blue? That shop has been there for quite a while, no?

Yes. I didn't understand why they came suddenly.

But it's inside the Casbah?

Yes. Beyond Gate No. 1. They speak fluent Arabic. They came, talked to him, told him, said there was nothing he could do about it, that he better not start asking questions or talking because it wouldn't do him any good. We went elsewhere and they welded it shut, outside the Casbah. There's a passage one can sneak through into the Jewish settlement, so that was welded shut and taken care of. Then we got back to Gate No. 1 and the guy was still in the shop and they talked to him again, and he wouldn't evacuate. So we were placed along both sides of the street, along the Casbah, along the diagonal.

How many men were you?

A lot. We really blocked the place. We were blocking traffic. We told the drivers, if you want to get through, go around. We didn't know how long this would take and that was the most frustrating part because we told them it was about to end and that it's alright. The deputy battalion commander came along and other guys and real violence broke out. The owner was forced out, the shop was ransacked, stuff was kicked in the air, forcefully, people were screaming and yelling from the outside. We simply stood

there for a good couple of hours. That was the problem, we didn't know when this was going to end and we got dirty looks from the Arabs and tourists, standing there and seeing everything happening without knowing what to do with all of it.

Who ransacked the shop?

The deputy battalion commander. The company commanders.

Were they looking for something?

No, I think they wanted a show of force. Perhaps they said it was a search but I don't believe that. It was simply to scare people, to show force. They forced him out, holding his hands and legs.

How old was this man?

Elderly. I don't remember exactly. There was even an ambulance summoned. Perhaps he suffered a heart attack during the incident. The problem here was that we really stood there four, five, or six hours. Motionless. The tourists and the...didn't move either. You say to them: "Go around, if you want to continue, just go around." They remain, and I got to the point where, even trying to put on a serious face, like "Don't mess with me!" or "Go away!" to make them think I didn't care what they wanted. And that's a really long time. You also see the violence behind you, and the people facing you ask you questions. There was a demonstration and we wanted to make some room there. The CPT⁵ came, they're illegal as far as we're concerned, on principle. They had no permission by our government to be there. And there are these old ladies, especially from the CPT, whom you are supposed to shove off with your body, and it's unpleasant because the woman is about the age of my grandmother, and I can't do it. Finally I do it.

How do they respond?

One of them was looking at the ground, indifferently as it were, not seeing that I'm there. I told her to move, in English, and she wouldn't react, so I began to shove her, and she wouldn't move. I shove her and she moves a bit, shove her a little more and then a little more. I shove her with my body and I remember this really well because it was so unpleasant, standing there for hours facing civilians and seeing the violence going on behind me.

Did blocking the street create a huge traffic jam?

Yes. It was insane. At some point people gave up and went around.

Didn't you let up a bit during all of this?

There were especially elderly people who had to get home, people back from

shopping and stuff like that, so we called our superiors, spoke with them on the side and they let them through. There were exceptions.

The toyshop – can you tell me a bit about what went on inside there?

I saw the Border Police there, but I wasn't watching the whole time, I wasn't really there and I didn't see everything that happened.

Which guys were there, which company commander? What ranks were the people ransacking the shop?

There was a deputy battalion commander, GSS agents, Border Police. I'm sure my own deputy battalion commander was there. He was a hot-headed guy, acted kind of German, really neurotic. I remember him messing things up. There were guys who wanted to weld the place up, and some Border Policemen who came. It was mostly they who did it. All the rest, the company commanders, sergeants and squad commanders, were either around, or securing and making sure the soldiers were lined up properly.

Did you happen to see the shop afterwards?

It was simply welded shut.

Totally sealed, and hasn't been opened since?

Not when I was around.

How long had it been opened before it was sealed?

A good few months.

And then one day the army decided to do this?

One day they simply said: "That's it, we're doing this."

And what about other shops next to it? They remained open?

Yes. The house above it, called the "Doctor's House", was abandoned then. Essentially, there was one sealed shop and one that wasn't. It had to be cleared, that's all. No more.

Did you understand what the reason was for closing it?

I guess the army didn't want some Hamas guy sitting in that shop and observing our movements.

Facing the gate?

Yes. There's an exact angle facing the road going up to the Jewish settlement. It took a long time until the shop was sealed.

Testimony no. 16, 2008

If you're not crying, you're laughing

Stones were thrown at us, both by Jews and Arabs.

Where were they thrown from?

Inside our war-room, there was a surveillance control room. I saw the incident through the television cameras. There were Arab children throwing stones at a Jewish family. All the forces in the area were alerted. Lots of Jews and Arabs came and were all throwing stones at each other. And when the soldiers came, everyone started throwing the stones at the soldiers. There was also the whole episode of the "House of Contention"¹⁰ which we were ordered to evacuate. They [settlers] organized a whole pilgrimage of their supporters who came on foot from Jerusalem to Hebron, and who had to provide security for them? We did. The Palestinians were demonstrating in protest. We get to the site and everyone begins to throw stones at us. You ask yourself: "What am I doing here?"

What do you do?

Find a place where you're safe from the stones and wait for them to stop – you can't do a thing. Only the Border Police can react because they're police– so they're called in.

Did you witness their modes of operation?

I witnessed Border Police in action once. One unit came, they all walk in three lines, wearing black vests, helmets on their heads, you see they know what they're doing, unlike the local Border Police. A bit scary. A Jewish settler outpost had to be evacuated. The Border Police stands there in rows and you see the Jewish crowd from Kiryat Arba¹¹ coming at them and they stand there with their shields, waiting. Anyone who jumped them would be handcuffed and placed at the side. They're so big they don't need teargas. After finishing the job they let the people go and they left. I was on guard at the sentry post at the time so I saw it all happening.

The settlers were known for their violence?

On the one hand they were nice to us, they invited us over on Fridays [for Sabbath dinner]. I wouldn't go, my friends did. We had an NCO in charge of Jewish education, and he managed to organize through the religious school in Kiryat Arba that soldiers

would be hosted by families [for Sabbath]. The same religious school who later threw stones at the soldiers. If you're not crying, you're laughing at the way things worked there. It's hard to understand the situation. You don't understand who you're protecting. At most of the incidents I witnessed, it was Jews assaulting Arabs and we had to secure them [the Arabs]. There was a case where two older Haredi Jews decided to come down from Kiryat Arba to Hebron not by way of the Worshippers' Path¹² but through an Arab neighborhood. A force had to go over there to rescue them.

How did they do it?

They went there and got them out. They continued walking towards the Cave of the Patriarchs.

Testimony no. 17, 2008

To be the nice guy and the bad guy at the same time

There was an episode of someone chasing a kid with a commando knife because he annoyed him or something.

Who chased a kid with a commando knife?

One of the soldiers.

Was the kid Jewish or Palestinian?

Palestinian.

What was the story there?

He sort of ran over him. He was very excited about having done it. All of us felt almost ready to beat the guy up. He was from another platoon.

This was on a patrol?

No. He was standing guard at the post. The kid wanted to have the dessert from his lunch which he hadn't touched anyway, something like that. He asked him for it. The soldier said: "No, get out of here." So he came and asked again. I remember it happened to me many times, standing guard at the post and kids come around asking you for food. I recall I had a hard time giving them stuff and then having to enter their house armed. It was weird for me to have to be the nice guy and then the

bad guy at the same time. I don't want a kid to like me when I'm pointing a gun at his dad. There are lots of things that remained unconscious, all these thoughts that I have in retrospect. It was simple at the time... It doesn't make sense, if I'm standing guard now, I'm a soldier. Why should I give him my dessert?

Testimony no. 18, 2008

Dress rehearsal

Once we carried out a mock arrest.

What's a mock arrest?

Before you go on an arrest mission, you have to carry this out. I'm not even sure it's proper army procedure. I was told it was. You choose – or rather – a house is chosen for you to practice an arrest procedure. Like a dress rehearsal before the real thing.

Tell me about a mock arrest.

The first arrest mission my platoon carried out – my platoon was the one doing the most arrests in our company. So on our first time, we got a house, not far, and we had to practice the arrest. You come along and as usual get all the people out of the house. You wake them up at one o'clock in the morning, get them out, blindfold them, take their IDs, and that's it. They're not taken anywhere. Our guys were totally exhausted by this. If there's one thing I'm really sorry about in terms of being humane... There was simply no reason, no justification for this. They were really mad at us, mad at everyone.

That was the last time you got to do a mock arrest.

There weren't anymore. But there were many times, again it's this issue of randomness, you choose a house and you go there to carry out activities, even if you have nothing on the people living there.

Testimony no. 19, 2010

You're a part of it

There was once this pilgrimage to the tomb of a [Jewish] sage inside the Casbah. I remember lying on the surrounding rooftops; you're looking out observing everything. On the one hand you don't like that you're doing this, and it's all because of some sage that they want to pray here, and now you've got to clear all the Arabs away from the site, stop traffic and all. It's frustrating to be a part of this. No one asks you if you want to, you're simply a part of it.

What was the story of behind the sage?

There's some grave there, I don't remember the man's name. We had to enter Palestinian Hebron to get to it.

Not the Casbah.

Not the Casbah. Palestinian Hebron. It's frightening because you enter with a large force, stopping traffic. We entered some hours earlier to position ourselves on the rooftops all around. You stop traffic, in effect enforcing a curfew. People are not allowed to come out of their homes, walk around, get back home from being out.

For how long?

Several hours, five to six hours.

And people from the Jewish settlement come there to pray?

Yes, both from the Jewish settlement and from other places.

Where were you?

On some roof.

What did you do there?

Lay there with my rifle, that's what I did most of the time. I had to listen to the settlers argue among themselves that it's impossible to live with leftists.

You said the street was closed off. Explain.

There's a semi-central street there, with many people on it, but it's not the main street.

Is there commercial activity?

Yes, and cars traveling through it. So they stationed army vehicles on both ends of the street covering a certain distance.

Do you remember how many kilometers it was?

It was perhaps two kilometers – from the army barrier to some building that was under construction. All this was blocked. To go up to some roof, we had to break

through a door, just break the lock – it was a school or a bookshop or something, I didn't understand exactly what it was. We had to kick the door and break it in order to get upstairs. That's it. You sit there, on the lookout, don't let people through. There were people inside... deaf people. It was a center for the hard of hearing, something like that, and they were stuck there for five, six hours.

People there had to stay inside?

Yes. Either you get out now and do what you have to do, or you stay inside. No, it wasn't even get out now, because the army arrived without announcement, so if you're inside, you stay there, and if you're outside you go away.

What about the deaf people or others who went outside, what was done about them?

They didn't go outside. They stayed inside and someone from the army tried to communicate with them somehow.

When you go upstairs to the roof of the school or a home, you go through the...?

There was a staircase so I simply got in by kicking the door.

Was there a family inside?

No. It was empty. But we went upstairs and lay on the roof.

Can you estimate how many troops were there when this area was closed off?

A lot. We were... There were guys from our advance company and we were also spread around. In terms of numbers ...there were several platoons out there and a medical team from the battalion HQ and the company commander and the deputy battalion commander, and the battalion commander and our own company commander, that's a lot.

About how many Jews came out there to pray?

Not so many. Several dozen. But it was not crazy like at the Cave of the Patriarchs, just a few dozen. They came to pray, had a picnic, really it was the biggest absurdity. You see them sitting down at a picnic table, ambling around, eating, having a nice time. You think to yourself: "This doesn't make sense. For this you are supposed to stop everything on that street and leave the hard of hearing stuck in their building?" There may actually be people who think it wasn't that important for me to be there at the moment... I think I'm too scared to refuse to carry out orders...

When the street was opened after a few hours, were you all there?

We wrap things up, the group of worshippers leaves first, and then the forces leave together, keeping an eye on one another.

Testimony no. 20, 2008

The army is there

The patrols – that’s 50% of what a soldier in Hebron does. What was their purpose?

“Patrol 30 defended the Jewish settlers in Hebron and the State of Israel,” and all that. What was its purpose? To make the Arabs feel that the army is there, it’s everywhere, and they’d never be able to know where the patrol would show up. The army is always there. Meaning they shouldn’t think they can... And also carrying out inspections. In the briefings, it was defined as preventing hostile terrorist activity in its designated area. Practically speaking it was simply to deter. This hand gesture – when you’re walking up front, next to the officer, this is the gesture. He goes like this and you go like that.

As if you’re opening the way.

Yes, really as if God is parting the waters. All we need to do is this hand gesture and they [Palestinians] are already clinging to the wall very clearly, rather scared. Knowing it’s not worth their while to start anything and be detained.

Were there any who wouldn’t move?

Of course. The annoying ones, yes. Those annoying ones that you have no patience for because then you’re walking the whole day, you’re basically dying... You’re walking, dying to finally get to sit down and suddenly this idiot shows up who won’t budge, so what do you do? You point your weapon at him. Obviously he’ll move.

Does it always work?

Usually it works. Along with shouting: “Go!” [in Arabic].

And inspections, whom would you inspect?

Usually off to the side, I remember a place called, not the butcher-shop, something similar. “The Rooster” it was called, it was across from the “Roosters’ Post”. On Saturdays, this “Rooster” post would be manned, on the Worshippers’ Path¹². It was this dark alley, you’d go into a place where a tractor stood and it was always dark and creepy to go in there. We’d always stop there: “You cover in this direction, you cover in that direction,” and then some guy arrives, he’s all in shock because suddenly a sergeant stops him and says: “What’s your name? Give me your ID. What are you

doing here?”

Was there a specific profile for people you'd check or was it just anyone who entered the alley?

Not kids. Not at all. But there's something I really remember from patrols. I remember once we went with the platoon commander. He had this thing where we had to be absolutely quiet, really good. So we're walking along the street, no one notices us walking. We can surprise them, we're snakes. So it was the middle of the night – night patrol – and we were walking. A guy is walking along, not towards us but in the same direction as we were, and we had to walk very, very quietly. I recall kneeling in the dark. He'd come along, we hid, so he wouldn't notice us standing there in the dark, he passes us up, we'd follow him silently so he wouldn't notice, and then startle him: “What are you doing here? Give me your ID.” It was this commander's idea of fun, to make sure we're a team... There was never anyone problematic, but that was his kick.

Testimony no. 21, 2010

Ambassador of the State of Israel

I happened to be at demonstrations that leftist activists hold on Fridays. There's the Gate No. 1 army post and the post near Beit Romano, which isn't so high up. There's an elevated post inside the Casbah, but overlooking it. There's a post where you can come down, sort of in between. When those demonstrations take place, you stand there and lots of [settler] kids arrive, and adults, too, and you tell them that there's a regional general command order closing it off as a military zone and they must not climb up here, and then you have to quarrel with them and block them physically.

What do they do up there?

They sit above during the demonstrations, and begin to yell at the tourists either in Arabic or in Hebrew or in English, to stir things up: “Bitch, son of a bitch, Arabs...” I no longer remember exactly what they used to yell but there's this demonstration and you're thinking: “It's not helping anything that you're up here, just get down.”

Do they do anything beyond yelling?

No. I'm not such an expert on the Territories and the settlers, but I do think the

settlers realized at some point that all the hell they raise does no good for their image, and I think we felt that in Hebron, that sometimes kids did things, and there were little outbursts, but somehow they started to show a bit more restraint in terms of things that actually injure people, like throwing stones and such. They could stand in the middle of the demonstration on top and laugh at the demonstrators: “You’re demonstrating and you’re actually forbidden to enter this area, we’re stronger than you, ha-ha-ha!” But they couldn’t do any more than that.

What would happen at those demonstrations?

The first time it happened, it was a bit ugly. It was a bit uncomfortable because it leaves a unpleasant impression. As soon as a tourist or demonstrator touches a soldier, you have grounds to arrest him. First off, just basically being a soldier in Hebron places you in an uncomfortable position. For them you’re an ambassador of the State of Israel.

For whom?

For tourists. You’re an ambassador of Israel, not only in demonstrations, everywhere. In the Casbah, when you escort a tour. At a demonstration first thing you stand there, and the thing is we surround them. We don’t stand watch over the gate. There is Gate No. 1, they’re in a group and we surround them and then the whole blaming business starts of all those tourists who know what’s best for Israel and they know what’s best for the world and this starts all kinds of... In English they’re telling us: “You don’t have to do this, why are you doing this? You should be ashamed. We know you’re feeling bad about it so don’t do this.” There’s also: “Why don’t you live as two peoples in one state?” There were lots of accusations and diplomacy ideas, as if I’m supposed to be some decision-maker now. This places you in an uncomfortable, uneasy position because you’re not completely at ease with being there in the first place and on the other hand you are not supposed to talk to them.

To the demonstrators?

To the demonstrators. And you know that for the sake of public order you should look confident and they must not be able to tell from your face that you’re having a hard time.

How does this manifest itself?

Simply if what they said disturbed me or made me think about what I’m doing now and so on. Still on the outside I tried very hard to keep a straight face, to ignore them as it were. It’s weird because you’re estranged from what you really feel inside, it’s weird to be standing in that situation.

Do you recall any specific incidents from one of those demonstrations?

Yes. At some point we began to shove them back.

The demonstrators? Why?

Because... the truth is I have no idea, those were simply the instructions. At the time you don't...

Was there any kind of rioting going on?

No, no rioting, but there was a demonstration. "Start moving away," we said and started to make them disperse towards Palestinian Hebron. We were simply standing there and not letting them through. We'd say it was a demonstration without a permit, things like that. We didn't always ask questions. Sometimes we were told: "Guys, you have to stand between them and this spot, and not let them through." Or, say there's a road that passes right below a Jewish neighborhood, in the Casbah, when you turn left from Gate No. 1. We would have to prevent demonstrators from getting there, no matter what.

Why?

Because if they do, stones would be thrown at them, and there'd even be Molotov cocktails. There would be another problematic spot, and media, and diplomatic stuff.

Why not stand on the roofs and prevent the settlers from throwing stones?

I thought about that, too.

So what do you do?

Just stand there and hold hands. They do and we do and somehow we created a human wall and then we go: "Get ready! Set!" and shove them further and further into the Casbah. There were such incidents.

Were there any instances of violence then?

Yes, as soon as... Some soldiers are not that much in control. Say a soldier comes to the demonstration and he's all riled up about something else. As soon as he is touched, he'll go berserk on them. Even officers.

Have you ever witnessed this?

Not among friends of mine, but guys from other companies or officers or commanders. He'd be touched by someone – great, that's good enough for taking everything out.

And what happened?

He'd push the guy who touched him down to the ground, grab him, cuff him, bring other soldiers and take him out. I also caught someone by the legs, and he began to scream as if he were being tortured. It was like: "Relax, stop putting on a show for the

cameras.” You see the foreign press arrive, and they get it on tape and what can you do? You have to go on taking him off into the Jewish neighborhood on the other side.

Testimony no. 22, 2008

Sterile road

What are the instructions regarding Shuhada Street?

Arabs are absolutely prohibited from accessing it.

From where to where?

No access onto Shuhada Street.

Period?

Yes. Unless someone shows an Israeli permit, allowing him access. Then you call the patrol, detain him until the patrol gets there. The officer checks it, and then perhaps he's allowed to proceed onto Shuhada Street, to get to Tel Rumeida.

And if someone lives on one side of Shuhada Street, may he open his door and cross over to the other side of the street?

No. They may not be on Shuhada Street. Absolutely forbidden. It was a sterile road.

That was the term?

It happened about three times that we'd seen someone walking on Shuhada Street, ran after him, chased him, and nothing. I mean we wouldn't have caught him anyway, weighed down by our ceramic vests. Regardless of what shape we were in, not a chance.

Were you aware of the discussions about the street in the Supreme Court?

I remember hearing it was a topic of deliberations and two days later – we heard all this by way of rumor, and that there was no way to...we heard about it from our leftist parents. We heard about deliberations in the outside world and I remember being told about it. But people were also saying that on the other hand there was this reign in Hebron that the regional brigade commander could decide on everything, because this was a closed military zone, so he could decide what happened within his designated area, and I don't recall even a single day in which there was an Arab on this road.

What about nearby streets? The road going up to Jilber, Tel Rumeida? Were Palestinians allowed there?

There was a section where they were allowed? I think they were allowed access near the Police Checkpoint. I might be mistaken, but I seem to remember people there.

Testimony no. 23, 2008

As if they own the place

I'll tell you – first of all we came from a very specific background, so from my own outlook, Jewish settlement there is twisted. But that is not to the point. I'm there as part of the army, to protect them. I was committed to my mission, and from the onset it was clear that this is what I was going to do. Everything was directed at carrying out missions as best as possible, regardless of my political leanings. This was my mission, that's what I also told my soldiers. Now, problems came up immediately with regard to this. They [settlers] feel as if they own the place and suddenly, you're on patrol and someone begins to enter the Casbah, or someone wants to enter the Casbah, they're hurling comments at you. There's a certain relationship with the settlers. On the one hand they treat you really nicely, you're hosted by them on the Sabbath, they're hospitable. On the other hand, as soon as it backfires, meaning we prevent them from doing something, or say they see an Arab child throwing a stone and we don't manage to catch him or don't do enough in their opinion, that's it. It begins with swearing at us, continues with yelling and I've even seen acts of violence. So it's not that... There was no violence directed at us specifically, but at the Border Police, there was real chaos. And there were lots of fights with her.

The settler woman.

With ***, yes. I'm trying to remember, there were lots of fights with her. There are places where both Arabs and Jews are allowed access, meaning they can all go there, mixed. For example, on the way to Tel Rumeida, places like that. There is friction. You try to prevent it. You don't want that friction, your mission is to avoid it, to create as much calm as possible, and often the people creating that kind of friction are not the Arabs but rather the Jews. Mostly it's the Jews, okay? Undoubtedly. Anyone who was there will tell you that most of the friction there is caused by the Jews.

How?

Comments, shoving. Now say I get there, and I take a side... I'm not judging but I go to the side that is creating the friction, which is usually the settlers. Then there's tension, and she is mostly nervous and manipulative and has her say. In the beginning I would still talk to her, tried to be nice, but that didn't help. It's as though she knows how to talk and she immediately picks up on the fact that I'm from a kibbutz and that's it. Story over. She already knows exactly what I think and where I'm coming from, and the swearing begins, and you realize there's no one to talk to. They're there. They're not budging.

Do you recall a specific incident where you found yourself in the middle?

I remember several cases. I'll try to recall the main reasons, but first of all something happened in Purim¹³. ***'s son came and tore off our battalion commander's ranks.

You were present?

I wasn't there, but the story made its way around. I don't want to mention names of those present, but he simply came along and tore them off following certain incidents. There was once a terrorist attack, while we were there. The attack itself did not take place in Hebron, it was somewhere else, I don't even remember where, and the settler children began to throw stones at Arabs' homes.

In Tel Rumeida?

Not in Tel Rumeida, at Mitkanim¹¹, around the 4-5 army post. We tried to stop them. You go to the kids: "Why are you throwing stones?" and they go on doing it, not minding you one bit. Those kids are the toughest part of the story out there. They throw stones and all, and there is nothing you can do about it. What can I do? What can I do about kids? What, do I arrest them? No, I can't. It's not something you can actually do. You can't even touch him. He can throw as many stones as he likes. You try to prevent this, you try to speak to him. I mean, if it's something physical, you'll prevent it, but he'll continue. It's the same children, I remember the name, it's the son of *** [the settler woman].

How old were these children?

Around 12 years old.

And how did the story end, when they threw stones at the Casbah?

At first they began to throw stones, we tried to prevent it, they went on, swore at us, and continued throwing. We wanted to prevent this, so at some point we simply summoned their parents and they went home, the parents couldn't care less. Same thing on Lag Ba'omer¹⁴. They had to get wooden planks somewhere. The Arabs'

shops in Hebron are broken into on a regular basis. They are shut, the Arab shops. I don't know when they'll be reopened, but all the shops on Shuhada Street¹⁰, that whole area is closed and they break into those shops. There's nothing you can do, it's amazing. You try to prevent this, you call the police, nothing happens. The police say it's frustrating, too. I remember talks with policemen, it doesn't help. There's nothing.

What do you mean?

Nothing to be done about it. The kids are stopped, then they get right back to doing the same thing. There's no enforcement to speak of. There's nothing you can do to stop those kids and those people in general from doing these things.

Because you're a soldier? What were you told?

I'll tell you what happens. Practically speaking, I'm not supposed to deal with the civilian population. Certainly not Jewish civilians. Meaning if there are any problems, I have to summon the police, but if I see something happening violently, I am going to stop it. Then you call the police. The policeman can't do anything about it either. He can stop the kid, but everyone knows everyone there anyway. The policemen know the settlers, the policemen are frustrated, they know the kids, they know the parents, they know everyone – the stone-throwing continues, no change. We brought it up very often. I'm sure it's been brought up a lot before, and after, and there's no way to prevent these things from happening. That's the most frustrating thing about Hebron. This matter of trying to defend the settlers and working your ass off on missions and things that they have no clue are happening, these 6-6¹⁵ shifts, the Casbah patrols. It's a grind, and they just don't give a damn. They really don't. It's incredible...

Testimony no. 24, 2008

Mapping

We did mappings of all the houses. I don't know how the army stores that information, why we did it for every house there. I'm saying this because everywhere we went, people would say: "This is my tenth time already so what are you guys looking for here?"

You'd be sent to those particular houses?

Yes, that's what was done. On every single mapping mission we'd be allotted a

certain block, some houses, and we had to 'map' everything.

What does that mean, 'mapping' a neighborhood?

Neighborhood would be a bit much. Say a block. It means entering the house, getting the people out, assembling them in a certain room, there is a form to fill out, and we have to photograph the rooms, photograph the people, along with their IDs and names.

You take a picture of a person as he holds a sign with his name.

Like that.

Profile, face on, everything?

Like handcuffed detainees.

Really. The entire family? Everyone living in the house? Including the kids?

I think the kids, I don't recall whether the kids, too. I think so.

Men, women?

Yes.

Even if it's two o'clock in the morning?

Regardless of the time.

And even if it's their third time.

Look, it might have been our third time, but it was their thirteenth time. It's not that... They're used to this. In the Casbah they're used to it. We had other missions, further away, with mapping of places that we were told were more serious, so we emphasized them a lot more. In the Casbah often we were sent to places where we already knew the people, so it was more superficial. I knew it, even the company commander I once went with said: "Forget it, we already know this."

So how long does this take?

It depends on how thorough you want to be. In the Casbah around the Jewish settlement, I think it took about a quarter of an hour.

Per house?

Per house.

And a search is conducted, too?

Very rarely. If it's needed. Searches are rather routine, nothing special about them.

Who would select the houses to be mapped? The company commander? GSS⁹? You as commander on the spot?

Sometimes it was me, if it was something I initiated, or wanted to do. Sometimes it was the company commander.

Testimony no. 25, 2010

An intimidation mission

Abed is a guy who lives close to the Jewish neighborhood, and he constantly brings tourists up there, guiding tours for them about Hebron and the occupation. Every time he brings a group, you send Patrol 30 there. It was part of our routine. We'd report to the brigade war-room: "Abed has tourists up on the roof again." Boom! We go there and stand on his roof for an hour, or half an hour. Station a patrol on his roof.

While the tourists are there?

I don't know, I don't know if they're still there. I don't think so. One day we really got tired of this, so the deputy company commander spoke with the regional brigade commander and asked him what to do about this. The brigade commander proposed that we carry out an intimidation mission, although we never called it that. The whole platoon went in there at one or two o'clock in the morning, the company commander and deputy wore black masks, and we simply went in through the Shalalah Barrier.

The company commander was with you too?

He and the deputy commander and our whole platoon, started walking towards his house. Then... it was not an arrest mission, it was just to scare them. Wild banging on the door with our weapons, telling them: "Get out now!" We took out Abed and his brother and some guys from the platoon entered the house and woke up the kids and the wife. I think the grandparents were there, too. Old people. Then the commander and deputy yelled at Abed and his brother outside, something like: "Stop doing this!" We were inside, there wasn't too much to do. We were inside, they were yelling outside. His wife and kids were there, tired as hell, and nervous. We knew we shouldn't conduct a search, and I don't know who gave the order. It wasn't really an order, it was more like: "Let's behave as if we're searching the house." Like, let's mess this place up. I remember that me and someone else began sticking our weapons into various spots in the house. You stick your gun barrel in the closet, mess up the clothes, open a cupboard, open drawers, use your rifle, as if you're conducting a search, as if it's justified. I don't quite know why, I don't remember whether it was the platoon commander or the deputy company commander. But it just was...if we're already inside your house, let's make believe we're searching it. So we went through the motions, just for kicks... And that was that. Then we left. I think it worked for two

months, or a month, and then the guy continued.

Tell me more about the black masks. What was the point? Did you know they'd do this or you suddenly just saw these two Ninjas with you?

No, that came first. The company commander came out of his office with a mask on and then the deputy said to someone: "Listen, have you got a mask? I really want one, too." So the guy went and brought him one.

Testimony no. 26, 2010

Those kids are naughty

There was this bit about a Palestinian kid sitting in a spot where he was allowed, but there were some Jewish children who didn't like it, and they said: "Soldier, get him out of here." I began to argue with them. I wouldn't have shut my mouth when people spoke in such racist terms about Palestinians, but we couldn't, it simply happened... You're familiar with the home of the mute woman? Jewish children would throw stones at it, so you chase them a bit, but you know it makes no difference if you catch them.

Why not?

Because no one will do anything about them. Not the police, not your company commander, no one. I don't know if the brigade commander says: "These kids are naughty, great. We'll scold them and let them keep doing it." But you could catch an Arab kid throwing stones, and you can take him outside the Casbah, blindfold him, handcuff him and take him into custody so he'll get scared for a bit somewhere at the Hebron police station, I don't remember exactly where in the station.

But suppose those Jewish settler children do things like this, and you know those kids, how does a situation arise where you catch the kid and then nothing happens?

Nothing happens. There was a boy called "Wild Joseph". We nicknamed him so because he was a bit screwed up. He was... if a Palestinian passed by his house and wanted to climb up the "Desperation Stairway"¹⁶ which you'd approach from the post, he would begin to hurl various objects at him [the Palestinian] and rile things up. I personally never witnessed him throwing stones but was around when he swore or yelled at Arabs. If a boy threw a stone you could stop him with your body, but

you couldn't cuff him, only restrain his hands so he wouldn't throw stones. I don't think we ever did that because you feel it's not your place to do so. It relies on your personal judgment, that's the problem. You think: "Frankly I'd like to grab his hands, but am I allowed to? Am I not allowed to?" Because what you have to guide you are mainly your rules of engagement. You don't get instructions about dealing with such occurrences. There was a lot of anger in the company towards the settlers, especially since we were there to defend them. It was anger mixed with a lot of other feelings because you're there for their benefit, but they don't give a damn what you say. There were occasions where I was on the standby squad, where you only want to rest, and you want everyone to leave you alone, and then you're alerted because some girls want to go up to the spring up the hill, which happens to be inside the Palestinian area. But it's Abraham's Spring so they have to go up because we are in control there and we'll let them go up there. I don't know the reasons.

Have you ever been present when a child or someone from the Jewish settlement did something to a Arab?

I happened to be at the mute woman's house when they were throwing stones.

What happened?

It happened several times. Sometimes I heard her yelling at them¹⁷ and went to see what was going on, and then I saw them.

What, the children throwing stones?

At the house. Simply throwing stones at the walls of that house. Yes, I saw them throwing stones, and then you say: "Hey kid, come here." You realize he might run away, perhaps he won't but you know he's not really afraid of you. You aren't going to grab his hands because if you do, you don't have anywhere to take him. You're not going to tie him up and call the front command jeep to come along. There's nothing you can do.

How did the episode with those kids end?

I started yelling at them and they ran off at some point. The problem is it's never over. These things keep happening over and over again.

Testimony no. 27, 2010

You stop thinking there's an enemy

What is an arrest mission?

It's brought up already at noon or even a day before it is supposed to take place. There's a thorough briefing including complete details and where we're going. Nothing about whom we're about to pick up. There are drills, usually... I remember doing it only on my first arrest – we were constantly on standby so we couldn't partake in the drills. I don't remember drilling. We talk with whoever is going to do the arrest ahead of time, ask questions. Where we're going, what route, what the security weak points are, what we're we allowed to do, what we aren't allowed to do, rules of engagement, etc. Then at dawn or at night we go on the arrest mission itself.

Do you recall a specific arrest mission?

I remember everything. I remember especially being disappointed that... On your first arrest mission you're sure that it's some big deal, and then it's just bullshit. You enter Abu Sneina¹⁸ neighborhood or something like it, and... take in three kids. After all the "combat procedure" preparation – with your ceramic vest and helmet and all that nonsense – it's all just to separate women and children. The army takes this so seriously and what you end up with is a bunch of kids. You blindfold them and handcuff them and take them in your vehicle to the nearby police station. And that's it. It goes on for months, and you never... you stop thinking there are terrorists, you stop thinking there's an enemy; it's always children or boys or some doctor. You never know what their name is, you never talk to them and they always cry and shit their pants. I remember one time...there's always those annoying incidents where you make an arrest and then there's not enough room at the police station so you simply take the guy back to your army post, blindfold him, stick him in a room and wait till morning for the police to come pick him up. He sits there like a dog... We tried to be nice and get them a mat, some water, sometimes some food and they'd sit there with their hands tied and their eyes blindfolded, stay there like that till morning. And that was procedure. Or they'd be left in the war-room. That, too was procedure. Until morning. Until someone would come and pick them up.

Testimony no. 28, 2008

To really convince them

Mitkanim⁷ army base is located on Shuhada Street⁶, right?

Yes. There was a time when we were told: "If an Arab wants to go by, he can. The Supreme Court has ruled in favor. But try to convince him not to, because he'll have a rough time getting through because the settlers..." I don't know.

Who explained this to you?

The platoon and company commanders, and whoever gave the briefings out there.

What do you mean?

The truth is that most people didn't know. If someone came along you would tell him: "You can't get through here." And if he still wanted to go ahead, you couldn't really prevent him from doing it. You had to explain to him that he'd better not because the settlers might... I don't know what.

If anything happens to him on the road, would you protect him?

I remember we were told that essentially our mission was to protect the settlers, and we also have to maintain order in the area. We are seen as soldiers on behalf of the State, so the Palestinians have to be protected, too. But you have no tools to do that.

What do you mean?

Perhaps it wasn't said to you in so many words, but it was obvious that you couldn't handle a Jewish settler as violently as you could a Palestinian, you know?

For that matter, if a Palestinian runs towards a Jew holding a knife, what would you do?

I'd shoot him. If I can stop him without shooting I would.

And if a Jew ran towards a Palestinian with a knife in his hand?

I'd try to stop him with my body. Not shoot him.

Could you stop him?

I'd hit him with my weapon in the face, I don't know. It seems pretty subjective to me because your superiors don't talk to you about this. You know, it's not... There was another time, cameras were set up or something. And the settlers wanted to sabotage the cameras all the time and did manage to do it once. And then we heard that if someone did this again...I saw a kid playing with it, I already knew his name. I called the police and told them it was him, gave them his name and everything. The police came and arrested him. But you know, the police try not to arrest him first.

They ask you: “Do you know his name?” I tell them: “Yes, it’s ***.” “Are you sure it was him?” Then you really have to convince them, you know.

Testimony no. 29, 2010

Kicked him on his way

There was this place in Abu Sneina¹⁸, it was this junction, and one of the things we used to do a lot was look for stolen cars. Which was I think half to pass the time and half, - let’s face it, why not help Israeli police, show everyone we’re enforcing Israeli law in Arab territories, a bit of everything.

So anyway, the company commander was good at this, at locating stolen cars, one could say to his credit.

How do you locate stolen cars?

Generally when something looks suspicious to you, a new car, or one without a license plate, or a car whose license plates don’t add up, or a car driven by a kid not even 15 years old yet, stuff like that. So you stop him. You ask for documents, check them, ask him a few questions, check the license plate, there are ways to do it through the war-room, or you talk directly with the police. They tell you whether it’s stolen or not. We found stolen cars several times, especially stolen motorcycles. Or there were missions where we would escort the police. They’d check especially where there were Israeli license plates. There are many Palestinians riding around with Israeli license plates because they buy the cars from Israelis, don’t manage to sell them, so they sell them in the Territories, and then they always replace the license plates with Palestinian ones, but sometimes they’re caught before they’ve managed to do that. There are also situations where a guy would use masking tape and write the license number on that, weird stuff like that. Once we stopped at some junction, the “Spider Junction” in Abu Sneina. It has a lot of streets converging into it, and many stolen cars would be stopped there. So we saw two guys walking a motorcycle. We stopped and asked them what the story was. It was at the beginning of our stint there.

Still with *, the company commander?**

Yes. So he got off, asked them what this was, tried to understand whether the motorcycle belonged to them or not. Then a guy came along, some kid, I’m not

sure what he did exactly, but he made faces at him. So one of the soldiers said: "Come here!" He didn't, he ran off. Again: "Come here!" and so on. Anyway, I don't remember exactly what happened, but they caught him, slapped him around, kicked him, punched him some, and said: "This is the last time you're rude to Israeli soldiers." I'm not quite sure what they were trying to tell him.

What did the kid do exactly?

I'm not sure. Later I understood he was provoking them.

How old was he?

13, 14, perhaps a bit younger, or older, I don't know. *** was talking and the other soldiers were securing him from the side, so someone was looking out and then *** called him over and said: "Come here," and he didn't and ran off, or stuck out his tongue, made a lewd gesture, stuff like that. I'm not sure, I don't think it even came to that. Usually children don't provoke Israeli soldiers just like that. Anyway, they grabbed him at the back of the neck, the way you do when you spank your kid brother, but less jokingly. All three of them came at him, punched him, slapped him.

The company commander, too?

Yes. And kicked him on his way.

Serious beatings?

No. He didn't limp away crying, but he left very scared and ran off.

And the company commander took part in this?

Yes. That was something that I heard from guys who spent more time with him in the front command group, from the officers, too... I don't know if this was the way he did things, but generally speaking he was rather – he did things that I find less legitimate. Even driving off into H1¹⁹ to get falafel. Which was a prohibited area.

Alone or with the guys?

With the guys. No, he didn't go alone. With the whole front command group. They crossed over, stopped at a falafel stand, got some, and then they said: "Quiet, don't let anyone know about this, it's forbidden," That's it.

What else happened with him?

I don't know, I think in general he was a lot more aggressive. Let's say you're talking about a protester at a demonstration, he might say something to you and then you can ignore it, the way you usually would. Like when they'd swear at you and you try to ignore that. He would immediately attack them, catch them. Like the kids he caught and forced to sit and wait at Gross [Square]²⁰ – that was his idea. The ones I

told you about before, that crossed through the hole in the wall. [Earlier the testifier told about an order to detain Palestinian children who had crossed through holes in the wall over to the sector that was prohibited for Palestinians]. When we were on arrest missions, he'd be much louder, knocking with much more force. I mean he did stay in control, he wouldn't trash their home, but he'd shout. For example, you're carrying out an arrest mission or getting people out of the house. You go in, knock on the door, someone opens, you get everyone out, check their IDs, see if the person you're looking for is there, trying to understand where he is. If you do, and realize this is the right house, often you can get an impression from what people are saying and understand that the guy just isn't there, so let's go. Often he would say: "Yes, let's go in, they're lying to us. Let's look into this."

And you would do it?

Yes. You go in, inspect the rooms, he'd check that you've looked into all of them, and go. Not going in and messing up all their stuff. It was like, insisting on going in to check. If some kid came out, this commander would yell and be a lot more aggressive.

Testimony no. 30, 2010

Use of force

Did you happen to enter houses?

On patrols you go up on the roofs and often you pass through homes. They have a staircase inside the house so as you climb you look in the window and see what's going on inside. They're watching TV or sitting around in the living room and stuff like that. You actually pass in the spaces between their homes and can peek inside with just a wall between you.

Why would you be going there? What reason?

There are specific passages that you can use to get to certain rooftops. You can climb somewhere else and jump from roof to roof and get there.

So some of the house incursions were for practice?

Yes. But these were not actual house incursions but just going into those courtyards

where they have a stairwell. You know what the architecture is like in the Casbah, it's all very crowded and there are stairwells and passageways, we never actually went in to anyone's home there, but we came very close. If the door was open you could see into the house. You see what they were doing inside.

And these drills were frequent?

Yes, at least in the beginning because we had to practice where to go and what to do exactly when such things do happen.

Did it ever happen that people didn't want you to pass through their homes?

Yes, there was one time when we went up to a roof with our platoon commander to lookout over one of the roads, and we were sitting there, not doing anything special. There was a lot of laundry hanging there. A girl came along, looked at us, then a crazy old woman came and yelled at us in Arabic to go away, this was not our place, it was her home and she wouldn't leave. At first we tried to calm her down, we yelled at her a little to calm her down. She was shouting and gesticulating: "Go away!" At some point we did get up and go, we weren't there to disturb her. But it was like: "Calm down, okay, we're going." Before that, my platoon commander yelled at her: "Enough! Shut up!" Stuff like that. It didn't help. She wouldn't shut up. Finally we left and went somewhere else. As a rule, the friction with Palestinians was not easy, it makes you think. You make the rounds in the Casbah and go by kids or young Palestinians and think: "We're not that different, there's nothing different besides our culture and language." And this whole bit of exerting force so they hate you, you're simply a soldier and they hate you for it.

Testimony no. 31, 2010

Demonstrations

Once, when I was guarding, I saw a few demonstrations. It was basically Jews and Arabs waving signs and shouting chants. There's us – the guys that are guarding – and then there's Border Police guys who know something about the demonstration and are actually inside it. You can watch all these demonstrations on YouTube. They wave signs, shout, not too many people, 30 to 40 people. And after two hours it breaks up...there were settlers, Jews up on the roofs pouring water down on the

leftist demonstrators. Once – there's that passage, some street inside the Casbah, there's the Casbah on one side, the Arab quarter on the one side and the roofs of Jewish settlement on the other...

Avraham Avinu?

Yes. So people were throwing stones down from there.

At the demonstrators?

I remember they threw buckets full of water. Once they nearly dropped a rock on a soldier's head.

What happened?

The soldiers didn't manage to catch the kid who threw it.

Almost?

The rock fell right next to the soldier.

It was aimed at him?

Yes.

And that person was caught?

They tried, didn't find him.

Were you present, you saw that they were throwing rocks?

I saw a few times.

As a soldier, how do you behave in a situation like this?

If the guy is still there you report it on the radio and the front command jeep comes to catch him, although even then there's nothing to do with him.

Testimony no. 32, 2010

Meltdown

Once we stopped – there was stone throwing going on at Gross Square²⁰ so we were alerted and then the kid suddenly somehow showed up. So the lookout got on the radio and said: "Listen, stop, he's right next to you."

How old was this kid?

15 years old, Daoud was his name. We stopped him, stopped our vehicle, ran to him, and he was in total shock. We took him to Gross [Square], to the Jewish side, and

he started crying, yelling, he was having a meltdown there on the floor. There was nothing to do with him because suddenly you have a crying kid on your hands who seconds earlier was throwing roof tiles at Gross, so you're both dying to beat him to a pulp, being called to there in this heat, but he's crying to you. We didn't know what to do, so we took turns being with him, every little while someone else would take out his nerves on him and go. At some point when I was with him I tried to calm him down because he was tied, blindfolded, and crying, nose running and all, so I started shaking him, and then the deputy company commander tried, grabbed him and shook him: "Shut your mouth! Shut your mouth! Stop it!" We took him to the police station and he continued crying because the police didn't come and he wasn't taken in for questioning. It was so annoying, crazy story. In all this mess he's crawling on the floor, so the communications guy takes out his Motorola device. You know what that is?

The communications device?

Yes. *Boom!* Uses it to hit him over the head. Not meaning to harm him, just after over two hours of having to hear unbearable crying.

This is happening at Gross?

No, at the Givat Ha'Avot Station.²¹

At some side spot or...?

No, out front where all the police vans... Outside the questioning room. At some point I was with him and the communications guy took a picture of me. I didn't want to be photographed with him, it was a fucked up situation, you just don't know what to do any more. We were terribly confused, and there was anger. Because you see the stones he threw, you know what he did, you know it was dangerous. Again, you keep experiencing bad things but the people doing them are people who, I don't know...

How long was he at Gross until you took him to Givat Ha'Avot?

I don't remember if it was an hour or fifteen minutes. I think that was it. The messed up part is that he was at the police station for a long time. The most messed up part is that you come in contact with these people. Every time someone does something wrong, one of the Arabs, you take him to the police station, and then he disappears. He's either taken to some army base or somewhere else for three, four days.

Do you know where?

I don't know. We were always told it was somewhere in the Territories.

Ofer [Military Holding Facility]?

Maybe, I don't know. We'd just leave them at the police station and forget about them. They would just come back after a while. They weren't really going anywhere.

Earlier you said that when you were at Gross, the deputy company commander shook this boy.

Yes, we all did. He went wild at him.

What does that mean? Why?

Because they were such worms at a certain point, I just remember that we hated them, I hated them. I also was a racist there, I was so mad at them because of their filth, their being so miserable and that whole fucked up situation: "You threw a stone, why did you do that? Why did you have to bring me here and you here, don't do that." And he's crying and groveling on the ground. He had his hands cuffed and at some point we freed them because he was crying and pleading. He was screaming and all wet from sweat and tears and a runny nose. You simply don't know what to do about it. The shaking was out of desperation. It wasn't necessarily out of violence. I think we even began laughing, even now when I think of it, you're so lost out there, in this situation.

You're saying it was not only you and the communications guy, right? The deputy commander was also doing it?

Obviously, what do you mean? It's not that we were shaking him endlessly... It was like: "Stop it, you're driving us crazy!" and yelling at him: "Enough! Enough!" in Arabic. You throw any word you know in Arabic, like "excellent" and "what's your name?" and other such nonsense.

Testimony no. 33, 2008

Used to the routine

... The Palestinians live a rather subdued routine there and they're familiar with these things. I mean, they know that now there's a tour of the Casbah and that they have to get out of the way. They know that if an Israeli army patrol shows up they move over. They know that I can enter their home and they're used to it, every house there has had soldiers going through it thousands of times already. There wasn't a

single house I wasn't familiar with, from the inside as well. And that's what I wanted to mention also, in terms of our routine there. I was doing 8-820 patrols, meaning sometimes I was spending 16 hours a day inside the Casbah. I enjoyed it a lot, yes, it was even fun actually. Exhausting, but you feel free, you're walking around and all. We also took a lot of pictures there, we have lots of pictures. Nice photos. We could do whatever we felt like. Not violence, there was not really much violence except for routine inspections and stuff like that which we did a lot, and I personally did a lot. But even randomly, I mean even now I don't...I think that operationally it was the right thing to do.

What do you mean?

Not random, I choose the kid, if someone looks suspicious, then yes, we go and check him out. We detain him on normal procedure, ask to see his ID, if we need to, maybe carry out a body search but we try not to.

How do you decide whether a body search is needed? Like if he's wearing a jacket in the summer?

Perhaps, or if he looks suspect. At some point, you already know the routine, you recognize the faces, they recognize you, you know when things are suspect or not, you know who lives here and there. Things are rather clear, so at some point the checks also become less intense. At first we checked everything, afterwards things calmed down. The patrol routine is interesting. You walk on rooftops a lot, enter homes. You can enter a home through the roof, although you're not supposed to. I mean, we had no other way to get there so we'd always go through houses.

It's forbidden to enter homes?

It's forbidden to enter homes.

This has always been the case or is this something new?

I know we were forbidden to enter houses without a special order, but we would always do it, we couldn't not do it.

Because you can't go between houses without...

Impossible. You can't be walking only outside in the street. If you want to, you can, but no one would do that.

And that's happening 24/7?

More or less, you could say.

How does it work? Sometimes you enter from the roof, at other times you enter through the door?

Usually I wouldn't use the door, I'd find an entrance from the rooftop. There are plenty of abandoned houses, so through the roofs we knew we'd always come out through some house. Or by mistake. People are used to this routine there...

Testimony no. 34, 2010

It's their home after all

There's a guy there named Abed who's always bringing tourists up to his roof. His building is adjacent to Beit Hadassah and looks over this school or yeshiva or something. So there he is, right on top of their basketball court, their basket is attached to the wall of his house. So he's always bringing tourists up to his roof, and he's not allowed to do that because someone might throw a block down from there or something.

Did this ever happen?

Not while we were there, anyway. Sometimes stones were thrown from his roof, in the very beginning of our time in Hebron, stones were thrown at our posts, not at the settlers. And that was that. But at first they said they'd forbid him from doing this. He speaks Hebrew and is very connected to these things, he knows what's what. I think it's his profession too, his business. Lot of tourists come over to his roof and he sells them souvenirs and stuff.

What's the problem with taking them up to his roof?

It was a simple matter of deciding it was a security problem. I don't even know who decided to prohibit this. Again, on the basis of things that happened before we were even in Hebron. At first, before I was posted to the front command group, I wasn't really connected to all these things. Later I understood a lot more. I don't know who really decided this and why, but it was decided to forbid him to do this. At first it wasn't a big deal, and then everyone was annoyed, they went into his house at night, just to scare him. They must have behaved the way they do on arrest missions, taking out all the men, taking their IDs, yelling at him never to do it again, that next time he does he'll be arrested – something to that effect. It helped, sort of, because then he didn't

go up there any more. Later he did a bit, and then one of the objectives of the patrol was to go over and bring down the tourists that Abed takes up to his roof. So you go and tell him: "You know you're not suppose to bring tourists up to the roof." The tourists ask you why, you don't talk to them. So you sit on that roof for a half hour or an hour or until either the patrol commander gets tired of this, or he gets confirmation from the company commander or deputy to get back to our routine and leave.

What did the tourists do up there on the roof? Take pictures of the army post?

Not the post, they couldn't take pictures of it from there.

So what was the problem with their being there?

Simply because it's a very strategic spot with regard to the Jewish settlement there.

For the tourists.

Yes. The point was you couldn't really prevent people from climbing up to their own roofs, they also have laundry lines up there and all. It's their home after all. But you're saying: "Okay, fine, so only the actual residents can go up there." At some point you're pretty well acquainted with all the residents, and you go up there as little as possible. So there won't be too much unnecessary army presence. If people wanted to photograph the army post they'd climb up in houses that were closer to it, all the CPT⁵ houses and such.

This mission, did it really help?

For a while, yes. He stopped taking tourists up to the roof. Then he started up again. At first he did, then he didn't, or once in a while. Even that too, like all things in Hebron, ended up finally with: "Okay, I don't care, let the tourists go up, I really don't care." That was it in general, the attitude towards everything in Hebron. At some point, even little kids running away, scurrying through all those alleys in what's called the Old Casbah, the little Casbah, the eastern one...

Arab kids?

Yes. They'd go through there instead of passing through the Pharmacy Checkpoint, just in order not to make such a large detour. I didn't think they had that much to lose by being caught. At first we'd catch them and either make them go back or...first take them to the police, then send them back, or sit them down for some two hours in our posts and then release them elsewhere. Finally we got tired of them, too.

Testimony no. 35, 2008

Holidays in Hebron

I remember Purim¹³ events that were very annoying.

Why?

They filmed there that night. Two students came around to shoot a feature film, if I'm not mistaken, some love story between a Palestinian man and a Jewish woman or vice versa, I don't remember. They came out of one of the houses next to the sterile road, and one of the [settler] Jews happened to come along at that moment, I think he was a bit drunk, too, telling by his smell and conduct as well. He went crazy about their opening the door and going out directly into the street, and it's important to note here that none of the Palestinians set foot outside that door, they stayed inside because they knew their place very well. So it developed into a fistfight.

Was this an Israeli camera crew?

Yes. Not a large one. I think there were three people: camera, boom and director. That's it. That was during one of my first weeks there, perhaps my second week. I was a bit shocked, I didn't understand what was going on, what my job was here, since this was actually a fight among Jews, so what was my position in this? But it was somehow obvious to me from the way our company commander handled the situation, that we could not afford to have that happening in our designated area at the time. Certainly not on Purim, in the whole chaos that causes. It had to be stopped. I stood facing that settler, trying to persuade him logically that it was okay, that no Palestinians came out and that these were Jews and it was alright. I don't know whether he didn't want to understand this or if he was just too drunk or nervous, but at some point he turned all his anger towards me and grabbed my rifle sights to pulled it towards him. I immediately remembered what we were told: that no matter what, no one may touch our weapon. This is the greatest danger. In hindsight, I think this is meant just for Palestinians, but at that moment the first thing that came up was that and I pushed him back with my rifle. At that point he went wild and began to yell that I was pointing my gun at him, like I was going to use my weapon against Jews and stuff like that. After calming down, I realized that the weapon would not be used, hung it on my body and went over to him to explain, manipulated him with the Purim holiday mood, reminding him that he had to be merry and I think he was drunk enough not to understand what I was talking about and moved on. In general, Jewish holidays in Hebron were weird situations. There was Lag Ba'Omer¹⁴ which was not

supposed to be anything special but there was this procession of Jews from Beit Hadassah, which is a bit above our post, towards Tel Rumeida. The settlers went down in the direction of Avraham Avinu where they organized a huge bonfire. From afar I saw them dragging a large doll dressed in black, and I thought this was very banal and superficial and to be expected, now they were going to burn a doll dressed as an Arab. As they came closer I realized their doll was holding a "Peace Now" sign so that did surprise me a little, it was somewhat more 'creative'. This is what the holidays are like there.

Testimony no. 36, 2010

The Desperation Stairway

You just said that the police there is in a stranglehold. What does that mean?

As I was saying, the situation there is extremely complex. It's not like in the center of the country where citizens are disciplined and understand that they live in a place where they can only behave lawfully. There [Hebron] it's less obvious, and creates a very... confused situation.

Do you recall an occasion where you witnessed this confusion?

Yes, sure.

Tell me.

It was towards the end of our time there.

Why are you smiling?

Because it's really such a story... Our patience was at its end, we were the standby squad out there, it was Saturday and we were alerted by the barrier, at Beit Hadassah near the "Desperation Stairway"¹⁶: Jews had blocked the way to a Palestinian woman and began to throw stones at her.

Where did she come from?

She came from the stairs, so we rushed over there, with all our emergency gear and helmets and everything. We get there, see small [settler] children gathering. I came relatively late, I had been on my way to the bathroom so I joined them and saw my sergeant arguing with several kids who came up to about his navel, shouting at him:

“Son of a bitch! What are you doing out here? You’re not even protecting us! Whose side are you on?” Total mess. Their father stands on the side, inciting them against us because we told them they couldn’t go through there because the Palestinian woman was standing there and needed to proceed and they had thrown stones at her a moment earlier, with no reason. It was a real crisis, we didn’t understand what we were able to do about it. We began arguing and it was simply such a situation that... There were curses flying in the air...we didn’t know what to do. There was no solution.

How many children were there?

About seven of them, surrounding our sergeant and beginning to... He was already desperate, it was so surreal.

How old were they?

10, 11 years old.

And the Palestinian woman was still there?

No, she had already left. But we wanted to limit them so this kind of situation would not be repeated.

Do you know whether they had hurt her?

I didn’t see myself, I came after she’d been there. They alerted us on the radio, I didn’t get a detailed picture of what had happened beyond what we heard reported, that stones were thrown at a Palestinian woman and her way was blocked.

Let’s return to the situation itself. You’re with all your gear, running to this spot, tired, exhausted – what do you do about those kids?

There’s nothing we can do about them. My sergeant talked to them. I remember myself standing there and thinking: “What am I doing here? Am I their kindergarten teacher? I come here to protect them but they’re actually...” Situations like this happen all the time. It happened before our time and I’m sure it’s still happening. My thought was: “What is being done about it? Where’s the solution?”

So eventually you left and the kids stayed?

Eventually that’s what happens. There’s nothing you can do. What are you going to do?

Can’t you summon the police?

Okay, and then the police doesn’t show up, and if they do, what are they going to tell them? “Naughty boys, go home?” What would they say?

And people know about those kids?

Yes. I mean that whole settlement contains maybe 100 people.

No, I mean if those kids are the ones who do these things repeatedly, and you knew them.

Yes, sure, you know all the kids out there. They sit with you in your army posts one moment, and the next moment they throw stones, swearing. I think they're the ones out there to be pitied the most. They grow up into such hatred, such a reality. They have no control over it.

How long did you argue with them out there?

10 minutes. It wasn't too long, there was nothing we could do. Really. I'm asking you, what would you do? There's nothing you can do. You face those kids and know what happened and there's nothing you can do. Nothing at all.

Does the company commander give you instructions of any kind?

No. Nothing you can do. You report to your company commander, okay... He gives you an order just calming the situation on the ground, okay, stop the activity. There's no long-term solution or anything. Nothing.

Have you ever detained an Arab child for something similar, or have you ever seen such a thing?

I saw, I don't know if it was a child, I was at an army post and a child threw a stone at it. We chased him and caught him. We do chase and catch Jewish kids, too, right? Okay, we caught him, made him sit next to the post, and told him: "This is not okay, not okay at all." We tried to educate him, and he went on his way. There's not too much to be done. He didn't hurt anyone or have a weapon. It was this gray-area case. There's a lot of that in Hebron.

Now say you've caught an Arab child throwing stones. You would catch him, you said you'd make him sit for two to three hours, or half a day...

Less with children. At least in my experience. If someone actually came along and threw a stone and I saw him and caught him – though it didn't happen often, they were very quick and hurried away successfully – then yes, obviously our point was to put an end to this situation, to the stone throwing, you want to disrupt them. So you don't hit them and slap them around and go on your way. You catch them, detain them, that's the only thing you can do. Under more severe circumstances you summon the police and open a record for them. But that's it, you move on.

Testimony no. 37, 2010

Just to scare them

I happened to be at Gross Square²⁰ several times when Palestinian children would burn weeds at the cemeteries or roll tires and throw stones.

Towards the Pillbox Post?

Towards the pillbox or the Jewish settlement. The front command jeep would be alerted – the patrol – they'd be caught, and until the police arrived they couldn't just stay outside with them. So they would take them into the ground floor of the pillbox and they'd stay there. Once they stayed there for a few hours, and the door was locked from the outside. There's the door upstairs that's locked, so no one can get in or out. They were there for a few more hours alone downstairs – there's an incredible stench inside, infantry who were there before us would piss there on the floor and it stank to high heaven. They stayed there for hours without water, no food. Just that stench, it was disgusting. They cried and started calling people on the phone, and one of the soldiers who had sat at another post came to stay with them inside so they wouldn't mess around on the stairs. They made plenty of trouble and weren't supposed to use the telephone but they did anyway. I didn't want to use force so I called the war-room, and there was just a commanders' meeting going on in the company so the company commander came to the post.

Alone or with the deputy battalion commander?

Alone. He came, opened the door, and began to yell and swear at them in Arabic, and slap them around a bit. How did it end? There was nothing the police could do about it.

That case with the company commander? He slapped them around and what?

No, then they kept quiet, they were scared of him. They stayed still and three hours later they were released, it was all meant to punish them, scare them. They're not afraid of the police. There are 16-year-olds there with 19 police citations.

That's the usual age group? Or younger?

Younger, older, from 10 years old and up. But older ones, too. The police has nothing much to do about it. They say: "Okay, we'll open a record, and they'll spend a night here, but otherwise, there's nothing we can do, they're minors."

How long did they sit in the pillbox?

Three hours, but there were many cases where they'd sit and wait for the police to

pick them up and then one of the soldiers would go with them to their interrogation, or the police would go straight there.

And that whole story where they sat inside the pillbox because they rolled some tires?

They rolled tires, threw stones, made a fire.

Did the stones hit you or the pillbox?

No, they didn't.

The tires they rolled were on fire?

Once there was this burning tire, but they're not supposed to do that. It's like an educational thing. As long as you allow a kid to do something that is wrong, he'll go on doing it. They know they're not supposed to do it, and as soon as they see that no one reacts, they simply go on doing it because they see that it's okay.

What is the point?

No point. If they see that no one jumps at them, that it's okay to roll tires, then they'll do it. It will be burning tires, and then eventually stones.

What were your instructions regarding those kids?

Scare them. The police, too, said there is nothing they could do about them. Just open another citation for them, but that wouldn't really bother them. It's not like it would keep them from being accepted to college or some job or the army... That's it, so there's nothing to do except scare them.

And this happens routinely?

It's not like he punched them or got them down to the ground or broke their bones or anything. Just slapped them around some. I'm not saying it's okay but that's what they understand.

Do you think, based on your time there, that it really changed things? Did they throw fewer stones or burn fewer tires?

No. They know, they hear somehow which battalion is on duty, if it's Golani Infantry – who they're more afraid of, apparently because they're more violent than the Nahal Brigade – and after that came Kfir Brigade... And then both the settlers and the Arabs, guys who talked to us, would say we're arriving, that we're this kind of...

The "vegetarian" battalion?

With a higher moral standard. Out there you've got to make an impression that you're not just standing around your posts on the lookout, but that you're active. There were lots of initiatives in Abu Sneina¹⁸ and the Casbah, and stuff was caught and

prevented, both. In general there weren't too many incidents in that half year.

Do you recall more occasions where people were detained for educational purposes?

This was not educational punishment. It was to scare them.

Testimony no. 38, 2008

A routine thing

What are targeted missions?

If it's an arrest mission, it involves going into a place that we usually don't go into. Say there was an entry into Bani Na'im village, near Hebron. It was also often things that came down to us from the GSS⁹. Most of them were arrests, but they could also be a large demonstration of presence, like in Bani Na'im or similar places.

Were there entries into H1¹⁹?

Yes, every day the army entered H1, to the home of Na'atsha's parents.

Na'atsha?

Yes, something like that, I don't remember the precise name. Before we got there [Hebron], there was a terrorist attack, two civilians were killed. All the intelligence info from the GSS pointed to Hebron as the place where the assailant came from, so he had to be caught.

So his parents' home was entered every single day?

Yes. Not at regular hours. Never at regular hours, so they wouldn't expect it. So that if he did come there, they wouldn't be able to warn him that we were coming.

Who would go in?

One of the older company's commanders, with an auxiliary company commander, another patrol force, two vehicles.

What would they do there?

Arrive, bang on the door: "Where is he? Where is he?" Naturally he wasn't there and they'd come back. Straight-up harassment, so the family would pressure him, make him come back, give information, something like that.

It lasted the whole time you were there?

With short pauses, but yes.

Was it by order of the battalion or brigade commanders?

Brigade commander. It was a routine thing.

Testimony no. 39, 2010

Disrupting lives

Was it a frequent occurrence that a street would be closed off?

There were the Saturday tours that were most... We hated that the most. How does it work? There's this large group of people from the settlement who come to tour the place [Casbah]. It happened all the time. The guide is... I don't know, he is a great distorter of history, claims there is this love-story between the Nazis and the Palestinians, stuff like that. It happens all the time. Every weekend. Usually before the demonstration²² and there were people who would show up for it regularly, Jewish tourists from America, or from all over Israel and settlers always join them. We pass them, there's something on the wall, we walk through the Casbah and the guide says: "Here's a stone carved in the shape of a Menorah, so probably this is where Abraham..." Somewhere he sees something reminiscent of a Swastika so he says: "Now I'll tell you a love story, not between a man and a woman but a love story between Arabs and Nazis." Really, these are moments when you wonder: "Why do they listen to him?"

How do these tours work?

At first we'd simply walk, surrounding them in a circle and walking along with them and they said it didn't make too much sense. So now some forces flank them, and others close the tour, and some are scouting ahead. And some soldiers are running on the rooftops.

How many men does this involve?

You take half a company to do this.

How many men is that?

Command group and half a company – that could amount to 30 to 40 men. And there

are the standby squads and the patrol. That's their job at the moment. And there's a squad running on the rooftops, which is exhausting, I don't know how they managed to do it, and there's the squad closing off the procession. First off, it's annoying because you cannot possibly accept this fact that you must quarrel with Palestinians in the Casbah. "No passage through here, go there, don't get close to me, don't get close to them!" For the sake of this tour you're disrupting lives, for this miserable tour that doesn't really mean anything...It's hard to explain in words, but when you're there you simply tell yourself it's not fair, every time they feel like it, we said we're strong and we'll protect them so they simply conduct this tour whenever they feel like it. There were occasions where...say one of the settlers is in the army. So he came out with his weapon to show how cool he is and all, that he's so important.

And you let him?

Can't help it. You can't tell him not to come with his gun.

Not even the company commander?

I think he was just asked to stay calm.

Testimony no. 40, 2008

They didn't think it was funny

Rooftop patrols – we'd climb up to the rooftops. I loved it. We did five such patrols where the idea was to cross the whole Casbah just on rooftops. Each time we'd come from a different direction and then when something happens we'd know how to come around using their roofs. I remember once we went with our sergeant on the roofs and there was nowhere left to go. So we entered a house, jumped from the roof into their porch, screaming of course. They weren't on the porch at the time. We'd scream, they'd come out and see it's the Israeli army on their roof. "Come on, open the door!" we'd yell, jumping down one after the other, and even if he had intention to harm us this was his chance because you're jumping from the height of about two meters with the weight of all your gear, smashing on the floor, you're not really a threat... He didn't try... If he'd wanted to harm us that would be the time, and apparently he didn't want to. He was terribly scared, right in front of his wife and kids. That's it. We entered their house, came down the stairs, and out into the street.

Entering homes on patrol? Is it embarrassing?

It's embarrassing. Especially... I remember constantly thinking: "Obviously they hate us, that's so obvious. A kid sees me pointing a gun at his dad – why? Because I had nowhere else to go. It was terribly embarrassing.

Was it common?

I had this trick of making faces. I remember it...I wanted to make them feel...I remember walking inside the house and kids would come by, lots of kids. They'd pass, a whole line of them, standing and looking at you, I don't know if they understood or whether they were used to this, and then I'd make a funny face at them, and naturally they wouldn't find it funny.

Testimony no. 41, 2008

She offered us cookies

Once we were on Avner Patrol, all the way up the hill and suddenly we hear that there were shots at the Pharmacy Checkpoint. Everyone goes wild. "Gunfire!" Everyone's running, of course not exactly knowing what's going on, but this was with our former sergeant. So people start asking: "What do we do now?" Finally it was a kid who had thrown a firecracker at his window. What madness. Those were the days I hated most. It took three hours. It could have continued all day, such an incident.

What happened then?

We'd search all the Casbahs, alert the standby squads, everyone. Really, no one is given a second to rest, all the markets are closed off. The western Casbah, Abu Sneina¹⁸... The Al Sheikh neighborhood. Jabal Juher, everything. All the patrols show up, alerts, standbys. That's it. There's nothing you can do about it, you simply have to inspect everyone on the street.

What does that mean, 'closing off the markets'? How do you do that?

Two men, the sergeant and someone else, stand together in front, stopping the traffic on the street, another two close it off at the other end, and another two patrol and secure them.

So the entries and exits are all blocked, the companies are alerted, and then there are searches. How is this done?

I remember very few occasions where we'd search the whole Casbah. I remember many incidents where we'd block off streets. A person arrives, the force goes through the Casbah properly, opening and all, but fast, half-running. Looking for the person whose description we received over the radio, finding someone who resembles him, searching him... Continue. Run, run, run, and then you don't find a thing.

They knew it was a BB gun.

They said a boy... at some point they already knew it was...there was no hole in the window.

First they knew it was a boy but not exactly what happened.

They knew it was a boy, perhaps they thought he used an air gun because there was a mark on the window, but no hole. "It's dangerous, why does he have a BB gun? Go on, run, search."

You entered houses, too, or was it just a street search?

In that specific incidence...we didn't enter people's homes so much. I mean, I remember there was someone's house where we jumped over the wall and entered her yard. I don't know why we did that. We entered the yard, so in order to get out of there, I mean, would we hop over the wall again? We exited through her house. I remember she was very nice and offered us cookies. It was really weird. I try to think of a person whose house is entered by six soldiers with all their gear... I guess they were used to this. It happens there quite a lot, for some time now. But still, six soldiers entering their home.

Did you knock on the door or was it open?

No, we knocked. I must admit that even though it's the army and we're all psyched up and all, even our sergeant, still it's Battalion 50, meaning the lefties, so... We enter, go through, exit, don't say... anything, just continue running, looking really serious and important. The truth is that except for that one occasion, it wasn't so much like that. There weren't so many such incidents, not so many explosions.

How long did this go on, until someone finally told you: Listen, it was just a BB gun, get back to normal?

I don't remember exactly. Something in the order of two hours, three hours.

All that time people couldn't come out of the Casbah?

They can't come of the Casbah anyway, ever.

Testimony no. 42, 2008

Keep that plate to yourself

What were your relations with the Jewish settlers like?

That depends to a great extent. There were people who really connected with them and went to Chabad House on Friday nights and sat with them on their guard shifts. I looked to it personally that when they came to me at my post, I'd make them turn back and didn't relate to them too much, didn't accept food or drink from them.

Why?

At first I did accept hot drinks from them. At some point I remember one of the settler children coming around, who was the main star on these occasions. He came to me on my shift with a plate of food and as he was approaching he saw a little Arab boy on the road, so he spat on him and then came to me a few meters later with that plate. I told him: "You can keep that plate to yourself." After that, I never took anything from them.

Was it a young child?

Grade-school age, yes.

Were there instructions what you could and couldn't, to what extent you could interact with them?

Not really. Only talking among us. Some people felt more comfortable with it, some less. There was an army post where two tiny little Arab sisters hung around, and guys started giving them food, and then we talked about that, too, and how it looked, and stopped that as well.

What was said about this?

That it was not our place. It came to the point where they would come over to the post and ask for food. That was out of line. It began nicely, they were really cute. They would play around near us and when you're standing six hours on guard duty, it's fun and you have some candy in your pocket so you give it to them and then when they start asking for food...

Testimony no. 43, 2008

We try to find the solution ourselves

There were Arab kids who'd come in to steal metal, they needed metal.

Where were they going into?

Into the shops.

Okay, those same shops where the Jewish settler kids would steal from [referring to an episode recounted earlier by the testifier]?

Yes. They have their spots. Kids will be kids, you know. They come in, they steal and we were tired of this. You take them to the police once, they go back, their parents might be beating them up and they are forced to go out and bring things home. We have no solution, so we blindfold and tie them up, they sit in the post, get food and water. First time, for five hours, second time longer. That's how we punish them. After the police picked them up we try to find the solution ourselves. They don't get beaten up. It would certainly have helped, but we don't do that. So their punishment was often detention until they'd be picked up. They were placed in the sentry post, but again, they were all treated decently, no beatings, never...

Testimony no. 44, 2010

I wanted conflict with them

I remember Thursdays on *** Road. It's a route that you use to go up the hill once or twice a week to visit the Pillbox Post in Abu Sneina¹⁸. Thursdays there's this weird market there of the strangest goods, I think they're stolen. Repulsive stuff, piles of clothes and market food stuffs, it's always on Thursday, and packed full. Hundreds of thousands of people would come there, the street would be jam-packed, but that's exactly when we'd come by in our jeep, I don't know whether it was intentional or not, but it became a bit, like if you're driving uphill on *** Road with all the... The jeep has two sirens, one a normal honker and another with the most irritating noise. Say you'd be driving there and your vehicle is moving two kilometers an hour because you're making your way in a crowd and honking the whole time, then they begin to throw stones at you. You're in this armored vehicle and they're throwing stones at

you the whole time and you're cracking up laughing, I remember this as a lot of fun. We would honk on purpose, really loud. You drive, make your way uphill, and the whole time there's this sound of stones hitting you, *boom*. You don't even get out to chase them, first of all you can't possibly, you're surrounded by thousands of people, and secondly, because you really don't care, it's an armored vehicle and you're in the middle of a market with thousands of people, hundreds of people, I don't know.

So why do it?

Because you have to visit the pillbox, change shifts there. And also, we'd have all those jokes about the market... I guess I hated Arabs so badly by that time. They made me sick, I was disgusted by their stench, their filth, and the fact that they were always so servile and... you keep wanting to quarrel with them, you want them to... I kept wanting to be violent with them, to confront them, I wanted them to hit me and I'd hit back and not just stand facing them with my rifle. But it never came to that, they were always subdued, miserable, repulsive. I just hated them for it... I was so mad at them all the time...

Testimony no. 45, 2008

Playing around with the soldiers

... Beit Hadassah settlement. Arab children had thrown stones at Beit Hadassah. That was a hell of a story! Suddenly all these things come up, you're taking me back to it. Arab children or an Arab child threw a stone at Beit Hadassah, broke a window, suddenly – boom! I was on patrol at the other end of town, and – boom! Reports are coming in about 15 settlers running into the Casbah, looking for Arabs to beat up. They broke a shop door. We're alerted, rushing over and when we got to Shalalah there was no one there any more, just Arabs, angrily showing us the damage. "They were just here, look what they did to my door." We went to Beit Hadassah, looking for the boys, didn't find them. But there were stones thrown. Jews threw stones at Arabs in the Casbah.

What happened to those who ran in?

They got away. Before we got there. Came, broke doors and stuff, and ran off.

And then there was stone throwing between the Casbah and Beit Hadassah?

That continued. Even as we got there we saw a stone flying into the Casbah, so we want to start a search in Beit Hadassah, but searching them? You can't tell who it was. v

Testimony no. 46, 2008

Golani comes to Hebron

... So about Tel Rumeida, what do you remember?

Golani infantry get there, they came into the area after a long time. In hindsight, I'm telling you that the Jewish settlers just loved us. In front of Baruch Marzel's house we'd be told all the time: "This is the best battalion we ever had here." Then Golani showed up. They hadn't been in Hebron for a long time, we replaced the Nahal Brigade and there was always this rumor that the Nahal men would hand out chocolate milk [to Palestinians] at the checkpoint, but they'd say: "We're not like that, Golani's here now!" Totally. Golani was now in Hebron.

Who was saying this? The settlers or you?

We were. Totally. That's how we'd be indoctrinated. Golani is now in Hebron.

Indoctrinated? That's how your commanders would talk?

Yes. And it's true, we toughened everything up.

What does that mean?

That if before lines were not drawn, now we did draw the lines where everyone [Palestinians] was supposed to stand [while they were waiting to be checked].

Draw them literally, on the ground?

Yes. And checkpoints that had not existed before, I mean you know Hebron pretty well, don't you? So if you go up from Police Checkpoint to Tel Rumeida, there's an army post, and we came along with a bucket of paint, there's a three-street intersection there, so we'd paint a line from where the Palestinians would come down, another line for where they came up, everything got tougher. Order and... But the way people were treated was not like in Nablus. Nablus was rough, we were really tough there. Here it was different. People were treated a bit better. At least that's what I recall from

the foot patrols. Nahal would do them in the small Shalalabs, or the big Shalalabs, I don't exactly remember what you call it. We went in, I saw all of Hebron: I saw the minarets, the banks, we really went inside the markets. We were not allowed to be near the Palestinian policemen. We'd walk around inside, totally. You know we had these permanent markers with us [for marking tourniquets]. We'd doodle over all their ATMs. As individual soldiers, not as a general order. We'd enter the market, there was a table with Palestinian police, they'd see us, get up all four of them, put on their weapons, and whoever took this patrol out got scared and said: "Okay, we're going back."

No one was detained? Palestinians caught on the Tel Rumeida Road where they were not supposed to walk?

I have to try and remember. Yes, there were rules about how long you could detain someone who rioted or disturbed you. I do remember that once we made several youngsters sit because you know how it is, they come around making faces because you're a soldier and you only try to get it out of them, make your point. So they were kept there for a few hours and finally released.

I'm missing the middle of the story here. They come around scowling and then they're sitting there, handcuffed. How come?

It very much depends on the soldier there. "Go stand over there" and then he does it on purpose. Or he cursed, I don't remember. There was no hitting. Either they swore or tried to show a bit of rebelliousness within the limitations without endangering themselves and for that they were forced to sit there.

You mentioned the doodling on ATMs – was this an expression of boredom?

No, I remember something, I'm trying to think of how to word it. Once on a Saturday we got permission to go to the pool in Kiryat Arba¹¹, the army's. When we got back we went up to Tel Rumeida and these two guys seriously intended to catch an Arab, beat him up and leave. And I'm thinking how I...

Guys on your patrol?

No, no. Three guys, I told you we went out and came back. They were a bit screwy. Finally both of them were discharged. I remember trying to prevent this by talking to them. I think they didn't do it in the end, but there is something I do remember... Guys took mats from somewhere, I told you.

What was the story? Where did they take mats?

From one of the houses. Near Tel Rumeida, I don't recall why they were there to

begin with.

Where did they put them, in the lounge?

No, they took them home.

Is this something that was known in the company or was it under the table?

Under the table.

Testimony no. 47, 2008

To deter them

We had mapping missions, which means going into the house and mapping it, making a drawing of its layout. It was up to the company commander at the time.

Was this a common type of mission?

Yes. It could happen three to four times a week.

Where?

In the Casbah, and in Abu Sneina¹⁸ as well we had mapping patrols where you go from house to house, you get a list of eight houses and map them. If you don't find the entrance, could be that that house has changed since it was mapped last. You go on. I remember that on a patrol in Abu Sneina, when we were on a mapping mission – this was early on there – about a month after we arrived, we heard: "It's just been done in my house two months ago, what do you guys want now?" And we reply: "Why would we be sent to you if your house was mapped as recently as two months ago?" But that was part of the deal, to deter them. To enter the house, be seen, so they'd realize we know exactly what goes on in those houses.

Was it always in neighborhoods around the Jewish settlement, or sometimes deeper inside?

Deeper inside as well.

Where? Actually within H1¹⁹? In the area that is under the control of the Palestinian police?

No. More around the Casbah. Once we went into a house that was really on the borderline, in H1.

Testimony no. 48, 2008

Prepared for the situation

We had an episode with Shihab Na'atsha who was somehow related to some terrorist attack. He was one of the heavies, we really hoped to catch him – finally someone who'd really done something – and our battalion would send out an arrest mission on a regular basis looking for him. The advance company, especially, as well as the auxiliary company were targeting his home every day. One day our deputy company commander had apparently fought hard enough to get the okay for us to go on an arrest mission to his parents' house. We got there at night, spread out around the house, checked that no one was coming out of a window, the whole procedure. Knock on the door: "Everyone out!" and before you even finish talking, the door opens, everyone is already out. Since they'd already had so many arrest missions they knew what to expect. They had chairs ready outside, and water bottles, they were simply prepared for the situation, it must have been very regular there. I think that about a month or two weeks after we left Hebron, he was executed by a special forces unit or Duvdevan, I don't recall. One of the officers in our company could identify people of the family by their look, he could stop people in the Casbah and say: "This is a Na'atsha." He'd open their ID and he was always right. That guy had so many arrest missions against him.

And you never caught him?

No. No one from our battalion caught him. I also think those arrest missions were meant to draw him out, thinking there is a limit to how much a man will let his family suffer on his account. But that's my personal opinion.

Testimony no. 49, 2008

As if you're trash

The only thing for me is this strong feeling of frustration – you're there to protect people who don't give a damn, who brutalize you, use their kids to be mean to you.

No appreciation whatsoever. The fact that they ask you to escort them, and you do it on Saturday, is not the point, even if they do bring us snacks all that time, because it's not worth it if right after that they're swearing at me and even throwing stones and acting violently. These things are unbearable; it's a nightmare, something that doesn't happen in the rest of the Territories. I mean this attitude, as if you're trash for all they care. It is especially visible with their kids. They have no shame, they can say anything they like, no one pays attention to them, there is nothing to be done about them. They're the lords of the terrain, they do whatever they like. These kids who broke into a shop, there was nothing we could do to stop them, it was amazing. It is so frustrating to watch a kid breaking into one shop after another, smiling, not caring, and even if you say something to him, or stop him once, it makes no difference. The next day you'll see him again, and the police officer is frustrated, too. They're surrounded by frustrated people who can do nothing about it, so the situation out there is totally absurd. I mean, one can still argue about the yeshiva out there, but the situation this creates, the attitude towards the army is...

Testimony no. 50, 2008

Not letting them rest for a moment

... There is initiative. The company commanders have an interest in initiating things – security activity – so as not to fall into routine and not make do just with the patrol – to do more, extra. So mapping missions are one such initiative, not just as a show of force – it does have certain security value and sometimes the GSS⁹ is involved as well. Less around the Casbah because the GSS knows the Casbah very well, everyone knows what goes on there.

So where did you go on mapping missions besides the Casbah?

All the towns around. There were several missions. Because we're a relatively young company, we did less, other companies did more. But specifically my own platoon took part in several mapping missions.

Where?

There was a large operation in Bani Na'im. It wasn't just mappings, it was on a bigger scale.

Mapping in Bani Na'im.

And there was another village, I remember that very well, right at the junction, the northern entrance near Halhul. We did mappings there, a large mapping operation. We really took people out of the houses, carried out searches.

Who ordered this operation? The GSS?

It came down from the brigade commander and the GSS.

Was it carried out during the day or at nighttime?

Nighttime. All these things happen at night. I don't remember ever doing a mapping during the day.

You'd go into H1¹⁹?

Sure, we went everywhere. Not on patrol; on special operations, sure. Plenty of times.

Mappings were also done in the areas around...

I don't recall specific places right now. Most of the mappings were carried out near the Casbah because they were not that significant, except for some major operations where we did carry out mappings. There was one very large operation carried out by the battalion, by the brigade – we entered the northern part of Hebron and mapped a bloc of houses designated by the GSS. But it was a really major operation, as if we were going to war.

But this operation was all mapping missions.

All mappings, and I can imagine that some companies carried out arrests. Specifically we carried out mappings in houses designated to us by the GSS.

And was there any special reason for this operation in northern Hebron?

Look, sometimes there are reasons, which to me are quite understandable. I mean, often there's an area, which is advantageous intelligence-wise. For the GSS it's very good, it shakes things up. People begin to talk and stuff. It also demonstrates presence, it shows we're in charge, although the army no longer likes this phrasing, 'demonstrating presence'. But it's also a part of it. And the battalion was excellent at doing this, this is what it did. This initiative of doing, of constant action, not letting the other side rest for a moment, keep initiating operations and more operations. That's why the battalion did so well out there, as I understood it.

In this operation did you do a search?

We did, we entered houses, trashed them, I mean we tried to proceed gently but you can't keep from doing it.

What, flipping drawers upside down?

Yes.

Find anything?

No, nothing there.

What is the definition of ‘finding something’? I mean, if you find a Hamas poster, for example.

Pass it up. You’re told in advance what you need. Arms, obviously. Propaganda, that’s important, you’ll pass it up. You need to catch the person, of course. That’s the kind of stuff you look for.

Testimony no. 51, 2008

Free reign

... I’ll tell you that within a very short time I began to feel that I was much busier protecting Arabs from the Jewish settlers than protecting Jewish settlers from the Arabs.

How is that manifested on the ground?

I don’t know what Hamas does inside Hebron, but whenever there was tension in the mixed neighborhoods, or mixed streets, I never witnessed a situation where Arabs harassed Jews. I mean, there was no violence on the part of Arabs, they didn’t harass the Jews. I think this was mainly out of fear. Because whoever was there before us handled them very roughly. The Jews, however, would really drive the Arabs crazy. They’d throw diapers full of shit into their gardens, throw their garbage into their yards. If an Arab kid was walking in the street and ran into three Jewish kids, they would beat him up or just harass him and all. There were lots of such harassments. Annoying things, like some religious neighbor lady comes to us saying she saw her son’s toy tractor down in the garden of her Arab neighbors, they stole it. Go figure. The company commander hears this: “What do we do? Go in.” So we go into the Arab woman’s home to retrieve the tractor, the stupidest thing. And you know, suddenly this group of soldiers – say we’re standing three, four soldiers outside – and the platoon commander enters the house with another soldier, begins to argue – it’s so idiotic for the army to be dealing with this to begin with, he starts to tell this Arab

mother that her little son's tractor actually belongs to the Jewish woman. I don't even know, it's hard to believe. There's no reason for an army to intervene in a dispute between neighbors.

How did it end? Did you take the tractor? Bring it to the Jewish woman?

Something vaguely tells me yes, but I don't remember how it got out of there. At the moment the platoon commander listened to the company commander but I remember him feeling awkward as well, just as we did. There was an argument. Or, once we were standing guard at night and this young Jewish religious woman from the neighborhood showed up. Next to the Tel Rumeida army post there's a building, we were standing close by and she said that on her way down Arabs bothered her, and that next to the post she was bothered again and it was one o'clock at night, so she wants us to call the police. We deliberated what to do and asked: "Are you sure?" because we knew that sometimes the girls say they were being harassed. Finally we did summon the police, they didn't make a big deal out of this, talked with the Arabs a bit and left. It was nice because it was our last month there and from then on she would sit with us on our guard shifts and we got to talking. Differences create interest, it was good.

Was she young?

Yes, a year or two younger than me. It was funny because four months earlier on a Friday night – the settler families would invite the soldiers over for Sabbath dinner – I didn't yet know her at the time but we were guests at her family's dinner, myself and another friend.

Is it a tradition that at some point the soldiers are invited to homes of the Jewish settlers?

It works out so that two to three Sabbaths are spent at the post, and one Sabbath we get home leave. So nearly every Sabbath you're invited, the platoon commander comes around and asks: "These and these families are inviting, who would like to go?" If it's not while you're asleep or on duty, why not go and have a decent dinner rather than eat at the post? So we sat there and things came up for discussion like the fact that we're leftists and about the Rabin assassination. It was interesting. Their views are tough but it was fun.

Were you told what to do when you see them throwing a diaper into a Palestinian yard or their children assaulting a Palestinian?

Listen, we always try to separate them, calm them down, keep things calm. What do you do when you see someone throwing something like that? You can tell them:

“Guys, this is out of line. You’re not going to enter the yard and pick up that diaper, and you’re not going to tell them to go in and pick it up. I think our conscience and our morals really kept us in one piece out there. We said to them: “Guys, this is not right.” I think that the settlers in Hebron know that when the Nahal Brigade is around they can’t create as many disturbances. The Jews there know they have less freedom of that sort because the Nahal soldiers are less violent and more left-wing and when Golani infantry are around they have more free reign...

Testimony no. 52, 2008

Arrest missions

There was another time, the largest arrest mission we had. We caught the man, we’d made a mistake, the mission got complicated, we took the people out and didn’t put them inside one room, so all the neighbors woke up and saw what was happening. We took the son, they began to shove us and tried to prevent his arrest. His mother fainted; I swear we didn’t touch her. Afterwards they said we did. She fainted, my medics treated her, we had two medics with us and they treated her, and then we left as fast as we could, as soon as we saw that she was okay. Later we were accused first of all of hitting her and that she’d fainted and we had a whole story with the DCL and we were accused of not helping her and we should have waited for an ambulance to arrive. Maybe that’s true. That’s it.

What ever happened with this complaint?

We have our opinion.

Did military police investigators question you?

They questioned the officers... the deputy company commander.

Those two guys, the son of the woman who fainted, do you know the reason for his arrest?

Yes, I know. He was arrested because he was on his way to lay an explosive charge.

And the guy before that, at the first arrest you mentioned, whose father shoved you.

I don’t know why he was arrested, no idea. Something to do with Hamas, I don’t

remember. Usually I wasn't informed, but here specifically they looked for a long time. There was some explosive charge on the way [to being set] and they searched for all the people who were even tangentially related, so he was one of them. It was obvious to us we had to catch him no matter what.

And these were the kind of people you were arresting usually, as far as you know?

Yes, he was the most serious case, but we would arrest people who we understood were accomplices and things like that.

Were there cases where you were sent to arrest people's relatives?

Yes.

What do you mean?

I don't remember exactly, there was this guy they were looking for, Na'atsha, which incidentally is the largest clan in Hebron, so all those IDs have the name, "Na'atsha", on them. Anyway that was his name and I was on relatively few arrest missions but guys from other companies, they constantly caught his uncle or his cousin, the main thing was to obtain information. Two weeks after we left Hebron...

He was caught?

Killed.

Testimony no. 53, 2008

Life there is very cheap

If I'm not mistaken there was this clan fight at Jabal Juher and all hell broke loose, there was crazy gunfire. I remember a bullet hit very close to our post, but it was from that fight, there was no suspicion of us being targeted. A bullet hit near the post. First of all, it was an incident where snipers took down three men, snipers from our battalion.

Where were you during the clan fight at Jabal Juher?

I was at a post... Our marksmen were alerted. I was a marksman, too, but I was not alerted. They went up to the post. I remember it all on the radio, it was crazy. We directed the snipers to the armed men. One of ours. They went up there with huge

binoculars and directed them until they hit three.

What was said about them? Why was this done?

Because they're endangering others. If a guy is armed he must be a terrorist. There's no reason for an Arab to have a Kalashnikov. They know it's forbidden. It looks very... I say this now – life there is very cheap. If he's armed, he's got to die. Apparently he's a terrorist, he must die. Those were the rules of engagement, too. You see someone armed, you shoot. There's no deviating from this. If he is armed, in a second he'll be firing at Beit Hadassah.

That was the...?

Excuse. He might go out and shoot a Jew right now, who knows? Or your buddy on the post, and then it effects you, too.

But the Palestinian policemen are armed, aren't they?

No way! They couldn't carry arms. And even if they do, it's only in areas where we have presence.

Most of the time.

Yes, but when we're around...

Testimony no. 54, 2008

Casbah tour

The most frustrating time is Saturdays, I don't know if this still happens. It's those Casbah tours, I think.

What are those?

On Saturday, two o'clock in the afternoon, they [Jews] enter the Casbah, and we secure them. A guided tour enters the Arab Casbah, to see where Jews once lived, and show mezuzahs²³ or just... They come in their Sabbath best, all the children, parents, everyone together, and we have to secure them. They come in, meaning we have to clear the whole street for them. The whole western Casbah, we spread out over rooftops, everywhere, and they go right in, a real guided tour as in the Old City. This is a tremendous security risk. It takes place every Saturday at one or two p.m., we try to vary the routine a bit, change the time, but there's not too much room

for variety and we really resented that. We were mad. It was obviously approved by the brigade commander, by the higher echelons, but mission-wise it was very problematic. It's hard to secure such a large number of people right in the midst of an Arab population.

What does 'such a large number' mean?

Up to forty or fifty. Entering an Arab neighborhood.

And they have their guide? Who shows up for these tours? I suppose the local Jewish settlers came once or twice.

Right, but there are always guests, people who come to spend the Sabbath with them on a regular basis.

Sometimes the tours are guided in Hebrew and sometimes in English?

I don't recall if these were English or Hebrew speakers, but I'm certain that every Saturday and holidays there'd be these Casbah tours. It was our biggest nightmare.

Holidays, too?

Sure. Twice even. Because after all, on Passover the place is closed. We were moved over from the post to houses inside the Casbah, the Casbah was shut down completely and I think the tours happened even twice a day. Passover, Shavuot, Chayei Sarah, and there was the Cave of the Patriarchs, too.³ So the Casbah tour happened every Saturday at around two p.m., leaving from one gate to another, or from 4-5 Post or whatever that place is called? The "Doctor's House", nearby.

How long does such a tour last?

About an hour. It's limited in time, because security-wise it's very problematic. First of all it requires us to put a complete halt to the lives of the Palestinians there, their whole life routine. Saturday is a relatively busy day there and you know the narrow alleys of that Casbah, there's no room really, everyone has to move off, there's a force in front, a force in back, a force flanking the tour, and soldiers on roofs. I mean, the whole army unit comes out to secure this tour.

So where are the Palestinians? You said the Casbah is cleared, what does that mean?

We move them into the shops. They go inside, waiting for us to pass by.

They have to fold up their stands, and move inside? Or just the people themselves?

No, the stands are no problem. Just the people.

Meaning that wherever this tour goes inside the Casbah, there aren't any Palestinians visible.

Of course not.

And how do the settlers behave in all of this?

Like landlords.

Meaning?

Their whole demeanor there is as though they own the place. It's been taken from them, as far as they're concerned. I come along, they tell me what to do and whom to catch and if I don't do things right they'll command and be angry and say: "It's a pity that Golani isn't here instead." Stuff like that. They're very ambivalent, on one hand loving, on the other hand hurtful. They're very hypocritical. Most people living there are hypocrites. Once some settler slapped an Arab girl and ran off, simply ran off. It was this redhead and we didn't know what to do. We entered the Avraham Avinu settlement, one of the houses, and suddenly I catch myself and realize – what do I do now? Okay, say I see him, and? I tell him to come here? I'm no authority for him, even if I were a policeman. These people feel like landlords, on the Casbah tours as well. They're not just doing the tours for the sake of doing them, it's an act of rebellious opposition; to show that they're here, it's their turf, and that's why they insist on it. Even if only five people showed up, they'd still do those tours every Saturday, no matter what.

Testimony no. 55, 2008

"He bothered me"

You mentioned going on arrest missions once in a while. Did you have any idea who you were arresting?

Generally speaking. "His name is so and so."

Were you told what he had done?

No. We'd be told he was tied to Hamas in some way. There was information that was accessible and information that was inaccessible. Sometimes we'd be told he's involved in or wanted for something. In general, to give us background. Like some caterers at a wedding who hear a little bit about the bride and groom.

So how is the arrest carried out?

We bang on the door, there are two soldiers outside, and something like two soldiers with the platoon commander telling whoever opens the door: "Who's this and that guy? We have to pick him up." Usually he can't do anything, you're armed, so he yells a bit and gets angry and they come along, what else can they do.

And he comes with you, cuffed and blindfolded?

Usually handcuffed. Look, at riots when we arrested people it would be both cuffed and blindfolded and they might be sitting in our sentry post the whole night long, we'd bring them some scratchy army blanket or something, and they could spend a good many hours handcuffed and blindfolded. Which is scary, let's face it. You have no control over your hands or eyes and soldiers can bully you all they want. I must say we were particular about this. We might have given them a cigarette because we saw how tough they had it. They waited like that for a bunch of hours and then they'd be taken in. At some point the Abir [APC] would arrive and pick them up. On arrests I think I remember handcuffing less, I don't remember blindfolding. I suppose there was.

The guys who came to the post for a few hours were only those you remember from riots, or were there other situations in which a Palestinian could find himself cuffed and blindfolded in the sentry post?

Only if he threw stones or did something more serious. But listen, the Jewish settlers would react to the smallest peep. Say you were patrolling the street, and Arabs were walking there, and a Jew would come up and tell you: "He bothered me." The Arab would be instantly detained. Not always blindfolded or cuffed, but standing at the side for 20 minutes, and then some leftist foreigner would come along and say: "You've been holding him there for 20 minutes without food or water, that's beyond the pale," although I was usually glad when that happened. Because soldiers know they have to mind it when those people are there. Even if they are extreme. Generally, they're hated. Usually these are not Israeli activists. They're these weirdos, all kinds of international anarchists.

Where would the APC take them? Back home, or to the police station, or to the Ofer military base?

I think that at first they'd be taken to Harsina, to battalion HQ. From there they'd be delivered to the military police or something like that, but that interested us less. Like I told you, on simpler occasions, if a Jew complained about something, they'd be taken inside the APC, yelled at and let off further away.

Testimony no. 56, 2008

Security conception

The purpose of the patrol is first of all to protect the Jewish settlement. Meaning there's this security conception – you have a primary defense line, it's this line of patrol where you gather intelligence information, deter potential enemies – meaning potential terrorists – and eventually your patrol is the most effective means because it is not too visible. At night it is hardly noticeable, unexpected. In the morning it's visible, but at night... It's dynamic, not a static post. A post is something you see, you know it's there 24 hours a day, there's not too much new going on there. In fact it does the job. I remember at the beginning when we just got there we detained someone, he had a knife on him and the GSS⁹ agents arrived, and that was all.

A knife?

Listen, the guy knew where the barriers were, right? Perhaps he passes through there, but because this was a patrol, it caught him by surprise. We just came out of some alley, so we stopped him and found it.

Was it like a real dagger or...

I don't think he was about to stab anyone. Can't tell you. I have no idea what his intentions were, nor do I speak Arabic. But he had the knife at a location where he is not supposed to be carrying a knife.

Which is the Casbah.

It's the Casbah. He shouldn't be carrying a knife because if soldiers stop him he'd be sent right to the GSS. So he had this knife, perhaps he wanted to settle accounts with some buddy of his, or show off – I have no idea. But just to show you that the patrol does have a critical significance. I recall I was one of the big supporters of this, it's important to do the patrol seriously and not too visibly; to hang around in hidden places and surprise people, give them the feeling that we're unpredictable. Psychologically, if someone is on his way to commit a terrorist attack, he doesn't know where you're going to be coming from. So the patrol definitely has security relevance.

Did you also carry out intelligence warfare while you were on patrol?

Sure, plenty. I was really good at that.

What, like let's light up 'goosenecks' [fuel-filled barrels], throw grenades?

No, that's nonsense. I invented lots of procedures there, I mean there are all kinds of actions like hiding and then leaping out from somewhere.

And then what? Checking people?

Yes, a large number of people at once. What was most popular? There were all kinds of... Sending out two patrols at once from two different places and then suddenly you have a larger number of soldiers all arriving, or patrolling together so suddenly the Palestinians see twelve soldiers rather than six. Those things made a difference. I don't recall 'gooseneck' stuff too much. Perhaps once or twice. It's nonsense.

That all happens in the Casbah? Say you sent out three patrols instead of one.

Mostly in our designated area, yes. Unless some other company needed reinforcement.

And when the patrol went by and a Palestinian happened to be standing in the street smoking a cigarette, he'd have to get inside the shop just like during a Jewish tour, or he could stay standing out there?

Look, the patrol as a security force is important, but you'd prefer not to enter a bustling street in order not to get entangled. I'll tell you we didn't have too much trouble with that. Because they know. They're already accustomed so that when a patrol comes by, they move. They know not to enter between two lines of soldiers on patrol. If someone does, we throw him out of there. So that was less relevant. I think that as for affecting the population, this was nothing special for them. They see a lot of men, they could raise an eyebrow but they're already indifferent to this. It doesn't interest them that much out there. I mean, regarding the population, the hotter matters there are issues of construction. They're not allowed to build near the Casbah, there's some law against that.

Testimony no. 57, 2010

Not our job

What do you mean when you say 'an insane reality'? Do you have an example?

Yes. Generally speaking there are no laws out there, and even the ones that do exist are not enforced. Beginning with traffic laws and on through laws regarding

the way things are run. It's all very open, heeding the army is a recommendation as it were. Unless someone is arrested. Hatred is evident all over. It's the thing I felt was present most strongly: the tension between Arabs and Jews, between Jews and Arabs, between Jews and soldiers, between soldiers and Arabs, Arabs and soldiers. Everyone there hates everyone else. Because the situation is simply absurd, living so close to each other, with such terrific tension – not much good can come out of it. Lifting a stone is as trivial as giving a hand slap. It's like saying hello.

Both sides?

Both sides. Mostly the Jewish settlers as far as I saw them. Arabs there are more frightened. The Jews are not afraid because the army backs them up.

You just said that heeding the army is just a recommendation. On whose part?

The Jews.

How is that manifested?

The army has no authority over the Jewish settlers there.

What does that mean?

It's not its job.

What do you mean?

The job of the army there is to protect the Jews but very often, the Jews are like Israeli citizens, the civilian police are supposed to be in charge of them. For that matter, if a Jew did anything wrong, we are not authorized to detain him. If we comment, it's merely a recommendation, and it's not our job there. If anything happens to a Jew, God forbid, then it's the [civilian] police that arrive at the scene, and not us.

Did you have the authority to act if a settler committed a violation?

No, it wasn't my job.

Is this an official definition?

Yes, it's official. It is not my job.

Notes and Clarifications

1. Annual day of commemoration of the displacement which followed Israeli independence in 1948; marked with demonstrations.
2. Annual day of Palestinian protest commemorating appropriation of lands in the Galilee in 1976.
3. There are a number of holidays and occasions every year (both Jewish and Muslim) when the Cave of the Patriarchs, normally split into a mosque and a synagogue, is open exclusively for either Jews or Muslims. Passover, Shavuot, and Chayei Sarah are some of these “Jewish Exceptions”.
4. Temporary International Presence in Hebron: European-sponsored civilian observer mission in Hebron.
5. Christian Peacemaker Teams: international volunteer organization with monitoring presence in Hebron.
6. Main street in the Hebron city center (in Israeli-controlled Hebron); under various degrees of closure to Palestinian traffic and pedestrians since 1994 (see Testimony no. 3 and 23).
7. Golani military base inside the Israeli-controlled section of Hebron, on Shuhada Street; a small number of settler families reside inside the base itself (see Testimony no. 4 and 38).
8. Rams’ horns which produce sound when blown; used in Jewish ritual.
9. Israeli General Security Services (also called “Shin Bet” or “Shabak”).
10. Settlement point in Hebron erected in 2007 and removed by the IDF in 2008; also known as the “Peace House” (Beit Hashalom).
11. Jewish settlement with a population of about 7,500; adjacent to Hebron (see map).
12. Pedestrian path that connects the settlement of Kiryat Arba to the Cave of the Patriarchs.
13. Jewish springtime holiday on which children dress in costume; often associated with heavy drinking.
14. Jewish festival; involves the building of large bonfires.
15. Nickname for a shift schedule; indicates hours on-duty followed by hours off-duty.
16. Nickname given by soldiers to the stairway between Shuhada Street and a Palestinian girls’ school; so called due to the frequent friction at the site.

17. Though she is nicknamed “The Mute Woman” by soldiers, she is in actuality deaf and not mute.
18. A neighborhood in the Palestinian-controlled section of Hebron (see map).
19. The Palestinian-controlled section of Hebron (see map).
20. Major intersection in the center of the Israeli-controlled section of Hebron.
21. Israeli civilian police station serving Hebron; located inside the Givat Ha’Avot settlement (see map).
22. See Testimony no. 5, “Illegal Demonstration”.
23. A religious article placed on the doorposts of Jewish homes and buildings.