

# **BREAKING THE SILENCE**

## **Children and Youth -**

### **Soldiers' Testimonies 2005-2011**

“There was this incident where a ‘straw widow’ was put up following a riot at Qalandiya on a Friday, in an abandoned house near the square. Soldiers got out with army clubs and beat people to a pulp. Finally the children who remained on the ground were arrested. The order was to run, make people fall to the ground. There was a 10-12 man team, 4 soldiers lighting up the area. People were made to fall to the ground, and then the soldiers with the clubs would go over to them and beat them. A slow runner was beaten, that was the rule...”



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## **Breaking the Silence**

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This booklet is a compendium of testimonies given by over thirty IDF soldiers who served in the West Bank and in and around the Gaza Strip in the years 2005-2011. Like previous publications by *Breaking the Silence*, it portrays daily events in the Occupied Territories. The testimonies in this anthology illuminate the realities of everyday life for Palestinian children and youth who live under Israeli occupation. Although the events described here took place after the peak of the Second Intifada, at a time perceived as calm and uneventful from a 'security' standpoint, the reality that emerges from the testimonies shows that harsh treatment of Palestinian children continues unabated, and despite the overall security situation.

Having served in different units and regions, the testifiers depict a routine in which Palestinian minors, often under 10 years of age, are treated in a manner that ignores their young age, and how, in practicality, they are perceived by both the soldiers and the military system at large as subject to the same treatment as adults.

This booklet reveals how physical violence is often exerted against children, whether in response to accusations of stone-throwing or, more often, arbitrarily (see Testimonies 3, 6, 14 and 36). Such violence is often accompanied by harassment and humiliation (1, 7, 39 and 46). Testimonies describe child arrests (2, 13, 33 and 35) and cruel and indifferent treatment of children in custody (8 and 25). Despite Israel's High Court of Justice's ruling that sweepingly forbade the use of human shields, soldiers speak of commanders who continue to implement this procedure, at times using children for this purpose (15 and 17).

The most disquieting tendency emerging from the soldiers' testimonies relates to the wounding and killing of children in the West Bank and Gaza, whether by ignoring them at the scene of events, or by targeted shooting (see Testimonies 4, 9, 29 and 34).

Israeli children enjoy the protection of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Israel is signatory, whereas Palestinian children grow up with no protection or ability to live protected as their Israeli peers do. Since these children are perceived by the Israeli military as adults, they are exposed to a harsh daily reality that includes constant friction with military forces active on the ground, arrests, violence, harassment and, at times, serious injury and even death.

The dozens of testimonies contained in this booklet reveal the perspective of the Israeli soldiers on the ground, messengers of Israeli society, and serve as witness to the ongoing decline of the military system into increasing immorality. The words of the soldiers included here constitute an urgent call to Israeli society and its leaders: We must foster a serious discourse regarding the price of military rule of the Occupied Territories, the factors that enable this reality, and their drastic effect on the future of the region.

**"What is that job, really?"**

**Unit: Armored Corps**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2005**

We moved to the Ariel area, near Nablus. We were in charge of the entire road that crossed the West Bank from west to east, all the way up to the checkpoint at Tapuach Junction. Our designated mission was to prevent acts of terrorism. Simply handle the population. We would enter villages on a daily basis, at least twice or three times a day, to make our presence felt, and... it was like we were occupying them. Showing we're there, that the area is ours, not theirs.

**How is this done?**

A patrol goes in, or two patrols, two hummers secured by a jeep, and raise hell inside the villages. A whole company may be sent in on foot in two lines like a military parade in the streets, provoking riots, provoking children. The commander is bored and wants to show off to his battalion commander, and he does it at the expense of his subordinates. He wants more and more friction, just to grind the population, make their lives more and more miserable, and to discourage them from throwing stones, to not even think about throwing stones at the main road. Not to mention Molotov cocktails and other things. Practically speaking, it worked. The population was so scared that they shut themselves in. They hardly came out. Earlier I recall a lot of cabs with people on their way to work near the main road. Then it hardly existed any more. The whole village shut itself in. This just shows what a company commander is capable of doing.

**What level does this reach? What is he able to do?**

At first you point your gun at some five-year-old kid, and feel bad afterward, saying it's not right. Then you get to a point where... you get so nervous and sick of going into a village and getting stones thrown at you. But it's obvious, you're inside the village, you've just passed the school house, naturally the kids will throw stones at you. Once my driver got out, and without blinking, just grabbed some kid and beat him to a pulp. And that kid was just sitting in the street and looked like some other kid, or wore another kid's shirt, or perhaps he was that kid but that's not the point. He beat him to a pulp. Didn't detain him. Just beat him. And I remember they had this pool hall. These were already the more 'serious' guys, the ones who throw Molotov cocktails.

In order to get them out, detain and interrogate them, we'd catch them – my company commander caught a 12-year-old kid there once, and made him get down on his knees in the middle of the street. Yelled like a madman – it looked like some Vietnam War movie – so that the other guys come out or else he'll do something really bad to them. He'd do something to that kid. I knew it was just a hollow threat, and after all the guy's an officer, and I don't think an officer would do anything, but...

### **Actually shackled him?**

He had a plastic shackle. I remember it was raining. We went in, and as usual stones were thrown at us. My communications man who runs fast caught this kid who supposedly threw stones, shackled him and took him to the company commander. Brought him back to this place in front of that pool hall. The vehicles were parked there. He got him down on his knees and yelled as if...

### **In Arabic?**

No, in Hebrew, very loud so that the kids from that club would come out so we could interrogate them. They didn't come out on their own.

### **What did he yell at the kid?**

He yelled at him to shut up and the kid cried of course... He also peed in his pants, in front of the whole village. He got him on his knees and began to scream in Hebrew, to swear at him: "Those fucking kids from the club should come out already!" "Get those whores out!" "Let him be scared!" "Look what I can do!" "I'll show this kid." Finally the kids didn't come out, but we always had in mind that image of the old Arab with his keffiyah and stick. Regardless if there's shooting or stones, no matter what, he's a kid in the middle of the street. Kids and soldiers both would respect him. So this old guy comes along and somehow convinces my company commander to release the kid. And that's how that episode ended. We got out of there. The next day two Molotov cocktails were thrown at the main road. So we didn't really do our job. And you wonder what that job really is.

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## 2

**"Until someone comes to pick them up"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2010**

On your first arrest mission, you're sure it's a big deal, and it's actually bullshit. You enter the Abu Sneina (Hebron) neighborhood and pick up three children. After that whole briefing, you're there with your bulletproof vest and helmet and stuck with that ridiculous mission of separating women and children. It's all taken so seriously and then what you end up with is a bunch of kids, you blindfold and shackle them and drive them to the police station at Givat Ha'avot. That's it, it goes on for months and you eventually stop thinking there are any terrorists out there, you stop believing there's an enemy, it's always some children or adolescents or some doctor we took out. You never know their names, you never talk with them, they always cry, shit in their pants.

**Was there a case of someone shitting in his pants?**

I remember once. Always that crying. There are those annoying moments when you're on an arrest mission, and there's no room in the police station, so you just take the kid back with you to the army post, blindfold him, put him in a room and wait for the police to come pick him up in the morning. He sits there like a dog... We did try to be nice and find a mattress for them, some water, sometimes some food, and they'd sit there blindfolded and shackled, left like that until morning. Those were the instructions. That, or just to leave them in the war-room. That was also standard procedure. Until morning, until someone came to pick them up.

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## 3

**"It's not right"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Jenin 2008**

In Jalame, Jenin, while in squad commander's training, a driver showed me pictures of two kids they had caught, shackled, and kicked...

## **He told you about this.**

He showed me the video he took on his cell phone. Sitting shackled, and some soldier walks by and – pow – kicks them in the back or something. I felt so... in hindsight I thought: Why didn't I just tell him to stop? It was only later that I told him this was wrong, and he gave me a piece of his mind, this driver.

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## **4**

### **"We put some kid to sleep"**

**Unit: Paratroopers Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2006-2007**

When there's a "disturbance of the peace" the unit commander is authorized to ask the battalion commander for permission to shoot the leader in the leg.

#### **What is a leader?**

These are kids. Everyone participating is a kid. No older than 16. At most, 18. Usually when we come in, they don't go to school. We're the attraction and they come out to 'play'. I even remember once we put on music for them through some cellular phone. We also got used to this. We were relatively sane, took things fairly in proportion. We'd get... cement blocks and crazy things thrown at our vehicle and you... at first you use some rubber ammo and then realize, it's silly. Once... there's this PA system we have (a sound system for addressing a large public), so we put on music from a cell phone and everyone started dancing.

#### **The kids?**

Yes, it was huge. We put on music and suddenly they all stopped throwing stones and began to dance. It was eastern music so they were dancing with their hands. Then the song ended and they went on throwing stones. It was really serious. You realize who you're dealing with here. These are kids. Chances are I'd do exactly as they do if I were in their shoes. There was a case of a unit commander who decided to shoot a guy in the leg because he runs the show, and it happened.

#### **Live ammunition?**

Yes. Live, not rubber. You know, from the point of view of the commander, they would have stopped throwing anyway.

**When you begin getting hit with stones, you get out of the jeep?**

No.

**You shoot the rubber ammo from inside the jeep?**

You shoot through the loophole.

**Where do you aim? Do you choose some kid at random?**

Yes. Choose someone, aim at his body.

**Body?**

Center of mass.

**10 meters' range at the center of mass?**

I remember one time we put a kid down. We didn't kill him but someone hit the kid in the chest and he fell and probably lost consciousness, or at least, it was pretty close. About 10 meters'.

**Were you instructed as to how to use rubber ammo?**

No. It's like... There are rules. They tell you to shoot four. There's this cluster of rubber bullets, pieces with four parts, packed in a kind of nylon. You can break it in two, so it's stronger and flies further. As soon as it's four it's less strong and flies less far. We'd usually break it in half.

**Is this something you were told to do? That if you want to achieve a longer range you break it in half?**

No, we figured it out ourselves. It's something that's common knowledge in the army. People know about this. It's not... When you use a weapon, you get to know it pretty well, I guess.

**Just so you know, as soon as this pack is broken in half, it becomes lethal.**

Really? Well, that's what we did.

**We did, too. As soon as the 'tampons' are separated, they're lethal. The nylon must not be removed.**

Not removed?!

**No.**

We barely fired a whole cluster, I mean four. It's like you want to save ammo, too.

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5

**"Finding the solution ourselves"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: Lieutenant**

**Hebron 2008**

**Were there people detained, sitting blindfolded at the sentry post?**

Yes, plenty. I'll give you the simplest example – we had Arab kids who went into shops to steal metal.

**Those same shops that Jewish kids would steal from? [Note: This refers to a story mentioned earlier by the testifier]**

Yes, just like that. They have their spots. Now, kids are kids, and they come in, and steal. We got tired of it, you take them to the police once, and they come back, I guess their parents beat them and they have to bring the stuff. So we had no solution. We'd blindfold and shackle them, they'd sit in the army post, we'd bring them food and water... For the first time they'd be kept for five hours, longer the second time. That's the punishment we'd give them. After the police picked them up we'd try to find a solution ourselves. They would not be beaten. It would surely help, by the way, but we don't do that. So the punishment they got, and often, was to be detained until they were arrested – they'd be kept at the sentry post.

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6

**"Some hours at company headquarters"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Qalqiliya 2007**

At the entrance to Ma'ale Shomron settlement there is a curve in the road, named "Curve 90". It's a sharp curve where cars have to really slow down to take it safely – it's a right angle. It is very close to a village called Azoun, ten minutes from the town of Qalqiliya, and is considered hostile. Lots of popular terrorist action originates there, lots of stone-throwing. It's situated right on the main road to Ma'ale Shomron and many stones and fire bombs are thrown at cars on the road. The villagers are known for their hostility. There isn't usually stone-throwing at the turn, but once there

was. It happened as close as 200 meters from the village, a place where cars really have to slow down, and this happened after there was stone-throwing at other spots a number of times. We were alerted to there with our front command jeep. We got to the village, drove up to the houses closest to the curve, and then saw a group of children, 9-10 years old, running away. So the company commander and I got out of the jeep. We began to chase them. First they ran, went onto the balcony of some house, and then the commander took a stun grenade and hurled it into that balcony. It blew up. I don't think it hurt them or anything, but it made them run out of the balcony. The house was at the outskirts of the village, a neighborhood right next to the road, and they ran off around the house. We saw them run around so we came up from the other side of the house to face them. And we really did. As soon as the kid came up in front of us – he was about two meters away – the company commander cocked his weapon in his face to make him stop. The kid fell on the ground and cried and begged for his life. And our commander, so brilliant of him, decided to arrest those kids. Take them in for a few hours to company HQ, just to scare them. And the kid was just freaking out, certain he was going to be killed, and begged and pleaded for his life. His father and brother came along and said: "Don't take him! He's just a kid," and so on and so on. "We'll take care of everything." But the commander was adamant: "No, I want to take him in." And he actually tore him away from his dad's leg and we put the kid in the jeep. I did nothing at that point.

### **You took in one boy?**

Two. Two kids, if I remember right. He decided he wanted to take them in. It was this kind of gray situation, not that terrible, I think. Because those kids really do throw stones and that's risky – it's not like we actually meant to harm them. I suppose it is a very scarring experience for them, but the situation is complicated. On the way, at the exit from the village, people waited for us; they actually tried to block our way. Lots and lots of stones were hurled at us – rocks – until we finally got out.

### **Are you sure those were the kids who threw stones?**

They were kids who saw an army jeep and broke off in a run. So we said: "Okay, they're running." That's the thought, and so we began to chase them. How do we know they threw stones? It's hard to tell. We didn't even interrogate these kids afterward. We made them sit for a number of hours at the post and then returned them to the village.

**Blindfolded?**

No. The fact is that as soon as they got there, we soldiers gave them sweets right away and kidded around with them.

**What did the company commander say about this?**

He didn't see this, didn't know. It's not that black and white. At the end of the day, something has to make these kids stop throwing stones on the road because they can kill. That specific kid who actually lay there on the ground, begging for his life, was actually nine years old. I think of our kids, nine years old, and a kid handling this kind of situation, I mean, a kid has to beg for his life? A loaded gun is pointed at him and he has to plead for mercy? This is something that scars him for life. But I think that if we hadn't entered the village at that point, then stones would be thrown the next day and perhaps the next time someone would be wounded or killed as a result.

**Did the stone-throwing cease afterward?**

No.

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7

**"Along came a soldier and kicked him"**

**Unit: Givati Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Gaza Strip Boundary 2008**

At Nahal Oz there was an incident where kids came to try to find food or something – their parents must have sent them off to try to sneak into Israel because the families were going hungry. Any such incident is considered infiltration and involves a chase. There were 14- and 15-year-olds there, I think. I remember a kid sitting there, blindfolded, and along came a soldier known to be an idiot, kicked him and poured rifle-grease over him. He did this in the middle of the company HQ and not a single officer saw him. I said something to him at the time but I didn't yell at him, and I didn't tell my commander about what he did.

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**"Things that can still be changed"****Unit: Armored Corps****Rank: First Sergeant****Ramallah 2006-2007**

We had this checkpoint for Palestinians at Ofer Prison, the interrogation facility. We had to check Palestinians coming into the base. We did it by pointing our gun at them, telling them to approach, lift their shirt, regardless of the weather — this is near Ramallah, where it's not warm at all in the winter. If necessary they had to lift their pant legs. Men came through, girls came through — I don't know who we had to check.

**Did you ever find a person of interest?**

No. Not at all. I would talk to them. It was important for me to be the good soldier.

**What was the point of taking off their pants?**

If anything aroused suspicion. Personally I never saw this, but I suppose certain people were amused by this. I'm sure there were such cases: "What a kick, I can tell him to take off his pants"... I recall a detainee being brought in, a 16-17-year-old kid who tried to stab a warden at Ofer Prison. He was shackled, blindfolded, and claimed he was beaten all the way there. I told him: "Sit down, have a drink of water, eat some fruit." Everyone laughed at me. "What do you care?" I don't care what he did, he's a kid. Regardless whether he committed the worst crime, it's not his fault. These things can still be changed. Even the worst 15-year-old settler who beats up Palestinians, I still believe these things can be changed.

**Where did he come from?**

From jail. He was visiting his brother, and I was told he came with a knife, wanting to stab a warden.

**So he was brought to your detention facility?**

No, just brought so we'd keep an eye on him, at our quarters. He sat there shackled and blindfolded for 3-4 hours. He was scared, pissed in his pants, a little fellow, 16 years old. He claimed he'd been beaten up. It's not really our business. I told the Border Police to come pick him up, and they said: "Don't worry, it's okay..."

**Do you think it was passed on?**

Yeah, right... his hitters were put on trial... No, I'm kidding. These are the little anecdotes. Suppose it's right, and I've totally lost faith. A guy tries to stab a warden, he deserves to sit in jail. He gets beaten to a pulp on the way, and I've seen things

like this done: A detainee is brought in, he is tied to a post at the company HQ and anyone passing by slaps him a couple.

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9

## **"With half a wink"**

**Unit:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** \*\*\*

### **Jenin 2007**

There was a mission we took part in, we were gathering intelligence about an activist staying in a village in the Jenin area. This village was very isolated, located at a high elevation, and had two approach roads entering and exiting it in both directions – there was no other way to approach. There was an activist living in that village and every time a military force came to the village they knew way ahead of time because there was only one way to reach it. And he escaped. The intelligence we had on him said that he sometimes spent weekends at home so we checked and he was actually spotted armed, with another armed friend. The operation as it was prepared at the brigade HQ was to gather intelligence. The planners didn't really go into how and who would carry out an arrest as soon as the wanted man was spotted. And when he was actually seen, at that moment the undercover Border Police unit was alerted. It was a Saturday, and within hours they were ready for action and arrived at the village. They came to the house, next door, and ran out.

### **What team?**

Undercover. The working assumption was that the only way to get inside this village was undercover, not out in the open. It was noontime. Very soon they were shooting in the direction of the activist and his friend. One was killed, the other badly wounded. In that shooting an Israeli kid was killed, too, an Israeli Arab from Rahat.

### **The ones who were undercover were shot at?**

No. Not at all. I guess the point was arrest, on the one hand. On the other hand, could be that this was only pretend, because in several of the undercover operations I've heard about, there were arrests only in one of them. Every time the undercover unit was involved, it ended up with fatalities. I'm almost sure there was no fire opened at them, there wasn't time for this. The undercover guys just run and shoot.

**Did the Palestinians have enough time to get their guns out, and hold them?**

I don't know. Generally I think the rules of engagement let them fire if there are wanted men or armed men. I mean, they didn't have to wait for their lives to be endangered in order to shoot. I saw them get out and a second later there was gunfire. Very fast.

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**10**

**"As is done with all detainees"**

**Unit: Armored Corps**

**Rank: Sergeant**

**Ramallah 2009**

Anyone who touches the fence activates the alerts at the war-room. We got a reference point at Deir Qadis that the fence there was touched. When we got there we saw glass bottle shards. We stood on top of the jeep itself and saw a few kids. We went in, both the company commander's front command jeep and the patrol, and tried to catch them. It was on the outskirts of the village in the area closer to the fence. The patrol came from one direction and the commander from another entrance through Ni'ilin and the kids were detained. These were three children, the oldest 15 years old, one really little one, 7-8 years old, and another one in between the two, age-wise. The commander caught all three and wanted to check things so he made them sit on the road about five meters from each other, facing the other way. He took one shoe from each of them and began to walk the fence, looking for tracks. Then he saw tracks, one of the shoes matched it, and realized they were their tracks. He went to the little boy and spoke to him in Arabic, scared him until the kid broke out crying and told him. He detained the two older kids, the little one told him what happened. All these areas are covered with surveillance cameras connected to HQ and lookouts. If the commander wanted to do something extraordinary, he couldn't, he's being filmed. He opened the jeep's two back doors and placed the kid inside. He didn't beat him but he made brutal threats and the kid began to cry. Anyway, after getting the picture he detained the two older boys and continued back to the village. He yelled: "Go! Get into the village!" and the kid was terrified. The commander threw a stun grenade in his direction and the kid ran off.

## **What did you do with the two others?**

They were taken the way all detainees are, on to the battalion post, and from there they were sent on. I don't know what happens to them.

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11

**"For no reasons at all"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Salfit 2009**

We had to take over a school, which is already a big problem – taking over a school and turning it into a detention facility when it's actually an educational facility. We took over a school and had to arrest anyone in the village who was between the ages of 17 and 50, something like that. It lasted from morning until noon the next day. Anyway, all sorts of people arrived, shackled and blindfolded. What happened was that when these detainees asked to go to the bathroom, and the soldiers took them there, they beat them to a pulp and cursed them for no reason, and there was nothing that would legitimize hitting them. Really terrible things. An Arab was taken to the bathroom to piss, and a soldier slapped him, took him down to the ground while he was shackled and blindfolded. The guy wasn't rude and did nothing to provoke any hatred or nerves. Just like that, because he is an Arab. He was about 15 years old, hadn't done a thing. We arrested many of the people just in order to collect information about them for the Shabak, not because they had done anything. Many stones were thrown along the roads in that village... In general people at the school were sitting for hours in the sun, they could get water once in a while, but let's say someone asked for water, five times, a soldier could come to him and slap him just like that. Or let's say, I saw many soldiers using their knees to hit them, just out of boredom. Because you're standing around for 10 hours doing nothing, and you're bored, so you hit them. Perhaps that was the only satisfaction they had.

**That whole time, the Palestinians were shackled and blindfolded, in the sun?**

Yes. I have two phrases that I made up. There are soldiers who know what the point of the [plastic] handcuff is, and then there are others, who think that it is meant as a device to stop blood flow from the wrist to the fingertips.

**What does that mean?**

That they think it should be on so tight that no blood can get through.

**Why do they do this?**

The purpose of these handcuffs is to keep the person from freeing his hands, but there's a difference between that and preventing circulation.

**Were many people very tightly shackled at that school?**

Yes, lots of hands were shackled tightly, and they were begging to be released just a bit.

**And were they?**

Eventually, after they cried and complained, the company commander ordered them released, and after a while they even had their hands in front instead of behind their backs.

**After how long?**

About seven hours.

**They were sitting there with blue hands for seven hours?**

No, it takes time for hands to turn blue. Not everyone had blue hands, but many people already turned numb.

**How many people did you arrest that day?**

Around 150. Some of them were wearing their sleeping garments, straight out of bed. Some had been allowed to get dressed, but most hadn't. I remember most clearly one 15-year-old whom a commander in the riflemen's company took in, grabbed his ear and put him behind another Arab. The kid was all shaking, I was sure he would piss all over himself out of fear. That's how I recall it.

**Which village was that?**

Hares. It was a brigade operation. Our battalion was in Hares because many stones were being thrown from that village at Israeli roads, so the army decided to collect information and find out who was in charge and organizing things. So this school was taken over to bring in all those people for Shabak interrogation.

**The whole battalion went in?**

Yes.

**Did this start in daytime or at night?**

At night. It was pretty funny, the school janitor was called in at 3 a.m. to open up all the rooms.

**And all the guys in the battalion, what did they do?**

Some went to houses, brought in people to the school, some took up positions, others organized rooms for the company commander, deputy battalion commander... All the officers who came there, and a room for the Shabak.

**And the whole battalion checked every house in the village?**

I believe so. Whoever was supposed to be arrested, was.

**What were the criteria for arresting people?**

Anyone over 17 years of age. But even 14-year-olds were brought in.

**How long did you stay?**

From 3 a.m. until around 3-4 p.m.

**12 hours. Did you witness more cases of violence against Palestinian detainees?**

Many reservists took part in this. They really had a ball with those Palestinians – swearing, humiliating them, pulling their hair, ears, kicking and slapping them around. These things were a norm, the whole battalion. The case at the bathroom was extreme but slapping and swearing and humiliating and kneeing them and stuff like that were usual. I know that at the bathroom, there was this "demons' dance" as it was called. Anyone who brought a Palestinian there – it was catastrophic. Not bleeding beatings – they stayed dry – but still beatings. I know of one case where lots of Palestinians were sitting on a kind of ramp and then two soldiers just went ahead and kicked two detainees. So the officer told them: "If you do this once more, you'll be in trouble," and that was it, as if during the whole operation there were only these two cases of bad conduct. That's what those officers must have thought.

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**12**

**"Human advantage"**

**Unit: \*\*\***

**Rank: \*\*\***

**Hebron 2007-2008**

One night, things were hopping in Idna village, so we were told there's this wild riot, and we should get there fast. Our officer wasn't there. The sergeant, plus a team of six soldiers, mount a secured vehicle, and we go to Idna. At some point it was really crazy there, burning tires, burning garbage bins in the middle of the road. We

drive and whole rocks land on the vehicle, thrown from the rooftops. Our hearts were pumping madly.

### **You entered the village?**

There were lots of forces there. Us, and the front command jeep with the company commander, battalion commander, his deputy and the command of another three companies, three patrols. The village was swamped with army personnel. We drove the company commander's jeep along quite a main street in the village, next to the mosque, several times. Suddenly we were showered with stones and didn't know what was going on. Everyone stopped suddenly, the sergeant sees the company commander get out of the vehicle and joins him. We jump out without knowing what was going on – I was last. Suddenly I see a shackled and blindfolded boy. The stoning stopped as soon as the company commander gets out of the car. He fired rubber ammo at the stone-throwers and hit this boy. The boy was holding his belly and tried to run or throw another stone, there are several versions of this. This is what I was told afterward, I didn't see it myself. The company commander punched him, very fast, made him fall on the ground and the medic and communications man tied him up and blindfolded him. All this happened within 20 seconds from the moment the vehicle stopped until I saw him shackled. He was put in our vehicle and you saw he was filthy from the stones. He asked: "What did I do? Why me?" I tried to talk to him a bit, gave him some water on the way, and he asked again why he was detained. I told him he had thrown stones, he said he hadn't, and so back and forth a few times. Finally I told him: "You're lying, shut up." The sergeant also got annoyed and said: "Don't talk to him." Two guys there were excited by their first action in Hebron and had their pictures taken with him.

### **Did he object?**

No, he was blindfolded, he didn't know. He asked for water so one of the guys said: "Water?" and gave him a hard hit on the head. I argued with that guy a bit and with the two guys who were photographed. At some point they talked about hitting his face with their knees. At that point I argued with them and said: "I swear to you, if a drop of his blood or a hair falls off his head, you won't sleep for three nights, I'll make you miserable." I took it hard.

### **How did they respond?**

They knew I was like that, I never hid it. They laughed at me for being a leftie. "If we don't show them what's what, they go back to doing this." I argued with them that the guy was shackled and couldn't do anything. That he was being taken to the Shabak

(General Security Services) and we'd finished our job. A few weeks later, I heard one of them saying things that sounded different: "If someone's shackled, why should I touch him?"

### **So why did they want to abuse him?**

Because they were caught up in a storm of action, wanted to show the Palestinians who's who, and the adrenalin kicked in. Mine did, too.

### **You rode on and out of Idna?**

Yes. Maybe other jeeps picked up more people. We took him for a medical examination and that was that. The argument about whether he should have been beaten up or not continued for some days. It became the business of anyone who was there, and people who joined around, from the platoon. Most said the Palestinians should be beaten up so they'll know what's what, because that's the only way they'll learn. I was really surprised. I knew that's the way minds worked in general, but I thought that \*\*\* would be more humane. But there's no humane advantage there at all. Later I heard worse stories about places where guys who wanted to beat up Palestinians were not stopped at all, in other battalions. After a while, still I looked alright, compared to others.

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## **13**

### **"Young kids"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Bethlehem 2005**

On the first patrol we caught kids with "nunchucks", these Ninja weapons. We picked them up because they're not allowed to carry those around.

### **I have never heard of such an order.**

That's how it was, they couldn't carry weapons including 'cold' weapons. Anyway, we were there – myself, another soldier and the platoon commander. The driver said they look suspect, we stopped the kids, they unpacked their bags, we found their "nunchucks" and something else that was suspect, asked what to do about them, and were told to "take them to the interrogation post at the regional brigade HQ." I think it belongs to the Shabak.

**An interrogation facility.**

Yes. We were told to "bring them in."

**How old were these kids?**

I don't know, 14-15 I guess.

**How are they put in the jeep?**

First of all we stopped them at the Gush Junction, everyone's looking on, plenty of people passing by, people all around them. You try to secure the situation – can't tell what's about to happen. You could be shot any minute. The whole situation is one of fear. How do we get them into the jeep? Two sit in back, and I and \*\*\* stand watch over them, pointing our guns at them.

**All of that just over some "nunchucks" ...?**

Go figure, young kids.

**I suppose you shackled them.**

Yes. And blindfolded them. Those are your instructions, and besides you don't know what to do, your first time out there.

**This was your first arrest?**

Yes. Very first incident.

**Do you know what happened to them?**

I think they were brought back to the same spot.

**Did they get their "nunchucks" back?**

No, I think the Shabak passed them on to us and they were put in the war-room. The kids had made them themselves. The company commander was thrilled and put them in the war-room.

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14

**"Whoever is slow to run – gets beaten up"**

**Unit: Combat Engineering Corps**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Ramallah 2006-2007**

There was this incident where a 'straw widow' [ambush in an urban area] was put up following a riot at Qalandiya on a Friday, in an abandoned house near the square.

Soldiers got out with army clubs and beat people to a pulp. Finally the children who remained on the ground were arrested. The order was to run, make people fall to the ground. There was a 10-12 man team, 4 soldiers lighting up the area. People were made to fall to the ground, and then the soldiers with the clubs would go over to them and beat them. A slow runner was beaten, that was the rule.

**What does such a club look like?**

It's the simplest wooden club, straight, about 30 centimeters long. You stick it in back of your ceramic bullet proof vest, like the sword on a 'Ninja-turtle,' then you pull it out and pound it down.

**You can kill a person.**

We were told not to use it on people's heads. I don't remember where we were told to hit, but as soon as a person on the ground is beaten with such a club, it's difficult to be particular.

**How many times did your platoon do this?**

I don't know, quite a few. Certainly 4-5 times. Perhaps with different kids...

**What did the company commander expect?**

That they would learn their lesson. I can only hope that the kids detained on the base or at the police station would not go back to throwing stones, but I can't believe this was the effect.

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15

**"Neighbor procedure"**

**Unit: Paratroopers Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Tul Karm 2005**

"Neighbor procedure" is used when an arrest mission takes place and usually a neighbor, a resident of the neighboring house, is summoned and required to enter the wanted person's home and call all its inhabitants to come outside.

**That's what you called it, "neighbor procedure"?**

Yes. At the briefings we were simply told to order a neighbor out.

**Who gave those briefings?**

The unit commander. Anyway, in other instances neighbors were required to enter

a house after its inhabitants got out, to make sure no one stayed inside. There are many problems with this procedure beyond the fact that there had been a ruling made by the High Court of Justice in November 2002 or a bit earlier against using the procedure. I remember this because it was a short while before I was recruited. The ruling was brought about after a big to-do about some arrest mission where the neighbor was killed – the Palestinians from the wanted man's house had killed their neighbor – so this procedure was outlawed completely. Besides being illegal, at times use was made of women and children for this purpose. Children.

**Do you recall a specific instance?**

Yes. I think it was in Tul Karm. There was a rather complex structure of several multi-storey houses. We got all the people out. No one was the wanted person. We feared he was still there, inside. So at first neighbors were used, then some kid. Bilal, I even recall his name. I remember because I got very angry over this. And they kept sending him into that house to check that no one was inside, open all the doors, turn on all the lights, open all the windows.

**Who decided to send him in?**

I don't know – I suppose it was our unit commander – but usually commanders wouldn't assign me to the team carrying out the mission, they knew my views on the subject quite well. I mean, there was some briefing: before an operation where I was squad commander, they used to say, '\*\*s squad will go here and get a neighbor out. I approached my own squad commander and said: "Listen, I don't know the unit commander's view on this, I'm not going to do this. I will not handle this business of 'neighbor procedure', both because I object to it personally, and because it is against the law."

**And what were you told?**

My own squad commander said: "No problem. Don't do anything you aren't comfortable with."

**What did he say about its being against the law?**

They know it is, and still they – I quote the unit commander – "I know it's illegal, and I am willing to have that neighbor killed, that mother, that woman, so that none of my men will be killed entering that house." He cited examples of missions where a wanted man locked himself in, and several times the army tracking dog was sent in and did not detect him, and several times the mother was sent in to open doors and she did, and every time the dog went in and found nothing. There was a squad there that noticed she didn't open a certain door on the roof every time, and forced her to open

that door. The guy was really there and the next time the dog went up, he killed the army dog. The commander gave this example because in his opinion he had saved the life of one of the combatants and he was willing to risk lives [of Palestinians] over this. Unlike him, the battalion commander told me... Before my talk with him, I got a copy of the "neighbor procedure". At the time it was accepted by the court under a lot of conditions. I got hold of these conditions and studied them beforehand, and told him: "Here and here and here we don't carry it out properly." Meaning, soldiers had used children and women, and that means their participation was not always based on their willingness. Sometimes those neighbors were threatened, coerced, etc.

### **What kinds of threats?**

"We'll arrest you, too." Things like that. No physical violence threats. Arrests, stuff like that, let's say harassment.

### **You approach someone and say: "Come with me." He answers: "I don't want to?"**

No one said they wouldn't. When you knock on someone's door in the middle of the night with your gun pointing in his face and shining your light into his eyes and tell him to strip, turn around, check that he is not armed, and then begin to ask him who lives here, who lives there, go here – he will not say he is not willing. But when later the person says: "I don't know, and this and that," and you think he's selling you short, I've heard guys answer him: "Too bad, we'll pick you up, too." There were all kinds of things like this. And the battalion commander claimed it was legal. He has a law degree. He claimed it's legal and we began to discuss the conditions and stuff, and he said: "In some instances you're right, and we do have to fix things." Indeed that night of my discussion with him in Jenin, again children were sent in to do it. So a request was sent out on radio that this time no one use neighbor procedure at all. I know that a very large-scale action was planned for that day, and right after my discussion with the battalion commander, all the commanders of all the battalion units were summoned for a talk with him. The first thing he did was to brief them on clarifying "neighbor procedure" – that permission should be requested, and that women and children should not be used. So on that day, everything still worked out ok. The next night, we entered Jenin again, and again a boy and a woman were used. After a few times, I heard over the radio that no one was supposed to send women or children into such a house, only adult men and only with the permission of the commander on the ground. So those were the changes. Although I know that later there were cases of "neighbor procedure", I don't know whether with children or not, but I'm also sure that today this is still done.

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16

**"I couldn't care less"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2010**

**Did you happen to arrest children?**

I remember especially adolescents. We once arrested three guys, three or two who were a kind of gang that kept throwing stones at us and they were... just boys.

**What were the grounds for arrest?**

Either the Shabak [General Security Services] wanted to talk to them, or they had thrown stones, or they were suspected of contacts with Hamas...

**Earlier you spoke of an incident where a kid shat in his pants during his arrest.**

**Would you like to elaborate?**

While we took him out of the jeep I remember hearing him shitting his pants... I also remember some other time when someone pissed in his pants. I just became so indifferent to it, I couldn't care less. He shat in his pants, I heard him do it, I witnessed his embarrassment. I also smelled it. But I didn't care.

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17

**"The guys are bored, they want action"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

... So there's a school there. We'd often provoke riots there. We'd be on patrol, walking in the village, bored, so we'd trash shops, find a detonator, beat someone to a pulp, you know how it is. Search, mess it all up. Say we'd want a riot? We'd go up to the windows of a mosque, smash the panes, throw in a stun grenade, make a big boom, then we'd get a riot.

### **And the locals were praying at the time?**

Yes, possibly. Everything goes. It's best, in the middle of prayers. That annoys them the most. You know what it's like. Soldiers are bored. They want action. Some are already waiting for the Palestinians outside, to fire rubber ammo as soon as they come out. Once we came – actually this was not planned – one of our guys went up to the window of the mosque, smashed it, and suddenly a riot broke out. So we came, shot rubber ammo, and they all scurried back inside. So a soldier went up and threw a gas canister inside.

### **Into the mosque?**

Sure. Can you imagine what sort of riot broke out there? I tell you, I never saw one like that. In Hebron we were provoking them like crazy. Then the company commander was alerted, the command jeep, because we needed more permission for these riots. The commander arrived, and said: "Look for this and that, shoot at the knees." We had a screwed up company commander, a real Arab-hater, too. We went out and there was this terrific riot, cement blocks were thrown at us from rooftops, everything. I had never seen such a riot in Hebron. You know, they'd get really upset at us when we threw stun grenades into their holiday prayers. So the commander got annoyed, stopped, froze everyone, just when all the Palestinians want to come back from the mosque. He wouldn't let anyone through. Old people want to get home – nothing moves. It's already 11 p.m., they've been standing there for some four hours. People are getting really nervous. He goes: "Okay, marksmen, up on the roofs. Soon Molotov cocktails will be flying." We were waiting for this. He says: "Wait, they're getting annoyed." He is used to annoying people: "Give them time, we'll warm them up." Some begin to push. He picked up stones, threw them at people, said: "No one gets through." A car came. He picked up the blocks that had been thrown from the rooftops, and boom boom, smashed the car. "Get out of here, fuckers!" Smashed the whole thing. Lights, everything. Left nothing whole. Crazy.

### **How did the riot end?**

It was a big one. We fired a lot of rubber ammo. A lot. Every time we'd catch Arab kids, hold them like this, with stones, like retards. You know, so that the others would throw stones at them, not at us.

### **Turn them into human shields?**

Yes.

**Did it work?**

Sometimes. Depends how much you provoke them. With the mosque it was a bit hard, because we were stoned from all directions.

**The kids don't want to run away? Don't manage to get away?**

You know how badly beaten they get? You catch him, push the gun against his body, he can't make a move, he's totally petrified. He only goes: "No, no, army." You can tell he's petrified. He sees you're mad, that you couldn't care less about him and you're hitting him really hard the whole time. And all those stones flying around. You grab him like this, you see? We were mean, really. Only later did I begin to think about these things, that we'd lost all sense of mercy.

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18

**"Total helplessness"****Unit: Paratroopers Brigade****Rank: (female) Sergeant****Nablus 2005-2006**

It's a harsh reality. Very very harsh. And the closer it gets to you, the more you realize things. Suddenly things that on the news just didn't make any sense to you, now pass as normal. And here you live it. I saw combatants abuse detainees, for instance, so many times, and it was highly upsetting.

**Was this common practice or a single event?**

Not common practice. Commanders also knew how to put an end to it. I mean, it's not something they'd encourage. On the whole people got treated...

**When you saw this for the first time, what did you say?**

It was very weird for me. Incredibly weird. It stressed me out. I was really scared of this situation.

**Do you recall a specific situation?**

I remember one morning, one of the first times I came to the commander's office and saw some five detainees, incredibly scary, and a few soldiers...

**What was scary, the way they looked?**

No, not the way they looked. The fact that they were actually children, around 14-15 years old. Not older. Blindfolded. And these combatants were not from my own

battalion - after all we were a regional brigade, and there are lots of different units – combatants came at those kids, threw stones at them, swore at them. And the kids sat as helpless as a human being can be, their hands shackled in those tight plastic bands that don't let them move, blindfolded, total helplessness. I often found myself feeling very ambivalent, not sure what I was doing, whose side I was on in this whole thing.

### **Did you say anything to anyone?**

I often made remarks, and some people responded by saying: "You're right, this has to be looked into." Others said: "After all they do to us, we have the right to treat them any way we want." Listen, seeing my own guys coming back, later in their service, but still, coming back from an eight-hour shift at Hawara checkpoint, when a Palestinian tried to stab one of them, at that point I say, sorry, but screw them. With all due respect. With all my good will.

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19

### **"That's what they understand"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2010**

I happened to be at Gross Square several times when Palestinian children ignited thorns and weeds in the cemeteries or rolled tires and threw stones at the 'Pillbox' Post or towards the Jewish settlement. A patrol would be alerted to catch them, but until the police arrived, the soldiers couldn't just stay with them outside so they would take them inside the ground floor of the post, and they would stay there. Once they had to stay in there alone for hours, and the stench in there is terrible. Golani infantrymen who were there before us would piss inside that post on the floor so it really stank. They stayed in there for a few hours without water, without food. Just that stench, it was disgusting. They cried and began to call people on the phone so one of the soldiers from another post was sent to be in there with them, to make sure they didn't make trouble — to sit on the stairs. They were a lot of trouble. They weren't supposed to use the phone but still they did. I didn't want to use force so I called the war-room, and at the time the company commander was sitting with the deputy battalion commander at our company HQ, so the company commander came to the

post. He arrived, opened the door and began yelling at them in Arabic and swearing at them, even slapping them around a bit.

**How did it all end?**

They were quiet, he had scared them. Three hours later they were released. They had sat there for three hours, as a punishment. But they would often either sit there and wait for the police to pick them up and then one of the soldiers would go with them for the inquiry, or the police would come right away.

**And that whole story, sitting in the pillbox, was because they rolled tires?**

Rolled tires, threw stones, burnt grass.

**Did the stones ever hit you? Or the pillbox?**

No.

**Were the tires burning?**

Once a tire was burning, but they're not allowed... It's like disciplining a child, as soon as you let him do something wrong, he'll keep doing it. They know they shouldn't do this and as soon as they realize no one reacts, they will just go on doing it because they'll think it's okay.

**What's the point?**

No point. If they see that no one jumps them, or cares that tires are being rolled, they will do it. Then there will be burning tires, and then stones.

**What should to be done with such children, according to instructions?**

Scare them. The police, too, said there was nothing to be done with them at the police station.

**And the company commander's approach is routine?**

The point is he didn't punch them or kick them on the floor and fracture their bones. Just slapped them around. I'm not saying this is right, but that's what they understand.

**Do you think that while you were there, this really changed things? Did they throw fewer stones, burn fewer tires?**

No. They know, somehow, they hear which battalion is due to arrive. They probably fear Golani infantry, because that unit is more violent than Nahal, and then there was the Kfir Brigade... We are a more 'moral' battalion. Still, it should be clear that we don't just hang around our posts and look around, but act. Show some clout, so they realize there are more soldiers, more patrols. So they'll know they can't approach or make trouble, because they'll be caught.

### **How is this manifested? Beyond leaving them in the post for several hours?**

Nothing can be done. The point is these children are afraid they'll be sent to the police station and their parents will have to come and bail them out, and then their dad will beat them up. They're told: "The police will come soon," and then they're just released.

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20

### **"Everything stays the same"**

**Unit: Navy**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

#### **Gaza Strip Boundary 2005-2007**

... There is an [offshore] area that closes in on Gaza, it's called area K and is controlled by the Israeli Navy, and it stayed this way after the 'disengagement' [of the Israeli military from the Gaza Strip] – nothing has changed there as far as the maritime designated area is concerned. Everything has remained the same. The only thing that changed is that area K is between Israel and Gaza, area M is between Egypt and Gaza, and in the middle was another buffer preventing boats from the Rafah dock to cross over to the Gaza dock. This part was opened to them as the 'disengagement' took effect. That was the only gain. I mostly remember that near the K area between Israel and Gaza there are children who would get up very early in the morning, really little children, they'd get there around 4-5 .a.m., because that area was filled with fishermen. It's a small area, and the fish would escape to the closed areas where no fishing happened. The kids would keep trying to get through, so every morning shots would be fired in their direction to scare them away, to the point that fire was directed at their legs – at kids who stood on the beach or rode a surfboat into the water. We had a Druze on board who would yell at them in Arabic and swear at them. Later you'd see the kids' faces on camera, crying, those poor kids.

#### **What do you mean by firing in their direction?**

It began with shots in the air, bullets passing them closely, and in extreme cases, even shooting at their legs. I didn't do it, but there were other vessels in my company that shot at their legs.

**What range?**

Long. 500-600 meters. Firing a Raphael Mag, all automatic.

**Where do you aim?**

It's a matter of angles. You have dimension gauges in the camera, and you place the marker where you want and it prevents the wave effect and hits where you want it to, precisely.

**You aim one meter away from their surfboat?**

More, even five, six meters. There were cases I heard about but didn't see, where the surfboat was hit. Ricochets hit them, of bullets hitting the water.

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21

**"Boom boom"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

**We haven't mentioned the Jews in Hebron.**

The Jewish shits.

**They gave you a hard time?**

Sure they did. But there's nothing much you can do about the Jews there. What are you going to do? That's the worst part. There are cases where you already wish you could beat them. For example, you know the "Worshippers' Path"? This Jewish kid walks along, an Arab kid passes by, boom, the Jew kicks the Arab kid in the face. If the Arab would hit him back I have to catch him and slap him on the face, see? The Jew is free to do whatever he likes.

**Did you work with the Border Police?**

Yes, they're the worst shits. What we do is nothing in comparison to them. They didn't give a damn, they go around breaking people's knees just like that. I remember once some Arab was caught throwing stones, they put his leg up against the wall as he lay on the ground and, boom, someone just stepped on his knee. No mercy. I said: "Wow." I could never believe the level of cruelty I saw there, how could they... We'd pass by on patrol, let's say, and see them standing at the checkpoint, saying to someone: "Come here." Boom boom, hit him, kick him, and it's just a kid. "Go on,

don't talk." "You're talking? Get over here again." Boom, boom. Start a stopwatch and make him run back and forth. He has 20 seconds to get me a soft drink.

### **What, from the grocery?**

Yes. Beat him to a pulp. And then the kid gets back: "He wouldn't give me the drink." "What do you mean? Go tell him now that if he doesn't give it to you, I'll slaughter him." That's how they'd speak to him.

### **In Arabic?**

Of course. Lots of Arabic-speakers in the Border Police. Lots of Druze.

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## **22**

### **"A kind of game"**

#### **Unit: Reserves**

**Rank: \*\*\***

#### **Ramallah 2011**

On Friday morning we went out to the village. My platoon had to occupy two houses. We split into two squads. One force took the roof of a house, and the other took another roof. The residents of these houses already know that their houses will be taken over on Friday because they have a good lookout position over the village. We were told that the person who lives in the house we took over, the father, is a Palestinian policeman. We got to the house. He asked: "What do you want?" At first he tried to resist a bit. "Why are you entering my house? It's my house." We said: "You are familiar with the procedure, we have no choice, we have to go in. We stand here on your roof every Friday." So he said: "Okay, go in." He resisted just a bit, he wanted to close some door upstairs first... And one soldier couldn't hold back, of course, and saw this as resistance and immediately began to yell at him: "Shut up, what are you doing?", while the guy didn't even intend to put up any resistance. He was really nice. I mean, he was very meek. He didn't really have a choice anyway. We came in, five soldiers, and the mother of that Palestinian policeman tried to resist a bit, too, and yelled at us why we were going up, it was their house. Except for that soldier who yelled, we were relatively okay. We spoke nicely to them, we said: "Listen, we didn't come to mess up your house. Go ahead, lock up everything you need, finish, tell us and we'll go upstairs." I mean, we treated them really well and as a result, except for

that yelling in the beginning, they were alright. Then we climbed up to the roof. It was around 10:30-11 a.m., and on the other roof, at a distance of about 300 meters from us, we saw the other force. And then nothing happened. One soldier with a teargas canister launcher, and other soldiers without anything but stun grenades, are on the lookout. The heat is intense, it's July, the roof baking in the sun, they get bored. Once in a while they enter the stairwell where there's a bit of shade – smoke, drink, eat, and go back. But in the meantime nothing happens. Absolutely nothing for about an hour. We're on that roof and nothing happens. Then at some point we see two people suddenly going behind some house. We don't know what they're going to do, what their deal is, but two people were spotted so this was a great opportunity for the soldier with the launcher to fire some teargas in their direction. Then you see how from the other roof also, our guys, and really the Border Policemen downstairs, begin to fire teargas every two minutes in some direction, because they spotted someone walking. This means, that on that Friday, if you were a Palestinian and you didn't want to get hurt, you couldn't walk around in your village street from 11 a.m. If you turned, that already makes you suspect and you'd be targeted with teargas or a stun grenade or something. Then it starts – people run away from the gas and suddenly the Border Police see them running, so – oh, they're running? Then they're definitely suspect and so they, too, start firing gas. You look out from your rooftop and see this scene – from about three different posts teargas is being fired at various targets in the village. Nothing massive, but it is still starting to rain gas. Around 1 p.m. we hear the Muezzin sounding the call to prayer for about 15 minutes, and after that we're told over the radio: "Now the demonstration will begin." Usually after prayers they come out and then we really see the mosque, but we still can't see its entrance, and then we hear people chanting on the megaphone, very weakly. I didn't see the people. Later I watched this on video. You really see it's nothing spectacular, maybe 20 people. Not some mass demo. 15-20 people. We couldn't actually see the demonstration from our post, but I began to see that teargas was being fired at them from all directions.

### **Who was it, the other force?**

Mainly the Border Police. The demonstrators were advancing towards them on the road so the Border Police began to throw teargas and more teargas in that direction. And that's it. We hear that the demonstration stopped.

### **How much teargas do you think was fired that day?**

A lot. Perhaps close to 100 rounds. Certainly many dozen, maybe over a hundred. But it's important for me to mention one more thing: The atmosphere among the

soldiers is... It's like some kind of game. Before Nabi Saleh, everyone wants to arm themselves with as much ammo as possible, so they'll have plenty to fire. It's for kicks. You have lots of stun grenades, eventually there's nothing you can do with one, you have to throw it, so they're thrown for the sake of throwing at people who are not suspected of anything. And in the end, you tell your friend at the Friday night dinner table: "Wow! I fired this much, you fired that much, I stopped this, you stopped that..." I mean, it's fun and games, elation, a chance for release and people just fire it all. That's the experience. Around 2 p.m. the company commander ordered us to go downstairs, and it's time to patrol the village on foot. So we gathered at a kind of village square, where there's a grocery as well, people were sitting there having refreshments, so the commander asked the grocer to close up and go away. He did, of course. Then lots of Palestinians started coming, but it was actually mainly internationals, Israeli anarchists and so on who started coming. They didn't demonstrate, didn't throw stones or yell or anything. They just came and stood there. We were about 10 soldiers, and then the battalion commander's front command group arrived, too, one of the brigade officers came with a document declaring the place a 'closed military zone,' and we told them in Hebrew and English both: "This is a closed military zone. Anyone who does not leave will be arrested." In fact there was no reason to arrest them, they were just standing there.

### **But if it's a closed military zone you have to arrest them.**

But they did nothing. We stood there, even spoke with them a bit. At that moment, things broke up: some soldier tried to grab someone so he ran away. There were little things, you heard a shout and someone was running, but it's no incitement, nothing like that. Until the demonstrators decided they would not budge, and a guy who was a reservist, in fact a settler, from the auxiliary company, an older man who was a volunteer reservist, around 50 something, began to go berserk, and became really violent. He lost it. He grabbed women and threw them to the ground, grabbed press cameras and threw them in a sewer, broke them, and this was a real provocation. He touched some woman, and immediately guys jumped to protect her, so all the soldiers jumped them. Anyway, all hell broke loose just because of that one reservist who started it all because he came along and didn't even wait. He was told he had to disperse them so he started hitting, kicking, and throwing anything that moved. Any Palestinian, anything. The press didn't interest him, he simply went wild.

### **Really lashed out?**

Yes. Lashed out, seriously. At some point the battalion commander told some officer

to take that wild soldier and keep him away from the area. Send him back to the company. "I don't want him here, don't let him near." We also felt we overdid things. I noticed other soldiers were also feeling very uneasy. Because we were always being told this is exactly the kind of thing demonstrators are looking for, and here they got it from that berserk soldier. Later there was an inquiry, the company commander spoke and said: "That guy was not from our company but it is important to mention that it's an exceptional instance, and if it were one of my subordinates I'd throw him out of the company straight away. Keep that in mind..."

### **How was this exceptional?**

He spoke about values, said this was out of line... Around 3-4 p.m. we began to get people out of the village, either by arrest or by chasing away all the people who were not from the village itself. Anyone who was not a Palestinian had to leave. Then they began to hide in houses, so soldiers under command of our company commander began to search the houses. We reached a house, the commander asked to bring the owner out, we knew that about 20 anarchists had just entered it. He said: "What do you want me to do, stop them from coming in?" So the commander said: "Yes." He said: "I can't keep so many people out." So the commander simply arrested the guy. Blindfolded and shackled him, took him into the jeep. Now this was the kind of arrest where the man is not taken to some detention facility because he wasn't actually rioting or anything, he was simply taken to the 'Pillbox' Post and made to wait there until about 8 p.m. when everything was over and then he was returned to the village.

### **An older man?**

Yes, about 50 years old. We walked the village, didn't see any more people out because they hid inside the houses, came back to the main square, there was this father there, the grocer. He was with his many children and children's kids – they spoke fluent Hebrew. Many boys were standing there with him. One of them, around 17 years old, annoyed one of the company commander's staff.

### **Annoyed?**

He smiled or something, so immediately an order was given to arrest two of the sons.

### **Why?**

Because he smiled or something. First the father said, no, don't arrest them. I'll beat them up. They did nothing. Didn't throw stones. So the commander said: 'No, he was provoking us. He provoked a soldier of mine.' And we simply took them, blindfolded, shackled, into the jeep and to the pillbox where they were made to wait for hours... There was an Israeli press photographer who simply stood there. Wouldn't leave. He

was told: "This is a military zone, everyone has to leave!" I mean, leave how? They ran into houses. He wouldn't, so the soldiers grabbed him by force, threw his camera on the ground, made him lie down, shackled him. He began to swear at them, he said: "You're Nazis..." this and that. While he was shackled, he said: "Just get my camera inside my bag." His bag was on his back. So some soldier came to get his camera inside the bag. It was returned to him without the film. He was all dust, and treated violently, forced to the ground and his head hit the ground, and he wouldn't give up, continued to curse the soldiers, out of frustration, ideological badmouthing.

**But you said that at some point you were told to remove everyone who didn't belong in the village.**

Right, but we went around the houses and didn't find them. We were playing cat-and-mouse for about an hour. Then we said: "What, are we going to start a house-to-house search?" So the commander said: "Let's go back to the central square, and if you see them outside, chase them, catch them." But we didn't see those people. Outside were only Palestinians because they knew we wouldn't arrest them if they weren't holding stones. So we reached some house, the commander wanted everyone out to make sure no anarchists were there. One soldier was sent in to make sure there were no internationals there, and that's it... Around 5 p.m., we had nothing left to do in the village so the commander took our force to the nearest pillbox. He said: "Wait here, if there's anything happening you'll be alerted, and if not, just wait in the pillbox. He said, take off your vests, make some coffee. In other words, there's no assignment for you right now. As we went down to the pillbox from the village, on foot, one of the soldiers already had ammo in his barrel and the safety catch was off, so there was nothing left to do but fire. Now, if you're a smart soldier you fire at some open ground – those soldiers weren't lacking. We went on and the whole time he kept saying: "What should I do with this?" So coming down from the village, there was no demonstration, nothing. There was this grocery and some kids hung around there, so when we passed them at some 200 meters away he decided to turn around and fire in their direction. He didn't hit them but he was bored so he decided to waste the ammo in the direction of those kids who weren't connected to any incident. At the pillbox were the two detainees, and we had to watch over them. They sat quietly. The soldiers did nothing, we just talked amongst ourselves, and occasionally one of us ate a peach and of course threw the pit at a detainee. And occasionally I'd see someone go over to them and step on their balls, stuff like that. Little things, not harsh violence, or...

### **Stepping on their balls? That doesn't sound like nothing.**

Just lightly, to show him: "I'm still here." Or if he moved a bit because the position he was sitting in was uncomfortable, then they'd yell at him: "Hey, don't move!" and give him a little slap. But no violence, I mean not beating them up, or smashing their faces with rifle butts or anything. That's it. Around 8 p.m. everyone came back from the village, and we were told to fold up. We asked the company commander over the radio what to do with the detainees, and were told that they would be released. And I really saw them being taken, without the blindfolds, free to walk back to the village.

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**23**

### **"A 12-year old boy"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006**

In Jalis, a situation developed – three solid days of chases. On one of the patrols it grew into a mad, mass riot where we chased some three kids from house to house and yelled: "Where are they?" at every house.

#### **How old were the kids?**

I don't know – 12-year-olds. It grew out of some small incident but this was already after three very charged days and it was insane. We didn't end up finding those kids. When it happened and we entered houses, we began to hear some noises in the neighborhood. Shouts and noise. We entered one house where we saw them enter and asked directly: "Where are they?" We got everyone out of the house and they were not there. We searched the whole house and realized they must have exited from the back. In the meantime you hear a rumble down in the street as we prepare to exit. In order to get out, I stand there and push people like this with my weapon, sideways, and someone above me hits away with my gun-barrel.

#### **What, at people's heads?**

People's mouths, heads. But this is a way to disperse a crowd. To make way. There were about 20 people just at that exit from the house. They spread out and ran, went down the street and began to throw chairs at us. I actually remember the image of a plastic chair flying overhead, and rocks, too. I feared for my life. Two patrols came

and we dispersed everyone. But it all began with a chase after some kids.

### **Why were you chasing them to begin with?**

You don't know what happens, you're the sheriff, what do you mean, why? Why did he throw stuff at me? I throw back at him. Really, I think I was acting as a 12-year-old kid, what we did out there. But with weapons. I did whatever I felt like doing.

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24

### **"Getting beaten up all the way"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

At some point a really effective solution was found to stop the stone throwing. Say a kid is caught throwing stones. First thing, if you bring him to his dad, he beats him up like hell.

### **Did you witness this?**

Sure. They don't care. That father doesn't care. He sees soldiers bringing his son home, doesn't talk to him. First thing, he punches him in the face, without a word. Doesn't ask: "What happened? Who did what? Did you... Didn't you..." First thing, he punches his face. Then he grabs onto the kid and tries to take him from you. He says: "Better I beat him up, rather than have the soldiers hit him, take him to jail or anything else." Beats him up. And soldiers, like any human being... It's really unpleasant, so you begin to pity the kid, I mean his dad beats him with a stick, on and on. So he's left alone. Basically, the point's been made. But if a kid is caught and a patrol is alerted, and the kid is taken into the jeep, they drive to the other end of town and throw the kid out there, and he has to walk all the way across town and also be beaten.

### **Inside the jeep?**

In the jeep and on the way. The whole time.

### **Slaps, kicks? Or what?**

Both. I've already seen... We had a guy, from the Caucasus, he was on our patrol, got off the jeep for a moment and someone swore at him. He got off, took off his helmet, hit him in the face with it. Literally split his face open. There were also beatings with sticks. Wood sticks, like the handles of a large hammer or ax.

### **You had clubs in your vests?**

We confiscated them from Palestinians. They had them in their shops and stuff. Just the handles without the hammer. No iron, just the wooden stick itself. They would carry them like police clubs. What's the point? The kid gets hit by the patrol, and he's thrown out at the other end of town and on his way back through he has to pass the guard posts, pillboxes. So he gets hit on the way back, too. He has to pass Gross Post and Avraham Avinu settlement and is beaten there as well. So not only does he have to make it all the way back on his own, he also gets hit again and again.

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25

### **"Aspirin"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

#### **Jenin 2005**

Salem is a detention center for security prisoners who do their time there. Conditions there were less favorable than at Meggido, which is a huge prison. There is checkup time once or twice a week, and whoever is taken to Salem has already undergone a doctor's examination to verify that he can do time at a facility without a doctor. Whoever isn't able goes to Meggido. There were all sorts of cases that I'm sure – if a doctor had seen them, they never would have entered Salem. Like a cardiac patient facing surgery, or a diabetic.

#### **They went to Meggido?**

Yes. But they were at Salem. That's the point. There were three instances I remember: The first was a 15-year-old boy with pain in his balls. You could hear shouts from inside the cell. A sewer runs under Salem and it stinks like hell in the summertime, really bad. Incredible. The inmates yelled for the sergeant on duty to arrive, and after 20 minutes of yelling, a 15-year-old boy was brought out of the prisoners' cell where there's a shaweesh (an inmate who can speak Hebrew and mediates between the wardens and the inmates). He explained that the boy had testicle pains. The medical protocol requires that anyone suffering pain in his testicles must reach the hospital, see a doctor. I was stressed out and tried to speak with the battalion doctor to ask him to make a call. He said he'd be there two days later, and that I should give him an aspirin.

**How did you answer this?**

That aspirin doesn't help testicle pain. He needs to get to the hospital. The doctor said he couldn't do it and would try to get there the next day.

**What happened to this boy?**

He's okay, a doctor came and took him.

**You told him to sit in the cell and gave him an aspirin?**

There was nothing much I could do. I gave him a pill to relieve his pain and it calmed him psychologically. I told him that if it hurts more, he should call me. He didn't.

**Did you see him the next day?**

I don't remember. I think so. Again, I remember he didn't summon me that night. There's a guard post inside the detention center which my own company was supposed to man, I wasn't there on duty as a medic. The detention facility would summon medics from the company as needed, when there was no doctor around. There was not ample medical provision there, not even a first aid kit. I realized he was supposed to undergo hernia surgery before his arrest. I know because a doctor who checked him before his arrest signed it. Maybe the examination was not thorough, but this kid could not stand arrest. Then I realized that a doctor does not always really examine the detainees.

**How did you realize this?**

When the medics were required to examine detainees' ability to withstand custody, we were told that even a medic could do so. At some point I could no longer be there. I had many confrontations with the staff and my company medic and the battalion doctor over this, so I was told not to go there any more.

**How do you know the prisoners' data?**

I saw their files... Every person arriving at the detention facility was required to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had to check his medical history in order to verify his capability, as well as anyone who was being released.

**What does the file include?**

Name, data, picture, formal details, crime, length of prison sentence, arrest document.

**Who fills it out?**

In principle, the doctor or medic.

**Did you fill such files out?**

Yes. I wrote in pulse, blood pressure, issues of health, medication, family history.

**Who signed the document?**

I did.

**What's written below the signature?**

The doctor, I think. I'm not sure. I think they said the medic may also do this.

**Who did?**

The doctor, I think.

**The doctor approved this?**

Yes.

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26

**"Some resentment"**

**Unit: Oketz Canine Unit**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Gaza Strip 2005**

We were at a post near Nisanit, close to Beit Hanoun, the northern Gaza Strip. There were two incidents that week at a place called Beit Lahiya. It is known as a very hostile place, and shootings and bombings there were not uncommon, Qassam rockets were launched from there towards Nisanit. We had to enter the village with D-9 bulldozers and armored APCs, a very massive force, and we were 'welcomed' with porcelain toilets, cement blocks, and the like, being hurled at us. We had to enter some house, at least to lay a "straw widow" [ambush in an urban area]. The "widows" in Gaza are not the same as in the West Bank, they're a bit different. You take apart the house.

**What do you mean?**

You enter with the heavy vehicle and make the wall collapse, then you come out of the vehicle into the house. You don't get off the vehicle outside the house, that would be life endangering. You know that you are actually going to destroy a house. The point was that some terrorist group had launched Qassam rockets at Jewish settlements and we had to go into one house in order to reach that house, from where they were fired. We got to a house that was in an area where there are no streets, really. It's all dirt tracks, and there's no set of aerial photograph maps that direct you, so we just break walls and proceed through them indoors, no walking on the street out there.

### **How do you break the walls?**

With hammers, and special equipment that belongs to the bomb removal unit, that uses explosives and creates a kind of hole in the wall, and then you break through with your rifle butt. Simply moving from house to house, by breaking through a wall in every house.

### **But you entered the first house with a heavy armored vehicle?**

Exactly. Now sometimes we would pass through yards, so the vehicle is taken there to create a kind of wall and then the soldiers go through. Once, we came to a school and heard voices of children inside. The force stopped – no one was supposed to be there, especially not children. Usually when IDF forces are around, the kids either come out and throw stones and then run away, or they're not there at all. So we thought it was intentional, you know, some kind of provocation of children so the Israeli army force would have to stop and be a target. We didn't really know what to do. The orders were to throw a stun grenade to create panic, so anyone there would creep back to their holes. And that's what happened. We entered one of the classrooms, we saw they'd left all their notebooks and stuff. I remember we were supposed to conduct a search with a tracking dog to make sure no one was left there by mistake... with some teacher, or someone pretending to be a teacher. Anyway, there was no one, and there were plenty of notebooks we were supposed to collect.

### **The notebooks?**

Yes. I remember looking at them. I remember seeing a map of Israel and Arabic writing, as if all of Israel is actually Palestine. You see cartoons of soldiers, of Jews, of burning Israeli flags and a kind of ax held by a soldier. Stuff like that, makes me think, hey, what's this? These are kids? This is what they're taught? On the other hand, we come to their school, scare them with a stun grenade. Now I tell myself: If you were a kid under the same circumstances, you'd naturally develop a kind of resentment. The Gazan child there in that school develops resentment almost naturally because you actually come to his school. He's already poisoned. On the other hand, he sees it happening on the spot. So he gets even more poisoned. He's saying: "It's not in vain, the stuff I'm being told."

### **Why did you have to get to this school in the first place?**

We were not exactly aware this was a school, it was a kind of relatively long building that could be passed through length-wise, rather than over exposed ground. We got to it simply because it was pretty close to our objective, so we decided to pass through.

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**"Can't tell right from wrong"****Unit: Kfir Brigade****Rank: First Sergeant****Hebron 2006-2007**

We also did such things, you know. Kids would throw stones at us, we'd catch some kid who happened to be there and beat him to a pulp. Even if he didn't throw stones. He would know who did. "Who is it? Who is it?" Finally he'd tell us who did it. Once we were on patrol, someone threw stones at us, nothing really serious, so we caught some Palestinian kid who had been nearby, we knew he'd seen this, he knew who had thrown the stones. Let's say we hit him, to put it mildly, until he told us. He took us. He told us where that kid was, we wouldn't leave him alone until he told us exactly where that kid lived. We went to that person's home. He wasn't there that day. We went back to \*\*\*, came out on patrol again at 6 a.m., went straight to the home of that kid. He was about 15 years old.

**The kid you caught?**

No, the kid that he ratted on. The kid who was the regular stone-thrower.

**How old was the kid you caught?**

About 10 years old.

**And the one he told on was 15?**

Something like that. Yes. We went to his house. He hadn't been home the night before. So we came in the morning, knocked on the door, some old woman came out, around 60 or so. She says: "There's no one here." You know how it is. We said we didn't care, went in, me and another guy, and at this point you have no more patience for Hebron and Arabs and Jews there. We entered, began to trash the place. There are doors on both sides of the corridor, I open all of the doors on one side, my friend on the other side. We found the boy behind the last door on the left. He was totally scared, realized we'd caught him. At first he wanted to escape, then he saw my comrade standing at the door, and gave up. We took him out. We had a commander, never mind his name, who was a bit crazy. He beat the boy to a pulp, really knocked him around. He said: "Just wait, now we're taking you." Showed him all kinds of potholes on the way, asked him: "Want to die? Want to die right here?" and the kid goes: "No, no..." You know.

## **In Arabic?**

Yes. He spoke Arabic well. So we began to walk, trying to walk behind them. I'll spare you the whole description, some things there were really out of line.

## **What happened?**

We walked on and on, the commander showed him holes in the ground: "You want to die?" "No, why..." He was taken into a building under construction. The commander took a stick, broke it on him, boom boom. And the kid didn't cry. I tell you, he was tough. About 14 years old or so. Not big. The commander took a stone, gave it to him, and said: "Throw it at him," pointing at me. I stare at him. What? "Throw it already." Slaps him in the face. "Man enough? Throw it at him." Boom, more beatings. The kid thought he was being made to throw the stone at me, so he did, not strongly or anything. The commander said: "Of course you throw stones at a soldier." Boom, banged him up even more. I tell you, that guy... Then people started coming. His whole family came out. And they weren't allowed in. They surely heard all the slaps and hitting. That kid was such a mess, broken apart. Then one of the soldiers said: "Listen, you're going too far. We don't want to come out of here with a dead body, there are still families around here." And I tell you, that kid got punched in the face, in the knees, kicked around.

## **Only from the squad commander?**

No, there was another soldier who joined in, but not as seriously as the commander. That commander had no mercy. Really. Anyway the kid could no longer stand on his feet and was already crying. He couldn't take it anymore. He cried. The commander shouted: "Stand up!" Tried to make him stand but he couldn't. He really couldn't. From so much beating he just couldn't stand up. The commander goes: "Don't put on a show," and kicks him some more. Then \*\*\*, who had a hard time with such things, came in, caught the commander and said: "Don't touch him anymore. That's it." The commander goes: "What's with you, gone leftie?" And he said: "No, I don't want to see such things being done." He always stayed away, never liked such things. A sensitive guy, a medic, one of the good guys.

## **And then what?**

Then he said: "I can't stand to see this any more." An argument ensued. The commander said: "I can't believe I take you out on patrols." Like he was really doing him a favor.

## **Where were you standing?**

We were nearby but did nothing. We were sort of indifferent, you know. Well, you only

get to thinking about this later, you don't think at first. This was happening every day. These were the little things. And then it becomes a kind of habit. Patrols with beatings happened on a daily basis. We were really going at it.

**And then he let the kid go?**

No. He grabbed him, took him out, and the people saw him, the parents saw him. Took him out? Lifted him by force. The kid hardly got up. I tell you, I have no idea how he managed, after an hour. And the commander goes on: "What are you carrying on about?" and kicks him some more. Takes him out, others are asking: "What did you do to him? Look!" Obviously he'd been beaten up. Anyway, he told them: "Get the hell out of here!" and all hell broke loose.

**What do you mean?**

You know, his mother is here and after all it's her kid. "What, he's only a kid!" His nose was bleeding. He had really been beaten to a pulp. The commander said to his mother: "Keep away!" Came close, cocked his gun, he already had a bullet in the barrel, or halfway so it wouldn't just fly out. She got scared. He actually stuck the gun-barrel in the kid's mouth. Literally.

**In front of his parents?**

Sure. "Anyone gets close, I kill him. Don't annoy me. I'll kill him. I have no mercy." He was really pissed off. Then the father, or not even the father, I don't know exactly who it was, caught her: "Calm down, leave them alone. Let them go, so they'll let him go."

**All in Arabic?**

No, they spoke to us in Hebrew. And he wanted us to see this, he was no fool. A good man. The guy who spoke to us? Was a really good man. Things got to a point where you can no longer tell good from bad. That's how it was in our platoon. We thought they were all shits. Anyway, the commander gripped the kid, stuck his gun in his mouth, yelled and all, and the kid was hardly able to walk. We dragged him further, and then he said again: "One more time this kid lifts a stone, anything, I kill him. No mercy." It was like that the whole way. \*\*\* was going on and on at this commander all along: "You're such a retard, all you're doing to this family is making them produce another suicide bomber, that's what you're doing. You have no mercy. If I were a father and saw you doing this to my kid, I'd seek revenge that very moment." He went on and on for a whole hour.

**If I were a Palestinian, what would I get beaten up for?**

It was enough for you to give us a look that we didn't like, straight in the eye, and

you'd be hit on the spot. We got to such a state and were so sick of being there, you know what I mean.

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**28**

**"Did you swear at the soldier?"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

When I was a commander at Gross Post [in Hebron], sometimes out of boredom, you know, there are more soldiers there so you sit and chat. I recall once some soldier caught an Arab kid and said: "You swore at me!" or something like that. His grandfather or father came, some adult, and he told them: "The kid swore at me. You don't know who you've messed with, I'm a maniac," begins to curse him, threaten him.

**Who?**

The soldier yelling at the kid and his father. Grabs him like this, holding him by the neck to the wall. So the father says to the kid: "You swore at the soldier?" Boom, slaps him. The father slaps the kid, you know, paying his dues. "You swore at the soldier..."

You're looking on and saying to yourself, Wow, I don't know. I mean, cases of real humiliation...

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**29**

**"Disturbances of the peace"**

**Unit: Givati Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2008**

There is a case I remember, where a kid died.

**What happened?**

I'm not even sure whether he died or not, he didn't die on the spot. I was indirectly

involved. There was a demonstration, well not one with banners and stuff, there were stones thrown.

**A riot.**

Exactly. A riot, with stone throwing. I don't know whether at settlers or soldiers, because by the time I got there, the front command group had arrived. The response was rubber ammo, from some point on. My officer is, let's say... First I'll give the dry facts. Rubber ammo fired at the legs, that's...

**That's what is allowed? That's procedure?**

At some point. Not at the beginning, I think. From some point, yes. Sometimes a teargas canister is used. At some point in the riot the officer shot to the legs, but at extremely short range. I don't know why, from about 20 meters, something like that. The moment he did that, a kid was bending down to pick up a stone, and got hit in the head. From there on the whole incident was about the treatment, some medic came and a Jewish ambulance, and an Arab one... I don't remember exactly. After a very long time because the situation was very dangerous, half of his brain was out of his skull, he finally got to the hospital and I believe that two days later he died. Now, from the facts themselves you could assume that this was intentional. But from my acquaintance with this officer, it was not. From the kind of orders he was responsible for about hurting people in Operation Cast Lead, it was rather obvious that this was not intentional.

**Where did this happen?**

There's this neighborhood, I don't remember its name, above Tel Rumeida. There's a main road that separates it from Tel Rumeida.

**And that's where the Palestinians throw stones, if you remember, towards the Jewish settlement at Tel Rumeida?**

I don't know whether at the houses, or the pillbox or the soldiers. I don't even remember because I wasn't there, I came there only later. The officer got there before me. When this shooting took place we were on the way, because we were on foot.

**You got there after the boy was hit by the bullet?**

I think so, yes.

**What did you see there?**

I saw a huge crowd and my medic taking care of the boy, mainly him. An ambulance arrived, two even.

**Were there dozens of Palestinians on the spot? Or hundreds?**

Dozens.

**Was there contact between the demonstrators and the soldiers?**

Not really. The stones were the contact.

**Was the boy among the kids throwing stones?**

At the front line, and the shots were taken from about 20 meters, really close.

**If that was the front line of the demonstrators, the soldiers approached after firing?**

Just the medic, not the soldiers.

**What, stones weren't thrown at him as he advanced? I'm trying to visualize the situation.**

Perhaps, but when I got there, there weren't. Everyone had come to take care of him and it was obvious that the medic hadn't come to...

**The riot was over by then?**

Not the anger and the shouting and crowding. But there were no more stones being thrown.

**I'm trying to understand the situation as a result of which he tried to hit a child in the leg at 20-meter range. Is it because that's what you do in case of a riot, or was there a life-threatening situation?**

My assumption is that certain judgment is used, and stones thrown at a certain range justify rubber ammo.

**Were only officers authorized to use rubber ammo, or was this something that even...**

I don't know. I'm not sure whether the shot was taken by the officer or someone from his command jeep. I remember it was vague. I don't know the exact instructions, whether only officers or not, but I think it was not too commonplace, and there weren't that many riots. I do remember two or three really well. At that time. I don't remember anything stretching over the whole period of time. It wasn't routine.

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**"They have to be respected"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

We'd go on these vendettas.

**Against whom?**

Against those who threw stones at us.

**But you don't really know who did?**

We'd pick up kids, beat them up really hard, kids who were nearby, and they'd tell on them and take us to their homes. You can see them with your gun sights.

**At what range?**

100 meters, you can already detect the kid. So you go catch him later, you know it was him.

**How?**

By his shirt. Often they change, but I remember we'd catch them, look at the palm of their hand, see how dirty it was, if there's soil, if they'd thrown stones.

**Right after the stone throwing?**

Yes, right away. Some were picked up a day later, when we already weren't sure, but we were told it was the right kid, so it was.

**...What about women? What did you do to women?**

Really, not much. Women are already out of bounds.

**Was that the norm?**

Yes. The limit. Sort of like, they had to be respected. There's this thing that you have to respect women, after all. No matter how sickening they are, you still have to respect them. You know that if you hurt a woman... Once we caused a serious riot because of this.

**You caused a riot?**

Yes, we made it happen. We said: "This is it, we need to get some armed men out of the house." Someone began an argument, with an old woman, like about 60, when they're already so screwed up, they start arguing. So somehow... I'll tell you how it was. We caught some kid and the mother came right away to get him. We wouldn't let her. We started arguing with her over him. "We're not letting you have him. He threw

stones." "No, no." She began pushing the soldiers. So one of them slapped her face right away. Boom. That very second the whole family came out of the house. You know how it is, a mother, a woman. When you hurt a woman – nothing can be done. So a whole riot started. The woman slapped his face back, there were beatings, a whole mess... There were actually lots of incidents like this, come to think of it. A mother comes to pick up her boy, and doesn't get him. He's about to tell on others, she realizes this, she's afraid he'll squeal on others, so she catches him: "No, why?" "Move, where is he?" She gets slapped on the hand, and starts fighting with the soldiers. Then someone slaps her face and the whole thing blows up.

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**31**

**"Gotta keep my spirits up"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Tul Karm 2008**

... There was another instance of a 14-year old, an illegal alien. He was detained, kept on the side, so he stood there and hummed to himself. This annoyed one of the guys. He went up to him and said: "Something amusing you?" The kid said: "Yes, gotta keep my spirits up." "Spirits up, eh?" and the soldier slapped his face. You're in a dilemma here, because he's your buddy so you're not going to tell on him. I began to say to him: "What are you doing?" and he said: "No, they have to learn their lesson."

**You never told anyone?**

I couldn't.

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**"Everything's fine"****Unit: \*\*\*****Rank: First Sergeant****Hebron 2010**

The company commander's front group jeep... People were saying all the time that they beat Arabs for fun. Beatings happen all the time, but there was one episode that turned into my own "main event" while I was out there... One day we were alerted. The PA system (a sound system for addressing a large public) announced: "Front command group to the jeep." We all jumped to our feet, began gearing up, me and the medic, we prepared everything and the company commander opened the door of his office, came out and said: "Get lost. Only \*\*\* and I are going." He told me to take off my gear down and come as I was. He was without a bulletproof vest or anything. Just a uniform and gun. We drove to the 'Pharmacy' Checkpoint. There were two, three kids out there who would not go through the x-ray machine. We stopped the jeep, he got off, took a boy to the alley.

**One of the kids who refused?**

Yes. Then he simply went ahead and did it.

**What did he do?**

First of all he faced the kid, who was this close to the wall. He looked at him for a second, then held him like this, pushed him with his elbow, choking him against the wall. The kid went totally wild, the commander kept screaming at him in Hebrew, not in Arabic. Then he let go, the kid lifted his hands to wipe off his tears, and the commander goes boom! at the kid, who lowers his hands to stop wiping his tears, keeping them at his sides. Then the slaps came, more and more slaps... This was a second phase of hitting and yelling. Then the kid began to really scream, it was frightening, and locals began to gather around the checkpoint, peek into the alley. I remember the commander coming out of the alley and telling them: "Everything's fine." He yelled at the kid: "Stay right here, don't go anywhere!" and went out to tell them everything was okay. He called the squad commander at the checkpoint, stood facing the kid and said: "This is how they should be treated," gave the kid another two slaps and let him go. It's an insane story. I remember sitting in the vehicle, looking on and thinking: I've been waiting for this situation for 3 years, from the moment I enlisted, I joined the army to stop such things and here I am, not doing a thing,

choosing not to do anything. Am I fine with this? I remember answering myself: Yes. I'm fine with this. He's beating an Arab and I'm doing nothing about it. I was conscious of not doing anything because I was really afraid of that company commander. What? Should I jump off the jeep and say to him: "Stop, it's stupid what you're doing."?

**How old was the kid?**

A teenager. Under 18. Really – 13, 14, 15 years old.

**And how long did this last?**

Something like 10 minutes of hitting, and then the officer got back in the jeep and left.

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**33**

**"Motivate them"**

**Unit: Reserves**

**Rank: \*\*\***

**Jenin 2009**

After my discharge, I was in reserves and we were on active duty. On one of our missions, someone threw stones, and then got arrested shortly afterward, nearby. It was a kid from Ya'abad village. Really just a kid. Two, three days later we were supposed to go bother villagers there, go to his parents' house and say: "Your kid was arrested because he threw stones. Make sure this never happens again." And that's what we did. We came at night, talked to his parents, and his brother who was a Palestinian Authority man. They didn't even know that he had been arrested. They had no idea where he had been for three days, and that's what I know.

**How old was he, do you remember?**

I think he was 14-15. There was no point besides this. Our orders read to punish them a bit, motivate them to see to it that their kids wouldn't ever do it again. That was the reason to enter the village. Wake up everyone around. So the thinking was didactic in that sense. Educate them to educate their kid.

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**"Things happen, what can you do"****Unit: \*\*\*****Rank: First Sergeant****Nablus 2005-2006**

... Riots we're in – we were told to shoot, of course, if anyone throws a Molotov cocktail. If we detect someone like that, we should fire in his direction. If someone heats things up you can shoot either very close to him or to his legs or something like that.

**Who decides that someone is heating things up?**

That's the point. There isn't anyone. I remember the guys next to me, all those fanatics who see all the Palestinians there as heating things up.

**And then what? Live ammunition or means for crowd dispersal?**

We had means for crowd dispersal, but for us at the firing positions with our normal weapons, there's one guy with these means, but, you know, once we had a real serious riot. Everything was thrown at us, we were shot at from all directions. You hear the shots as if they're one meter away from you and have no idea where they're coming from. You don't know who, you can't see, it is probably above you or from the sides and you can't see a thing.

**How many soldiers were you?**

We were six guys inside an armored jeep, and there were a bunch of other guys there. The whole battalion. The whole recon unit. And we were forced to be there because one jeep got stuck there and we had to stick it out. There were attempts to haul the jeep out, and the whole time all of Nablus was on its feet. There were four guys killed that evening. Or that day, rather. It was already morning.

**Four guys from your unit?**

No, four Palestinians. I remember there was a real crowd next to us, rocks were being thrown at us. You die, I remember acting dead in order to do something to make them stop, get away, run away from us. The guy next to me fired at the ground to make them run away, and then he goes: "Oops!" I look and see a kid bleeding on the ground and the crowd indeed was gone. The kid lay there on the ground, bleeding. I think he was still alive. I don't know what happened to him afterward, whether he was killed or not. I do remember him being removed. And four Palestinians were killed that day. No one spoke to us about this. There was no inquiry.

## **That whole episode began with a jeep that got stuck and needed to be hauled out?**

We were on our way back when a jeep got stuck, turned on its side. We had to haul it out. Of course, everyone stayed. And that brought on the biggest riot I've ever experienced, and I've been in plenty of them. We were shot at and explosive charges were thrown at us from all directions, and boulders, stones, refrigerators, dishwashers, everything was thrown at us – anything they had. I remember that I couldn't even urinate from all that stress. We were in that riot for some 10 hours. A long time.

## **Out in the street or indoors?**

In the street but inside our armored jeep.

## **So the guy who shot the kid did it through the loophole...**

Yes, from inside the vehicle. I believe he aimed at the legs or next to the kid. Could be he didn't hit him with the bullet but that it a ricocheted. But the kid was lying there bleeding. So... He also said to us, like: "Don't tell." No one talked to us about this. No one asked anything. Well, okay, a riot, so things happen and what can one do. Those guys throw Molotov cocktails at us so we have the okay to shoot to kill.

## **Regardless of their age?**

Regardless.

## **How was he with this afterwards, the guy who shot the kid?**

I remember saying to him: "I'm sure you're really upset about this." I didn't want to intervene, really. But I was actually the only one on my team who was bothered by such things. And I didn't bring them up too much, didn't say too much.

## **How was a riot normally dispersed?**

Mainly with means for crowd dispersal: teargas, rubber ammo. Also when shooting rubber, one should aim at the legs, not at the center of mass of the body. Always. But at some point we were told: "If you realize you have to use live ammo, go ahead and use it." So of course we first shoot in the air, or at a wall, or at the ground, and there are cases where shots are fired and hit the target either unintentionally or on purpose. But dispersal in general? Mostly teargas. Essentially these guys also don't want to get too close. I do remember that we fired, they were about five meters from us. Suddenly we saw someone come out of a stairwell holding this giant rock and, boom!, he throws it, and that rock hits our vehicle. It's scary, suddenly you don't see a thing. They get close and then you use everything you have and that's it. That was a

riot. A tough one. We had lots of those. It was just the longest, really the hardest. But there were plenty. Stones were thrown at us, shots were aimed at us, I remember that in nearly every mission I was on, every action that lasted till morning, we were shot at.

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35

### **"Desperate shaking"**

**Unit:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

#### **Hebron 2010**

Once there was a stone-throwing incident at Gross Square, so we were alerted and the kid appeared and we were called from HQ, and the lookout instructed us: "Listen, stop where you are, he's right next to you."

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

15 years old. His name was Daoud. We stopped our vehicle, ran out, he was in total shock. We took him to Gross Post, to the Jewish side, and he began to cry, scream, he was just streaming sweat and tears. We had nothing to do with him, suddenly you end up with a crying kid. A second ago he was throwing roof tiles at the army post, and you're dying to beat him to a pulp, and you're alerted out there in that heat. You want to kill him but he's crying. We didn't know what to do, so we put him under watch. Once someone who was with him went wild, did something to him and left. At some point when I was with him I tried to calm him down because he was tied, blindfolded, and crying, tears and sweat streaming out all over. I began to shake him, then the deputy company commander tried. He grabbed him and began to shake him: "Shut up, shut up, enough, cut it out!" Then we took him to the police station at Givat Ha'avot and he continued to cry because the policemen didn't take him in for interrogation. He was so annoying, this was insane. In all that mess, while he was crawling on the floor, the communications man took out his Motorola, his two-way radio and boom! – banged him on the head. Not meaning to be cruel, just hearing that unbearable crying for over two hours.

#### **This happened at the police station?**

Yes.

### **Somewhere on the side?**

No. In the lot with all those police vans... Outside the interrogation room. At some point when I was with him, the communications man photographed me. I didn't want to be in a picture with him, this was a bad situation — you simply don't know what to do with your life. We were terribly confused. There was anger, too, because you see the stones he'd thrown, you know it could be dangerous. Again, you're constantly experiencing bad moments but the people who do them are such, I don't know... The screwed up part is that he was at Givat Ha'avot for a very long time. Whenever someone does something bad, one of the Arabs, you take him to Givat Ha'avot and he disappears from there. He's either taken to some camp or another for 3-4 days, or I don't know. We'd just bring them to the police station and forget about them. After a while they come back. They don't really go anywhere.

### **You said earlier that the deputy company commander shook him, when you were at Gross Square.**

We all did. He drove the commander out of his mind. They were such worms at some point, I remember we hated them, I hated them [Palestinians]. I was such a racist there, too, I was so angry at them for their filth, their misery, the whole fucking situation. You threw a stone, why did you do that? Why did you have to make me bring you here? Don't do it. We were shaking him out of despair, not necessarily because we were violent. I think we even broke out laughing. Now, too, when I think about it, you're so lost there in that situation. We were shaking him, like saying: "Enough already! You're driving us mad!" and kept yelling at him: "Stop it! Stop it!" throwing in some words in Arabic. Any word we knew. All kinds of nonsense like "fine" and "what's your name".

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**36**

### **"Source of pride"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: Lieutenant**

**Bethlehem 2006-2007**

We'd go on two night patrols in the designated area. I was driving and suddenly I see some Arab boy, about 18 years old, with his face mangled, really bad. He had a black eye, his lip was torn, in really bad shape. So I stop, offer him water, and he points

at my jeep and say the license plate number was 06543, so he goes: "No, 0666 hit me." I don't understand what he wants from me and then the other jeep arrives. The sergeant in it says: "See how I handled him?" and the kid was all agitated. He went back to his village. This was at the entrance to his village, he lives in Husan, and that was that. The next day I went and told the deputy company commander about this, and nothing was done about it.

### **The sergeant told you...**

That he beat him up. He thought it was funny. He saw this as a source of pride. He was very proud of this and it seemed like something really cool to do.

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**37**

**"What can you do"**

**Unit: Field Intelligence**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2006**

Once we had to occupy a family home for six days in a row. This was in Nablus. There was a Paratrooper brigade operation there that lasted several days, so while searches and arrest missions were conducted, we had to make sure there weren't armed men. At some point we'd hear explosive charges blasting and occasional gunfire. We entered the home of some shoe storekeeper, it was a pretty large house so we concentrated the family on the same floor. The action lasted for three days. Of course, we were exposed after 12 hours and the whole street knew we were there. At first they crowded downstairs, then kids even came up to throw stones. I remember the officer called up one of the Druze soldiers in the company for him to come and threaten the man in Arabic, warn him to order the kids away, otherwise he'd be harmed.

**Who?**

The house owner. He received warnings on the phone in Arabic, to tell them to go away.

**And did he?**

Yes. It was procedure. That's what they're supposed to do. If we positioned ourselves on the ground and were exposed, we were supposed to bring the person over to

our position, and then call one of the Arabic-speaking soldiers and require him to threaten the man like : "We'll set your house on fire if you let anyone know." The deputy company commander instructed us on this. He also told us about a time this was done.

### **They are with you for three whole days. What do they eat, drink?**

It was a rather large house. There was another storey upstairs where we were, and we put the family downstairs with a guard. They were in their home. The first time, no one came out, and then we folded. Then the officer and I found an alternative spot and went to show it to one of the paratrooper officers. In my opinion it was an ego thing, he didn't like the idea that we had gone on and looked for a place on our own, so he required us to settle in that same house for the rest of the mission. I remember laughing about it later because after we entered the same house the second time, the officer told me the owner raised his hands, and the soldier facing him said: "What can we do..." So we entered for another three days. We let one of the kids come out and go buy food because they had been inside for a long time. Later, we already heard his kids going crazy and breaking stuff. He also talked to us and tried to tell us it wasn't right, he was a working man and it wasn't right that he had to be locked up at home with his kids. We were simply there that whole time.

### **Are there rules of engagement?**

On this mission I don't remember anything of the sort. There was nearly always a line of opening fire, especially when we'd enter abandoned houses, construction sites. Usually that line was drawn at a range of about 300 or 100 meters.

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

Take down anyone visibly armed. Anyone with a Molotov cocktail – take him down, too, even if it hasn't been thrown yet. For the rest, anyone who approaches the force needs to be warned: "Stop!" and if he doesn't heed the warning, to shoot at his legs.

### **You said that at a certain point the kids began to throw stones from that house.**

### **What do you do in such a case?**

We called the Druze soldier. I don't exactly know what he told the owner of the house, but they stopped.

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**"Kazabubu shlaflaf"****Unit: Kfir Brigade****Rank: First Sergeant****Hebron 2005**

Once I was on the company commander's front command group and we were on a patrol. Suddenly a disturbance broke out. Someone threw stones at us and it seemed strange to me later that we could have got out of there and nothing would have happened, I don't know.

It turned into a chase on foot, we ran among the houses, back and forth. Like playing hide-and-seek, only with grenade launchers and stones.

**How long did it last? Whom were you chasing?**

Three quarters of an hour, half an hour, kids 8-12 years old. We caught two.

**What did you do with them?**

We yelled at them... You threaten them, mainly. Some people got beaten, but with them it wasn't beating, more like raising a threatening hand. What can you do with a kid? The whole idea of chasing rioters is weird. Because the system has no means of handling things that happen there, with the law it tries to enforce. The enforcement system doesn't care, and what are you going to do with a kid who just threw stones at you now, and he's 8 or 12 years old.

**Did you ever detain or arrest them?**

We detained adolescents, say 16, 18 years old. You shackle them, blindfold them, put them at the army post's sentry booth and then take them back. Nothing happens to some of them. Some are harassed.

**What kind of harassment?**

It doesn't happen at a post, it happens while driving, say. Once we arrested someone and while driving, in the APC, someone played "Kazabubu Shlaflaf" with him. When I say, "kazabubu," you have to say your name, and when I say, "shlaflaf," you must say your family name. So he began to play the game with him without explaining the rules. He said: "Kazabubu," and hit him on the head. Not too tough, but it was simply humiliating. Less painful than humiliating. He would hit him and some would yell the answer at him, what he was supposed to say: "Say your name!" and the like: "What's your name!?" Shouts like that. Such a game can take about seven minutes...

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39

**"Harassment post"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

The 'Pharmacy' Post (in Hebron) was a real harassment post. One of our guys would catch kids, make them spread their legs against the wall, hit them between their legs with a metal rod and go: "Sing, repeat after me!" "No, no way!" They had to shout the Israeli national anthem after him... And if they didn't sing on beat, they'd get a blow with that rod to their knee. "Exactly as I say it!" on a regular basis. Always. It was a permanent harassment spot. People would be kept locked up inside, old men, and detonators would be thrown in where they were held. Regularly. Just like that. Bullshit. Our battalion was known for these things. The soldiers were already sick of guard duty, so they thought, if I'm going out of my mind, let them go out of their minds, too. You know these things. This nonsense. Listen, you get desperate.

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40

**"Trying to heat up the kids"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2009**

We were lying in ambush on Mount Eval, in Nablus. We were sitting there in a post that is very high up – there was an approach road and no one drove on it except for our patrols and supplies. Once in a while one of our vehicles would be hit by Molotov cocktails up there. After a few such incidents we were told to lay an ambush. It was a Friday. We came out of the post at noon, and sat at some corner so we could see if anyone approached. There was this tiny Palestinian hamlet there, really small, and we sat to watch whether kids came up there and threw Molotov cocktails. If a kid was about to throw a Molotov cocktail, you're allowed to shoot him.

**Shoot to kill?**

Absolutely. That's procedure. The moment you even see the lighter spark. So we are all out there, gung-ho, thinking we are going to shoot a Molotov cocktail thrower, and the trick was for some jeep to be driving up and down, in an attempt to heat up the kids. The jeep goes by and suddenly we see this group of kids coming out. I think they were holding some bag, I don't remember exactly. We had a marksman, one of my buddies, and he's sitting there with his M24 [marksmen's rifle], aiming at one of the kids, and I realize that this story is over, no one is getting killed. He asks the officer if it's okay to release the safety catch. The officer tells him it's fine, and he does, and we're waiting. There's this moment where you're at the edge of your nerves, like: What's going to happen?, and suddenly – boom! – the marksman's rifle let off a shot. We see the kids scatter in all directions, running like hell, and we have no idea what happened because we know he was aiming and we don't know whether the kid was hit or not. We report on the radio, fold up, the platoon commander was grounded or something, and my buddy wasn't really punished.

**Did he hit the kid?**

No...

**You said they were holding a bag. Did they aim at the one holding the bag?**

That's a spot that Molotov cocktails are often thrown from.

**But a Molotov cocktail is a bottle, not a bag.**

But you always have to assume that that's what's in the bag. You get it?

**What ages were these kids?**

Little – 13, 14, 15.

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**"People always exaggerate"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2006-2007**

**Were there cases where a soldier or a commander went overboard, and there was real violence or abuse?**

Always. It's not a normal situation to be in, and 19-year-old kids go overboard. There

were situations in which they really did, and others where they were even too soft with people.

**Do you have examples?**

Yes. Just walking down the street and hitting kids with a stick in the knee so they trip and fall, that's going overboard. Catching children who cross the checkpoint because they didn't understand what they were supposed to do and just walked on – they would just hit them.

**How old were these kids?**

10-year-olds.

**Do you have a specific example?**

Two brothers were walking along the 'Pharmacy' Post, which is a kind of trailer checking post. They just walked through. The metal detector beeped, and the soldiers yelled at them to stop and come back and they didn't hear them, or didn't really want to hear. One of the soldiers there ran, caught a kid, and there's this iron post at the side there.

**Looks like a big oven?**

Exactly.

**It's a kind of protective container.**

Yes. He pushed the kid inside there. Beat him up for five minutes and then let him go.

**A 10-year-old kid.**

Yes. The kid walked away after about 15 minutes. Limping.

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42

**"A kind of routine"**

**Unit: Nahal Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Hebron 2007-2008**

Another episode took place on a patrol in a neighborhood parallel to Harsina neighborhood, north of Givat Ha'avot. We patrolled there and the kids yelled at us. Some of the soldiers, including the officer, were sensitive to this. I argued with them, I told them to just let those kids yell. They said: "No, if they yell now, tomorrow they'll throw stones. If they feel free, they'll do anything they like and end up shooting at

us." Their proof was that someone who was with us on patrol in another part of the neighborhood had a stone thrown at his neck, and the stone thrower disappeared.

**How old were the children?**

9-13 years old.

**What did you do?**

We were five soldiers and a commander. We acted as though we were walking on. The commander called his deputy, telling him to take three soldiers and split up – break to the right and go around the children. The first time didn't work. He told them: "You're such infants, you can't surround them!" He laughed at them. He took someone else and went to surround the kids. At this point, the kids sort of scattered. We tried to provoke them so they'd get closer and we'd be able to detain them. Suddenly, we hear noise coming from the direction we had come from and the commander gets on radio: "Get over here." We go to where he is and find out he'd caught one of those kids whose home was really close by. His father had just gotten home. The father claimed the officer had caught the kid and probably made him fall to the ground and dragged him. The father, a huge guy, scary, began to shout in fairly good Hebrew: "What are you doing taking my kid?" The officer yelled back at him to lower his voice, that's what counted for him. Neighbors came, elderly people, trying to calm things down and explain them to the officer. The father was very worked up and the kid was half crying. The platoon commander, himself not in the greatest shape from the whole ordeal, got annoyed with the father, told one of the elderly guys to shut up, said: "Lower your voice," to another. I tried to help calm things down, too. I spoke with the older man and understood that he'd come to take care of the children. He said he'd tell their parents, beat up his nephew who was there and look to it that everything will work out alright and they'd never do it again. Everyone was so short-tempered. Everyone wanted to show they were in charge of the situation so no one listened to anyone and finally the old man insisted with the officer, spoke to him and somehow made the officer listen to him. This was an attempt to heat things up and what bothered me most of all was that this became a kind of routine out there. If anyone as much as yelled at us, we'd stop and try to surround them. It happened mainly with that officer.

**Is this something that happened repeatedly?**

Yes. Usually it didn't work. In this case it turned into real chaos. A whole chaos with that family because the mother and grandmother both intervened. We'd try to provoke the children, stop cars, inspect people, check IDs of people so that kids

would get closer and we'd surround them. Usually this didn't work, the kids did not react to the provocation.

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43

## **"A kind of fun"**

**Unit: Paratroopers Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Gaza Strip Boundary 2008**

Once every few nights people would try to cross the fence and we stopped them. Usually these were little kids, and the claim was that they were sent by terrorists to check if the fence was crossable.

### **What age are the kids we're talking about?**

12-14, approximately. They simply tried to cross the fence, over to the Israeli side. They claimed they came to work, I don't know. We didn't talk with them much. They would hop over the fence or cross in spots inside the riverbed where there is no fence.

### **What were the instructions?**

Nothing. The lookouts would spot them, the patrol would catch them, tie them up, blindfold them, hands shackled behind their backs, and that was it. They'd be left at the company HQ for a day or so. In certain cases it was longer, two days. I recall it was kind of fun to leave someone there. They were left at the entrance to the mess hall, on the side, in a shady corner. Then the Shabak (General Security Services) would pick them up.

### **What do you mean by 'fun'?**

There was this saying: "We have a detainee." Soldiers wanted to have their picture taken. Usually they were not allowed to do so, but sometimes they did. It was done, but it wasn't actually permitted. As though it didn't happen, but everyone did it. People would video tape themselves, they made clips: "Say 'Advanced Company' is the bomb, come on, say it!" Finally, some action. You're in such routine out there, every day it's the same thing, it's all terrible... you're looking for stuff. Suddenly there was something to talk about...

**They're shackled constantly, the whole day or two?**

Yes. Tied up. Whoever is on duty that day brings them food, water. If they need to go to the bathroom someone would take them. Or for cigarettes. I don't know. There wasn't anyone specific in charge.

**Did the company commander say anything about different treatment for children?**

No. As usual. There were not that many children caught. They were not considered kids, they were "assisting terrorists". They weren't perceived as little kids. That's simply what was said. Only in hindsight, when I'd think about it, I said I don't know what they actually did, probably came to look for work. I don't really know why they tried to cross the fence.

**How often would you arrest kids like that?**

I remember there was always someone around. Almost always.

**Would someone passing by them slap them on the way, or were they well treated?**

There were all sorts of incidents, but the officers were also involved. If they saw someone hitting the kid... I remember a few people went up for trial because they had hit a kid. The intelligence officer saw two soldiers beating one of the detainees. I think they were about 16 years old, if I remember correctly. After that they were tried and were made to stay on the base for the weekend. Something like that.

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**"As soon as you light a Molotov cocktail – you are free game"**

**Unit: Kfir Brigade**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Ramallah 2008**

In Ramallah, a friend of mine was on an ambush – there's the Beit El settlement and above it, the Jilazoun refugee camp. Once a night or two, guys at Jilazoun send out kids who throw a Molotov cocktail in the direction of Beit El. None of them ever really reach Beit El. It was always kids throwing, and for a while we would lay ambushes there, and once in a while a Molotov cocktail would be hurled at one of our forces, and they'd be chased. One of my friends was sitting at Beit El in a sort-of marksman's

post, and a kid came out and threw a Molotov cocktail, and he shot him. The moment they light up the bottle, they're free game.

**Did the kid mean to throw it at the force?**

No, he was the furthest away, he wasn't endangering my friend who shot him with his marksman's rifle.

**And he killed him?**

Yes.

**How old was the kid?**

Young, 16 years old. There was a Molotov cocktail being thrown from Jilazoun to Beit El every night, but not in a way that it even reached the settlement or crossed the fence. They weren't Molotov cocktails being aimed at a person's body or at a vehicle. Nothing. They were stupid kids who felt like protesting.

**Do you remember when this happened?**

July-August 2008. We had lots of X's [Note: Marked on the side of a soldier's rifle, indicating the number of people he's killed] at that time. The battalion loved it. There was an ambush around there where a kid coming up with a Molotov cocktail had his leg blown off. They laid ambush exactly at that spot. Kids came, the soldiers were there, the kids lit a bottle, and they were shot in the leg.

**At what range were they standing, when, you say, they were throwing the bottle towards Beit El?**

A few hundred meters. In an open space between the village and Beit El.

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**"The jeep was rocking"**

**Unit: Reserves**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2005**

We went up to a post between the settlements of Shilo and Eli, on some hill, I don't remember the name. We were briefed to replace the regulars, it was our first day out in the area. We arrived, we had a quarter of an hour briefing about the site and went up to replace them on duty. It was a pillbox post, located between two villages, on a junction in Road 60. We were briefed not to stop vehicles at the junction because

there's no intention to disturb them. We were only supposed to observe from above and make sure that no harm comes to settler cars as they pass. We got there, entered the post, and not even 10 minutes went by before we saw a police jeep coming.

### **Israeli police?**

Yes. They parked the jeep in the middle of the junction, I got up and saw this, went downstairs, and two minutes later we heard shouts: "Help us, army! Soldiers, help us!" All the conscripts went out with three reservists to help them. I went up to observe what was going on and there was this confused kid standing there, and I realized they had caused this tremendous traffic jam, stopping in the middle of the junction without bulletproof vests, without helmets, nothing.

### **The reservists?**

The police. They did just the opposite of what we'd been instructed, in every way. They created a traffic jam, and created a real disturbance. As they called us, they grabbed a father, mother and child, the parents around 50, the kid about 17, 18, and began to hit them, the father and the kid. They fought with them for a few minutes, in the meantime the soldiers arrived, flanked and secured them, and they were really fighting. One of the soldiers, I think, went over to join in. After a moment of hitting, they handcuffed the father on the asphalt. It was summer, very hot, I remember this. The kid was handcuffed as well, and the policeman took the kid with his hands tied behind his back and threw him into the jeep. The father was shackled on the side, and the mother was hanging on to the policeman. He pushed her away and the two went into the jeep, and the jeep was seen 'rocking'. You know, it's no lightweight vehicle. The soldier threw the kid into the jeep head first and he had no way of holding on to anything and then the jeep rocked. Finally they drove away, the father stayed lying on the asphalt, shackled, I don't know who released him. The mother came to the post and began to throw stones. In a few seconds several others arrived but dispersed pretty quickly, it didn't turn into a real riot.

### **Did you manage to talk to the policemen or the soldiers before that? Ask what had happened?**

No, no one understood what went on. They began hitting, I think they just detained people without any kind of intelligence information. They caused a traffic jam, they were there without a computer, empty handed, nothing, a pistol in their belt, and that's all. I went on radio, talked with my superiors – company commander, his deputy, battalion commander, his deputy, and even with the brigade commander – and told them I demanded an inquiry, I wanted to know why they did this. I tried to go through

the official channels to know why, how they could act against all the rules that had been made clear to us an hour earlier. They acted in total disregard of any law. And that was that. No inquiry, nothing.

**Did you try asking after that day?**

Yes. I was told it was being looked into, and that was that. I asked several times. Even after I left my reserves duty...

**Except for you, how did other reservists see this?**

They were less upset. Also, they came to secure them, and throughout the incident they were on guard and missed most of the violence. The beatings. They came, surrounded them, and before they got organized I was above, looking down at the whole thing. I saw it all from above. I don't think this was such an extraordinary incident, but to see with your own eyes how this unfolds in a matter of seconds...

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**"Jeans and a red shirt"**

**Unit: Armored Corps**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Ramallah 2007**

Once we were driving on Road 443, and a frightened [settler] woman stopped us saying stones were thrown at her. The commander immediately turned around – "We're entering the village" — and we went to Lower Beit Ur village, the whole show, storming in on the jeep, the lookout directs us, we arrive at the house, there were 20 children there. "Everyone line up." My commander liked me, but before we got going he said to me: "\*\*\*\*, don't be a wimp here," meaning, don't show any mercy. We get there, face them: "Stand in line! Who threw stones?" Everyone is scared. Five soldiers, with guns, try to catch those two 13-year-olds who threw two stones.

**The woman stops next to you and tells you that stones were thrown at her? The lookouts were on to this?**

No, we saw two children on the road beyond the fence, and later she came and we realized it was them. The lookout said they were identified and that they were on their way back to the village. We didn't know exactly where they were, we got to the house and caught those three kids by their clothes, none of them confessed. We were there

for about 20 minutes, they were lined up in front of the house, we were pointing our guns at them and facing a bunch of trembling kids, who'd be pissing in their pants in a moment, and the commander yells: "Who is it?!" and grabs the oldest one. "Tell me who it is and you won't get in trouble, don't worry, we'll take him and bring him back." We picked up three kids there. The mother was crying, the women were all in tears, the kids were shackled, taken into the jeep, scared. I just try to think what they must have felt, what it's like to be taken in an army jeep. I was sitting in back with one of those kids and the jeep bumps along the road, those roads out there... I took the driver's helmet because he doesn't need it in front, and placed it on the kid's head. The driver turned around, saw the kid with his helmet, and said: "What are you doing?! I can't wear it after this!" I got annoyed, I mean, what? If he wears your helmet then it's filthy? "You'll wash it out for me," he said. What a buddy... When he got to company HQ, first he washed out his helmet in soap and water, and only then put it on his head, because it had been on the kid's head for a few minutes. And this is a guy who votes for the Labour party, claims he is a leftie, but this disgusts him. How has this happened to us?

#### **What happened to the children in the end?**

I think they were brought back two days later. No jail space would be wasted on them.

#### **The kids confessed at some point?**

No, we got a lookout's identification for them, jeans and a red shirt. One of them escaped me when I shackled them, not too tight, so he released himself and ran. He was not chased. We were not sure it was them, and only on Friday night, back from Bil'in, our commander said: "They were it, alright," and everyone applauded. So we weren't sure, we picked up whoever was closest to the description. I thought then that if that's how they're treated, they'll be back two days later, and instead of throwing a stone they'd want to hurl a fire bomb... They should have been given chocolate and a sandwich and a good talking to. Now I know that wouldn't have helped either. Bringing their mother and saying to her: "Your kids can get in trouble," with a smile. This is one of those little incidents that you just take for granted. You choose two who look close to the description, and then you have a soldier washing out his helmet after the kid had it on.

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**"Mortal fear"**

**Unit: Reserves**

**Rank: First Sergeant**

**Nablus 2006**

We were in Ariel where we put up checkpoints without understanding why. In hindsight, several years later, you think: "What incredible things I did there..." You put up a checkpoint out of boredom, sit there for a few hours and then continue on. Once I saw kids passing, and one of the guys, a reservist who spoke Arabic, wanted to ask them what they study. He didn't mean it in any bad way. Then I saw how the kid nearly peed in his pants as the guy tried to kid with him, how the two worlds are simply disconnected. The guy was kidding and the kid was scared to death.

**“Breaking the Silence”** is an organization of Israeli veterans who served during the Second Intifada, beginning in 2000. The organization aims to make public the everyday life routine as it exists in the Occupied Territories, a reality that remains voiceless in the media, and to serve as an alternative information conduit for the public at large about the goings-on in the State of Israel's ‘backyard’. The organization was founded in 2004, and since then has received unique public and media standing, bearing the voice of soldiers who have previously kept silent. Since its inception, over 800 male and female soldiers have given testimony about their experiences in the military. They described the reality of military rule in the Occupied Territories for the past twelve years, as reflected by the soldiers’ point of view.

The main purpose of **“Breaking the Silence”** is to arouse public discussion of the moral price that Israeli society pays for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population and dominate it on a daily basis. Every testimony published by the organization undergoes careful research. This includes verification of the facts and crossing-checking them with other testimonies and archive materials of human rights organizations active on the ground. Our journalistic mode of operation requires the identity of testifiers to remain confidential.

The testimonies published in this booklet have remained in their original formulation, except for dropping any information that might help identify the witness. Certain short notes have been added in parentheses in certain cases, to clarify content and military terminology.

We wish to thank our volunteers and activists who have dedicated their time and energy, enabling this publication. Without their extensive assistance we could not bring such important testimonies to the attention of those who must be made aware of them.