

THE SOUTH HEBRON HILLS

**SOLDIERS
TESTIMONIES
2010-2016**

**[BREAKING
THE SILENCE]**

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TESTIMONIES
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**ISRAELI SOLDIERS TALK ABOUT
THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES**

Introduction

The South Hebron Hills is the southernmost part of the West Bank and includes the Palestinian towns of Yatta, Dura, Dhahiriyah, and the surrounding rural areas. The region includes approximately 122 Palestinian communities which together house close to 70,000 people, as well as roughly 8,500 settlers who live in settlements and unauthorized outposts affiliated with the Mount Hebron Regional Council.* The Palestinian population of the South Hebron Hills is primarily composed of Bedouin, as well as fellahin (farmers or agricultural laborers) cave dwellers, who lead a rural traditional lifestyle, earning their living primarily from agricultural work and sheep herding. Some are refugees who arrived in the West Bank after being expelled from Israel in 1948 and the years that followed, while others are descendants of families who have been living in the area for hundreds of years.

Palestinian residents living in the region suffer not only from poverty and lack of resources, but also from grave and ongoing violations of their most basic human rights. This intolerable daily reality in the South Hebron Hills that Palestinians are forced to live in is created by settlers of the area and the IDF, as well as the State of Israel. Under the Oslo Accords, approximately half the area of the South Hebron Hills is defined as Area C, which are areas of the West Bank fully under direct Israeli civilian and security control. Of the Palestinians in this region, approximately 26,000 live in around 65 communities located entirely within Area C, while another 10,500 live in 16 communities which are at least half within Area C. This means that the State of Israel is responsible for providing and regulating all aspects of civilian life for these Palestinian communities, including local planning, construction, development, infrastructure, and so on.

Despite this, different aspects of the local Palestinian population's life – including its most basic needs, such as access to water, connection to electricity, and the paving of access roads to villages – have been systematically neglected for years, severely impeding its ability to function and develop. Israel's reluctance to fulfill its obligations often results in residents lacking essential infrastructure. As a result, many Palestinian communities are compelled to find alternative solutions to fill their needs, including through receiving aid from local and international humanitarian

organizations. These organizations often offer Palestinian communities solutions that deviate from the State of Israel's institutional planning framework and are therefore often deemed, biasedly and distortedly, illegal, further contributing to the stigmatization of the Palestinian population itself as criminal.

In addition to being systematically neglected, the Palestinian population of the South Hebron Hills also has to endure constant and heavy military presence. Under the Judea Regional Brigade, which controls the entire area of the South Hebron Hills, IDF soldiers and officers conduct daily missions of arrests, 'mappings,' check-posts, 'demonstrations of presence,' and more. All this, along with closures in vast areas of land and the expropriation of roads and land by the IDF, restricts Palestinians' freedom of movement and limits their access to land, water, and grazing areas.

Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to the authority of the Civil Administration, the body responsible for civilian activity in the occupied territories on behalf of the Israeli military rule. This body administers a policy of discrimination and separation between the Palestinian and Israeli populations, including in all matters pertaining to planning and construction. The result is a near total restriction on construction and expansion efforts within Palestinian villages, even in cases where the land is acknowledged by the Civil Administration to be private Palestinian land. Due to this, many Palestinian communities in the South Hebron Hills face the constant threat of home evictions, as well as demolitions of homes, structures for animals, agricultural buildings, and humanitarian structures (clinics, schools, etc.).

Over the years, settlements and unauthorized outposts have been established in the area. Although some are considered illegal even by the State of Israel, the overwhelming majority not only enjoy state-funded infrastructure and connection to water and electricity, but also benefit from constant IDF presence to ensure their security. In addition, settlers enjoy a lenient and forgiving approach on the part of the Civil Administration in all that relates to issuing and implementing demolition orders for their own illegal construction. Settlers are also systematically involved in the local security establishment and in many cases use their roles as civilian security coordinators, or as members of the civilian emergency response teams of settlements, to promote their ideological commitments, at the expense of the Palestinian population. Settlers of the area also exploit the IDF's permissive treatment and the structural segregation which limits soldiers' authority over them. This forgiving attitude benefits the settlers, who make frequent use of violence through

"price tag" attacks, invasion of private Palestinian lands, attacks on shepherds and Palestinian fellahin, and attacks on left-wing activists working in the area. Thus, one of the most striking features of the area is the widening gap between the deplorable living conditions of Palestinian residents and the growing violations of their rights, on one hand, and the high standard of living enjoyed by the settlers and their overabundant and increasingly expanding privilege, on the other.

This booklet compiles 41 testimonies from soldiers who served in the South Hebron Hills during the years 2010-2016 and who were exposed to the realities in the region throughout their military service. Experiences described by combatants in the field, as well as by soldiers who served in the Civil Administration, present a picture that can teach us about the nature of the Israeli rule in this area in particular and in the occupied territories at large. As former soldiers who served in the South Hebron Hills, we believe that in order to end the occupation, we must expose the public to what military rule looks like and to the systematic and institutionalized discrimination between settlers and the Palestinian population, in which we took an active part during our military service.

* Data is taken from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA's) website and from the official website of the Mount Hebron Regional Council.

The South Hebron Hills

- The Green line
- Separation Barrier
- - Road
- ⊗ Checkpoint
- Israeli settlement
- Palestinian community



Be'er Sheva ↙

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01

He really saw himself as like another company commander

Rank: First Sergeant · Place: Otniel · Period: 2016

What annoyed me in [the settlement of] Otniel was the CSC (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense). He really saw himself as like another company commander, he would assign us tasks. [He] would call and say that there's a tractor plowing in an orchard which it wasn't clear who it belongs to, and that he doesn't want it to be there.

I just remember my frustration at the Civilian Security Coordinator who treated us as if we were his soldiers.

A tractor of Palestinians?

Yes. We had to go down there and tell him (the Palestinian farmer) that he isn't allowed to be there, and argue with him, and he tells us it's his orchard. Personally I would always tell him: finish what you have to do and leave. Until one time there was friction. But I just remember my frustration at the CSC who treated us as if we were his soldiers.

Do you remember what your commanders said about the relationship with the CSC?

Like, the differences in authority [between the CSC and the commanders] weren't clear.

As a soldier, when a CSC tells you to do something...

We were told to listen to them.

Were there instances where he really gave you orders?

Yes, orders. To kick out this person (the Palestinian farmer) mostly.

And you did it?

Yes.

Did someone explain to you who the CSC is and what his role in fact is?

No.

They just told you to do what he says?

Yes.

02

We block the road for the whole village

Rank: First sergeant · Unit: Karakal Battalion · Place: Negohot · Period: 2012

Right at the entrance to Beit 'Awwa there is a checkpoint that is open during the week, and on weekends the IDF closes it for a few hours until all the settlers return back to Negohot.

What do you do there, in [the settlement of] Negohot?

Guard the settlers. Standard settlement security. [During] guarding shifts in the settlement, every Palestinian worker who enters to [work in] construction in the settlement – we do a search on him and take his ID. There was this routine procedure that when construction workers come to work, an armed settler stands next to them with the weapon, sometimes aimed [at them] and sometimes not. He came,

stood alert, both hands on the weapon with the M16 facing the workers. There was a settlement which was located on a hill across from Negohot, [the unauthorized outpost of] the Booster. [Sometimes] the settlers leave on Saturday morning, go to pray at the Booster. And then [we would] block the road from [the Palestinian village of] Beit 'Awwa. The way from Negohot to the Booster passes through the road, so the settlers walk on the road. In order for the Palestinians not to come and run them over, we block the road for the whole village, its exit path, and the settlers pass. Right at the entrance to Beit 'Awwa there is a checkpoint that is open during the week, and on weekends the IDF closes it for a few hours until all the settlers return back to Negohot.

When you [first] arrive at the settlement, who does the handover briefing for the area?

The CSC (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense).

And what does he brief you on?

The regular things. That we're under his command, cases of death that occurred in Negohot, and that there are Palestinian communities that are located around Neghot, and "You don't want to see me catching someone doing something that I don't want done."

03

The settlers are your employer, you work for them

Unit: Armored Corps 8, 455 battalion (Reserves) · Period: 2013

There's a direct line [of communication] between the [Israeli] civilian population and the army. You have all sorts of farms (unauthorized outposts) in Susiya or Ma'on. I'm sure they have the phone numbers of the commander on the ground, they have a direct line to him. There was an incident where they (the settlers) headed out toward them (the Palestinians who approached the settlement). That's a demonstration of power. They (the Palestinians) head out, so then they (the

settlers) head out too. And then the army and the police go in as a buffer.

Was the option of arresting or detaining settlers discussed with you?

No. They (the settlers) are your employer, you work for them. That's clearly the way it is, you're the babysitter there. You get a phone call [from a settler] that there's some illegal construction by Palestinians. The settlement (Carmel) has a perimeter fence, and right next to it is a Bedouin camp (the Palestinian village of Um al-Kheir). They build there and everything. Why should I be called to deal with illegal construction? It has nothing to do with me. You walk around

You enter the settlement and then you have a conversation with the Civilian Security Coordinator and he tells you, "The Palestinians are building there and they're not allowed to. I want you to talk to them and tell them that it's illegal what they're doing."

there (in the village), you don't understand what's wrong. You enter the settlement and then you have a conversation with the CSC (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense) and he tells you, "They're (the Palestinians) building there and they're not allowed to. I want you to talk to them and tell them that it's illegal what they're doing." You talk to the Bedouin man and he says to you, "That's right, nothing here is legal, it's all slated for demolition. All the structures here have a court order for demolition. Whatever I do here – will be demolished. I've lived here since 1948, this is where my family lives." He lives in a shack, he built a shack against the law. It's just that it's close to a Jewish settlement, close to the fence, and now this

settlement is expanding [so it's in the way]. When a settlement has a problem with a Palestinian – the army takes care of it. The CSC stands there and watches. He has an open line to wherever he wants. He can even call the brigade commander, and the brigade commander will give an order and a patrol will go and look into it.

Did anyone ever discuss with you illegal construction within the settlement itself?

No. They won't speak to you about what they don't want to.

04

After another minute of awkward silence the company commander said: "Good question, I need to think about it"

Unit: Nahal Reconnaissance Platoon · Place: Mitzpe Yair · Period: 2012

I think if it had been the other way around, it wouldn't have ended that way. If the description had been "two terrorists walking around in Judea and Samaria," the whole world would have been up in arms. Two settlers from Mitzpe Yair – the army gave up after a few hours and passed it on to the police.

Did you happen to be present during incidents of settler violence against Palestinians?

I was at the base and suddenly we received a case of two settlers who left [the unauthorized outpost of] Mitzpe Yair and attacked someone, simply attacked. Their description was provided and our forces began searching for them. Patrols, all the vehicles were called up, we gave the description of the two people who did it to the neighboring forces. There was a moment when they thought they caught them at some bus stop, but it wasn't them. They really tried, and gave up after a few hours, and passed it on to the police.

The Palestinian who was assaulted was badly injured. He was in hospital, had bandages, was admitted. It was a lynch, and the news articles online were really small. I think if it had been the other way around, it wouldn't have ended that way.

If the description had been “two terrorists walking around in Judea and Samaria,” the whole world would have been up in arms. Two settlers from Mitzpe Yair – the army gave up after a few hours and passed it on to the police. Even the following day they couldn’t tell me whether they had been caught or not. [At the debriefing following the incident,] one curious soldier at the table suddenly piped up and said to the company commander, “So now if I see two Arabs lynching a settler, what am I supposed to do?” The company commander’s sharp reply: “Shoot to [kill].” “And if I saw these settlers hitting an elderly man, what am I supposed to do?” The company commander nodded with his mustache and was a little stuck, and mumbled an answer: “It’s clear to me that you have to respond somehow. I don’t know how, but you have to respond.” After another minute of awkward silence, the company commander said: “Good question, I need to think about it.”

Did you have procedures for dealing with settler violence?

No, there wasn’t anything decisive. The settler’s starting point is always better.

05

Quarrel in an olive grove

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit

When we were once on the Otniel [settlement] deployment, there was this quarrel [between settlers and Palestinians] in an olive grove. We came to separate [them], but no more than that.

What is your authority as a soldier dealing with a settler?

Nothing, you’re not allowed to touch them. You can try to separate them with your body (be the buffer between the settlers and the Palestinians), you can detain someone, but you’re not allowed to touch him. He (the settler) really has to adhere [to your instructions] when you tell him to sit down and not move for up to three hours. But in general, when the situation starts to become problematic you have to call the border police or the police, because they’re the only ones authorized to handle the settlers.

Who outlined this for you?

Every day at the base’s daily briefing.

Was it conveyed clearly?

They say, “you’re not allowed to touch, you are allowed to detain.” What is “to detain”? “Find a way to take them aside and ensure they don’t cause problems.” Which is of course bullshit, it can’t happen.

Is that said by the team commander or the company commander?

Company commander or deputy company commander, whoever is giving the base’s daily briefing.

06

A Civilian Security Coordinator who takes the law into his own hands

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration

There was always a mess around the olive harvest, as they (the Palestinians) have to coordinate it with us. We had a specific incident with the CSC of one of the settlements (the Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense). We arrived, after we

There was always a mess around the olive harvest, as the Palestinians have to coordinate it with us. We had a specific instance with the Civilian Security Coordinator of one of the settlements. We arrived, after we coordinated the olive harvest and everything, he came down with the settlement’s civilian emergency response team and drove the Palestinians away.

coordinated [the olive harvest with the Palestinian farmer] and everything, he came down with the settlement’s civilian emergency response team and drove the Palestinians away.

Does he have the authority to do that?

Of course he doesn’t have the authority to do it, it (the olive harvest) had been authorized by the brigade. He has the authority [only] if someone [is] in the SBZ (security buffer zone, a designated area surrounding a settlement from which Palestinians are barred from entering), and even [then] the CSC isn’t supposed to interact with Palestinians, period. He is supposed to defend the settlement’s security. If he sees something, he’s supposed to call the brigade. This CSC was

notorious for taking the law into his own hands. And it was a relatively big story when he drove them away.

And what did the army do in this instance?

We arrived and started arguing with him for a long time, at least an hour.

Is it an argument?

It's not supposed to be an argument, but yes, an argument takes places. An argument in raised voices that "they're allowed to be here," and "it was authorized before," and "it wasn't authorized before." They (the settlers) claim it wasn't, and we claim it was, showing maps. There's a famous big folder of areas of friction, we show them the maps and say that they (the Palestinians) are allowed [to be there].

Is there a process of inquiry for him or anything like that? Because on the face of it, he overstepped his authority.

Let's put it this way, we probably would have been asked for some kind of testimony if proceedings had been undertaken against him. And we weren't asked. The area commander knows the incident, I think he was also present and he also arrived [there]. In this specific case I'm almost positive it was the deputy brigade commander.

CSCs are subordinate to the army. Does the area commander in an instance like this summon the CSC for an inquiry, or sanction him in some way?

He can. I don't recall such an instance.

07

You go in this direction and you go in that direction

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal Reconnaissance Platoon · Place: Mitzpe Yair · Period: 2012

There was this time when we set a sort of ambush at [the unauthorized outpost of] Mitzpe Yair. Sometimes the cameras of the scouts were out of order, so from the outset we went with binoculars and scouted the entire infiltrators' valley (Firing Zone 918, through which Palestinian workers without an entry permit to Israel sometimes pass on their way to work in Israel). In the morning a [Palestinian] shepherd passed by with his herd, and a settler [also] passed by. It didn't lead to anything violent, but the settler started shouting at him that it's not his land and to get out of there, and that he's not allowed to graze his herd there. We arrived,

heard shouting, two [of us] ran over there and saw a settler who claimed that he (the Palestinian) isn't allowed to graze his herd in this area and that we have to kick him out of the area. We told him (the settler) to go away and we told him (the Palestinian) to go away. We didn't check where he (the Palestinian) is allowed [to graze his herd], where he's not allowed [to graze his herd], ultimately soldiers want peace and quiet.

Is there a proper procedure where you ask the police, the [Civil Administration]?

The moment we managed to resolve it like that at our level, "You go in this direction and you go in that direction," we didn't move it up [to a higher authority].

08

Two hundred cut-down olive trees

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal · 50th Battalion · Place: Carmel · Period: 2012

In the evening hours we got a report from the police station at Giv'at Ha'avot in Hebron about a "price tag" attack (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds, on a number of occasions including murder) that occurred near [the settlement of] Carmel. We arrived at the place with a sort of indifference. We were the first to arrive, there was a Palestinian family there: a father aged around... between fifty and sixty, a mother and two daughters, and something like 200 cut-down olive trees from their orchard next to Carmel. There was also "price tag" graffiti, "Death to the Arabs," sprayed on the ground. We weren't very successful in getting the older Palestinian man to talk because he spoke in Arabic, so we waited for trackers to arrive (in many cases trackers in the IDF are Arabic-speaking Bedouins). When the trackers arrived they found some kind of tracks, said they would look for them in the morning, and ultimately dropped it. The feeling is that we were there in order to save the police officers work the next morning from counter-riots that would come from the village. We were there for about three, four hours to calm things down.

When you left the area, did the trackers try to continue to pursue the tracks of whoever did this?

No. The trackers were there for half an hour, we were the first [to arrive] and the last to leave the place, and there wasn't anything special [being done].

* After the case was closed on grounds of an "unknown felon", the Palestinian landowner was awarded partial compensation by the state of Israel under exceptional circumstances for the damage caused as a result of a crime committed on nationalistic grounds.

09

Ultimately you're there for them

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal · 50th Battalion · Period: 2010

There was a terror attack in [the settlement of] Beit Hagai (the testifier is referring to a shooting attack near Hebron in which four Beit Hagai settlers were murdered), and then there was about a week where everyone was away from the base in loads of posts, [because] after the attack loads of these "Noar Gva'ot" ("Hilltop Youth", an extremist settler youth group known for often setting up unauthorized outposts, carrying out violent acts, and breaking the law) just headed out and ran to the [Palestinian] villages. Most of us were called up to that area, to the area of the road (Route 60) where it happened.

You're in the Storm (off-road military jeep), you know there has been a terror attack, what are you supposed to do?

Loads of Jews (settlers) simply filled the roads, and there were teens who ran to the Arab villages. I saw them running. We had to be on the road heading to Jerusalem, and we had to stop Palestinians' cars and tell them to turn back because there are people (settlers) who are throwing stones at Arabs' cars.

So you were actually standing still?

Yes. Actually like stopping cars with our hands.

Loads of Jews simply filled the roads, and there were teens who ran to Arab villages. I saw them running. We had to be on the road heading to Jerusalem, and we had to stop Palestinians' cars and tell them to turn back because there are settlers who are throwing stones at Arabs' cars.

How long did the whole incident last?

It lasted a few hours, around three, four hours. But then we were on call the entire week. It started because they (the settlers) actually hit the cars.

As a soldier serving in Hebron, what authority do you have over the settlers? Over Israeli citizens?

As far as what we were taught, they're supposed to cooperate with you. And it's not exactly a police force, but ultimately you're there for them.

Who's "them"?

The Jews (the settlers).

But if you happen to come across an incident of a riot or a law being broken by Israelis (settlers), such as people who throw stones on cars, what is your authority?

I think I can maybe catch them or remove them. I think it wasn't our responsibility, we didn't have that power.

10**They said it can't go on like this and it's temporary**

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration · Place: a-Tuwani

Khirbet a-Tuwani is a Palestinian village located in area C (areas in the West Bank under full Israeli civilian and security control). The route to the school where the children of the village study is close to a Jewish settlement called Havat Ma'on. Following many historical instances in the past in which settlers attacked the children on their way to school, it was decided that a military jeep, a military force, would escort the children every day on their way to school and back from school. And this has been going on for years. The body that is responsible for coordinating this is the Hebron DCO (District Coordination Office, the Israeli Civil Administration's offices operating in the oPt). The people in Khirbet a-Tuwani have his phone number (the Hebron DCO officer's) and they're supposed to meet the jeep every day at a certain time. Now, the amount of phone calls we would get at the DCO about the jeep being late, not arriving... Now, it's children who are waiting, they don't call us when [the jeep] is late by five minutes, they call us when it's half an hour late, "Twenty kids were late for school." It's a reality that can't... I'm sure

in the first months [of this arrangement] they also said it can't go on like this and it's temporary, but it's been going on as far as I know for ten years, eight years.* It doesn't work smoothly, there are delays all the time. The force is late, or the force forgot and didn't show up, or the company commander decided he has too many tasks and he decided to skip this task. This happens a lot with reservists.

And then what happens?

[The Palestinians] call the DCO or the brigade, and the brigade pass [it on] to the company commander and he sends a force there. Often it takes a really long time, all these things.

* The escorting of school kids by soldiers from the village of Tuba to the school located in the village of a-Tuwani has been ongoing since 2004.

Following many historical instances in the past in which settlers attacked the children on their way to school, it was decided that a military jeep, a military force, would escort the children every day on their way to school and back from school. And this is going on for years.

11

We patrol all night because there's no fence, because they don't believe in having a fence

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Artillery Corps 405 · Place: Nagohot

The Booster Hill is an illegal hill, it's an illegal outpost: a few trailers of families plus a soldiers' guarding trailer. It was established around fifteen years ago. It's very small. And [the nearby settlement of] Negohot is surrounded by Arab villages. What they (the Negohot settlers) did – that's what they say when they tell it – they wanted to show the Arabs that it's theirs, so the Arabs don't hold their heads up – that's their language – so they just built an outpost. The Booster Hill sits above an Arab village.

What goes on there?

A platoon of soldiers guards there all year round, which doesn't prevent the people

When there were holidays, the outpost emptied. Meaning, I guarded their equipment. Everyone left, dispersed to their families, and we would be the guards of the equipment of the settlers who live there.

who live there from being there or not being there. I mean, it's guarded regardless. Whether they're there or not there – it's guarded. There is no fence surrounding it. They claim they don't need a fence, the soldiers protect them. So we patrol all night because there's no fence, because they don't believe in [having] a fence.

When you were there, were there people around?

There were people there because I was guarding throughout an entire week,

including during holidays. When there were holidays, the outpost emptied. Meaning, I guarded their equipment. Everyone left, dispersed to their families, and we would be the guards of the equipment of the settlers who live there. They have a very small synagogue there and they don't have a minyan (the quorum for Jewish prayer), and they're religious people, so on holidays as well as on Fridays and Saturdays they need to complete a minyan. Now, they can't drive [on the Sabbath or during religious holidays], so they have to walk to Negohot, which is located 500 meters [from there], to complete a minyan. So in order to protect their lives, we block all the Arab villages, all their roads, for something like half an hour, and wait for them to finish praying. And then they return. Every time they want to make some kind of move, we block all the villages in the area.

What other movement apart from prayers?

Prayers are the main thing. Ultimately every time they ask the soldiers to block the roads because they want to go [to Negohot], then the soldiers do as they're asked.

Give me a concrete example.

They were at a Simhat Torah prayer. There were a few prayers during the day, [and] each time the villages were blocked – three, four times during that day I think. Each time you would see huge traffic jams in all the Arab villages. [Sometimes] they (the settlers) want to go from Negohot to the outpost in order to complete a minyan for one another. They won't plan it to make the Arabs' lives easier. So they go, come back, go, come back, they visit the people, and the Arabs – let them wait, let them stand there.

12

Babysitter for sheep

Rank: Sergeant First Class · Unit: Armored Corps 8, 455th battalion (Reserves) ·

Place: Avigayil · Period: 2013

I'm trying to understand if in briefings, on the procedural level, if anything was said about what to do if settlers cut down an olive tree, if you are standing next to [Palestinian] shepherds who are fighting [with settlers] – forget who's attacking whom – if there's some kind of procedure.

I don't recall there being a procedure. As far as I know, when there's a problem with a Palestinian, usually it's to be dealt with by the army, within the military framework. [But] a soldier can't deal with a settler. I mean, if there's some sort of problem with a settler then [it's] either to be dealt with by the police, or the border police arrive or something like that. Dealing with settlers is in the civilian framework and dealing with Palestinians is a military matter.

Is that an unwritten rule?

It's an unwritten rule. [Because] what can you do to a settler if you catch him cutting down olive trees? Theoretically you could arrest him. But that's theoretical, it stays in theory. You [obviously] discover these things ("price tag" attacks, acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds, on a number of occasions including murder) only after the fact, and then there's usually some kind of police intervention. But things don't work [like that in practice], it (soldiers' authority in dealing with settlers) isn't equal.

Do you remember incidents that you happened to be called up to?

Let's put it this way, most of the things you deal with in the day-to-day, not the special occasions, is mostly phone calls from all sorts of settlements' security guys (Civilian Security Coordinators, settlers in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense) [reporting] that someone (a Palestinian) is standing next to a bus station. These things often take up most of your day. There are also many times when you do 'route reinforcement,' you arrive to check (to carry out security checks) on all sorts of people. You kind of... look, there are interesting things, but it's a kind of system that constantly manages you from one place to another, you constantly take care of some small issue in some settlement. For example, there's a place called Mitzpe Avigayil. The settlement is built in a circular shape. Now, there's a security buffer, in my estimation, of something

To me it seems ridiculous that a reserve soldier arrives in order to film sheep eating grass with his iPhone. And it's absurd, it's not something that really should be part of your job.

like a hundred meters. One hundred meters around the settlement is a sort of security buffer zone. But this area is full of Palestinians, full of shepherds that these are their grazing lands. Those people from the settlement can call you and tell you that there are shepherds here, and you need to respond to this call [and go there to remove the shepherds]. Now, what [is wrong with this picture]? You look at the map and you

see that, say, his sheep can't eat hay that's a meter into the security buffer. And what do you do? You're a sort of babysitter for sheep, [making sure that] they don't pass through. Now, it's not just you. On many occasions another jeep arrives. In other words, there can be a situation where eight soldiers and that shepherd – who is usually accompanied by two, three European activists with cameras – are standing [there]. Now, on every force – in our case it was four people – one soldier is designated cameraman. Today everyone is [walking around] with iPhones or smartphones, so say you have this kind of situation, then three soldiers are handling the shepherd, and one soldier with his iPhone is documenting the whole incident, so in case there is some kind of allegation from the other side – you can present an opposing viewpoint. Now, to me it seems ridiculous that a reserve soldier arrives in order to film sheep eating grass with his iPhone. And it's absurd, it's not something that really should be part of your job. Now, what [is wrong with this picture]? You get a phone call from that hill (Avigayil), and you just have to stand there and have this [conversation] with them (the Palestinian shepherds): No, you can't stand here. And he tells you: It's the sheep who walk around. He's also playing stupid. Like, all the sides are stupid and you have soldiers with weapons in the middle, who really are a kind of threatening force, and that's how it continues.

And the settlers come out?

The settlers hardly come out because they don't need to. They pick up the phone to [call] the army, and the army handles it for them.

13

Dealing with left-wing organizations was like dealing with the enemy

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Judea Regional Brigade

During my [army] service, our dealing with left-wing organizations was like dealing with the enemy. I'll give a few examples. Every week on Saturday they would hold demonstrations. The left-wing activists would often call it not "demonstrations" but "going to work on Palestinian land," but always on land that is relatively disputed. Usually [this is] led by Ta'ayush (a collective of Israeli-Palestinian activists working against the occupation). In our area we took the left-wing organizations very seriously. We collected intelligence on left-wing organizations, on protest leaders. Three main targets in our area were Ezra Nawi, Issa Amro and Nasser Nawaja (well-known Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists operating in the Hebron area). Three main targets, and we collect intelligence on them in order to know when a demonstration is organized. There is no freedom to protest in the territories.

What do you mean by collecting intelligence?

Every Saturday [there is] what we call a "leftist operations order", which wouldn't fall short of any other operations order (orders given in a briefing ahead of an operation). Six-thirty in the morning, every Saturday – I'm sure it's the same to this day – regular police, border police, DCO (District Coordination Office, Israeli Civil Administration's offices operating in the oPt), the relevant battalion, brigade – everyone meets at the operations order. [They talk about] what to do, situations and responses, and prepare for it as if it's an enemy. The main tool with which we dealt with this was issuing closed military zone orders. The brigade commander (Judea regional brigade commander) has ultimate control [of the area], and he has

Every Saturday there is what we call a "leftist operations order", which wouldn't fall short of any other operations order. Six-thirty in the morning, every Saturday – I'm sure it's the same to this day – regular police, border police, DCO, the relevant battalion, brigade – everyone meets at the operations order. They talk about what to do, situations and responses, and prepare for it as if it's an enemy.

the authority to issue a closed military zone [order] and prevent any assembly. Often they (the left-wing activists) are allowed to be there, there's no reason [to prevent them from being there], it's area C (areas in the West Bank under full Israeli civilian and security control which Israelis are allowed to enter). Little by little we became more sophisticated: [the left-wing activists] were always arriving at a number of locations, and the area commander would sign like twenty orders beforehand each time, and we would get there and pull out the relevant order. A closed military zone [order] must have a clear cause for closure, you can't close the area, [you can't] just send a signature of the area's military commander. [But] that's how we would do it. We would get there, sign, declare [it a] "closed military zone" – [in] Arabic, Hebrew, English – and within ten minutes arrest everyone, while we know who the main activist is. Usually it's Ezra Nawi or Nasser Nawaja, and we'd go straight for them because they're the ones operating [the escorting of the shepherds], and immediately arrest [the main activist], no matter where he is, and throw him somewhere. In short, rather than dealing with terror, they (the soldiers) would deal with left-wing activists. Every weekend it would start all over again.

14

Suppress the desire of the left-wing activists to come

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration · Place: Mitzpe Yair

On Saturday mornings there are friction incidents with all the left-wing activists, there are demonstrations on Saturday mornings (the testifier is referring to the escorting of Palestinian farmers by Israeli and international left-wing activists). The "Saturday morning folder" is meant to clarify things for the forces.* Before a force arrives [in the area] it is given a verbal explanation and physically shown the areas. In case of a friction incident [between settlers and Palestinian farmers], it (the force) has the map, so it knows who is allowed and who isn't allowed [to enter the marked area].

Was there an attempt to dissuade the left-wing activists from coming to the area?

Yes. It manifests [in that] when the location of their cars is known, the police suddenly erects roadblocks. Suddenly I would hear that the police is arresting

someone who didn't have an ID. I understood there were also restricted access orders that cover the whole area.**

Was there a blacklist of activists?

The forces would know the problematic [individuals] on both sides. They know who the key figures are and know how to handle this kind of incident. The forces knew what each one looked like and who was problematic, and knew in friction incidents to separate [between] the brawlers (the problematic individuals on both sides).

The residents of [the unauthorized outpost of] Mitzpe Yair have a copy of the folder?

Right. And we confiscated [from them] one of the books (folders) that we saw. Could I tell you that they didn't get it [back] later? I assume they did, [the army] doesn't want to get to an incident of the kind that happened at [the unauthorized outpost of] Esh Kodesh, where masked [settlers] arrive and start hitting [people]. Could I tell you that the army and police later bring these rioters to justice? I don't think so, because the reality on the ground suggests otherwise. But maybe the goal of the army is to suppress the desire of the left-wing activists to come, that's another possibility.

* The "Saturday morning folder" is a folder that contains maps designating the areas close to Israeli settlements in the area of the South Hebron Hills that are restricted for Palestinian residents and/or Israeli citizens; a listing of the ownership and legal status of different lands; and instructions for the military forces about how to conduct themselves when facing Israeli and Palestinian left-wing activists.

** A "restricted access order" is an order which applies to a restricted place or area and grants the commander on the ground the authority to decide who is allowed to enter it.

15

There's no doubt that we worked for the settlers

Rank: Captain · Period: 2010

On Saturdays leftists arrive regularly. There were areas which are disputed between [Palestinian] shepherds and settlers. They (left-wing activists) joined the shepherd who entered a disputed area that is actually his, and they confronted the settlers. The soldiers would arrive and ask them to leave, escorting them a little,

We kicked everyone out, and obviously in the case of the settlers – it meant kicking them out with a wink. We know them and they know us. There was a sense that we were with the settlers against the leftists. There was the sense that we're together with the settlers and the leftists came to cause trouble.

and almost always would issue a closed military zone order. We would do a "leftist operations order" (orders given in a briefing prior to an operation) before every event. You plan where they will come from and what to do. It's an event, and you're the army, and you have to prepare for it. We would arrive together with the battalion commander, and the battalion commander had to issue a closed military zone [order].

Isn't that at the level of a brigade commander?

Exactly, only the brigade commander can issue [it]. His signature 'changes' on a regular basis, and I remember the battalion commander stepping aside

every time – sometimes it was an operations officer, sometimes it was one of the company commanders – and signing the name of the brigade commander on the document. It (the form) says "brigade commander signature," and he (the battalion commander) signs.

Does the brigade commander know about this?

The brigade commander knows, of course. It was a general authorization.

Are you describing an unusual incident?

Not at all.

Why does it bother the army? If it's Palestinian land, then Israelis who join the Palestinian shepherds are allowed to be there.

Because it doesn't end there, it ends in mutual violence.

Is this the same treatment the settlers receive?

No, of course not. Settlers are not treated this way, as most of the officers are settlers. The company commanders were religious. There's no doubt that we worked for the settlers. In this conflict we took the settlers' side. At the briefing [prior to the event] settler representatives attended too.

It's Saturday morning, you sit down and discuss which areas they will likely go to. Saturday afternoon, leftists and Palestinians are walking within an area.

What did you do?

We kicked everyone out, and obviously in the case of the settlers – it meant

kicking them out with a wink. We know them and they know us. There was a sense that we were with the settlers against the leftists. There was the sense that we're together with the settlers and the leftists came to cause trouble.

16

We're here and we are the ones calling the shots

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2012

In [missions of] 'making your presence felt' you feel that you're caught in power plays of "We're here and we are the ones calling the shots," whether it's being spiteful or whether it's throwing a stun grenade in the middle of the street for no reason. And when you're a soldier in a company you really want to throw a grenade and take part and... When you're in the occupation it seems all in all reasonable, because you're looking at it from a very narrow point of view.

Why does it seem reasonable to you?

Because that is what you're directed toward throughout your service – to succeed in [your] missions. They also tell you, "There are the settlements here, they must be defended, the [Palestinian] population is the enemy, order and control must be maintained." And whether you like it or not, [the way] to maintain order and control is by using aggressiveness and violence. There isn't another way of doing it to a population that isn't interested at all in your control.

As a soldier, a nineteen-year-old child, how do you understand that these are the things that you need to do?

I came from a family of, like, the classic Zionist left, who knows that what's happening in the [occupied] territories is not right but excuses it through all sorts of intellectual acrobatics of "If I refuse orders then everyone will refuse orders when settlements are evacuated." So you do need a hierarchy, and you convince yourself that you have to be humble and accept orders.

17

So that they know who's in charge here

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2012

In [the area of] Hebron, it's like the general atmosphere there... In general, there's an aim to create deterrence and make [the Palestinians] feel that you're the boss. That's a term that comes up a lot – "who is the boss." So that they know who's in charge here. It would be manifested, say, when we would drive to make arrests or 'summons' (handing out summons for Shin Bet Security Service questioning) in the middle of a village, then all the way [there] we would be quiet, and all the way back they just opened the door of the Wolf (armored transport vehicle) – I called it 'operation thunderbolt' – you simply throw stun grenades randomly in the streets on your way out of the village, so they know that the army was there.

Do you get this procedure as instructions from someone, that that's what you have to do?

It came from the company commander. Very clear instructions: to throw [stun grenades] into the street until we leave the village. I don't know how to explain it.

Did he explain it like that? So that they know who the boss is?

Yes, very much so. Very simple words. It's always the same thing: so they know who the boss is, so they know who's in charge here, so they know we're here and hear us, and know that the army is here. Like, with the idea of preventing anyone who wants to carry out a terror attack from initiating anything, because he knows the army is a presence in the area.

18

It's unfair to wake them up in the middle of the night, but on the other hand they're not paragons of virtue

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2012

There were days when they (the Palestinians) kind of lost it in [the villages of] Tarqumya and Idhna. We would catch many suspicious things at the checkpoints, stones were thrown at us endlessly, and [the commanders] wanted to make our

presence felt. So there was 'presence demonstration' in Tarqumya and Idhna – entering [the village] in the middle of the night and throwing loads of stun grenades. [You] enter in the middle of the night to make your presence felt, throw stun grenades, make some "booms", some car alarms go off. Open the window, throw a bit behind the car, throw on the road, drive off. That's it, no harm done.

How long does such a round last?

Half an hour. In and out. One vehicle – a patrol, front command squad, sometimes both together. And it usually wasn't for this purpose [only]. Do you know what 'summons' are? Its pre-arrest. You give him (the Palestinian) a letter, "You're coming, Muhammad, take this! Come for an interrogation with the Shin Bet [Security Service] captain." Summons are also very quick. [You] come, hand over the letter, leave. On the way out [you throw] a bit of stun grenades. I don't think anyone was really hurt by that too much. It's unfair to wake them up in the middle of the night, [but] on the other hand they're not paragons of virtue. Not everyone at least.

19

Our entire goal is to make our presence felt on the ground

Rank: Sergeant First Class · Unit: Armored Corps 8, 455th battalion (Reserves) · Period: 2013

When we were in [the] Susiya [deployment], our tasks were divided mostly between guarding our post, holding patrols, holding a front command squad, a Civilian Emergency Response Team, guarding in the [regional] brigade, and holding a pillbox (a small, concrete, cylindrical post used for guarding and observation) near [the settlement of] Carmel. Our entire goal is to make our presence felt on the ground. This concept, "making our presence felt on the ground," is repeated again and again and again. What does a patrol do? Drives around. There's nowhere much to go, so you drive around a bit in the larger settlements, Susiya and Carmel, and you drive around in outposts such as Avigayil. An outpost is [made up of] between ten and fifteen trailers, generally arranged in a circle, with some sort of guard post at the center. They have no fence that protects them. I almost admire their courage to live on the mountain in the middle of the [occupied] territories. And a patrol [team] goes, sits down, has some coffee and goes on to the next location. Your goal at the end of the day is to make your presence felt on the ground. In between you

have scouts who locate people (Palestinians) who have accidentally decided to stop somewhere. Usually it's romantic couples or people whose cars broke down. And then you stop him, take his ID, chew his ear off a little, ask him unnecessary questions. It's quite a submissive population, doesn't really cause any trouble. It also depends on the commander. Some are okay, take [the person's] ID, hello hello and bye, and there are others who will now go to town. In order not to spend your [entire] time moving from one coffee break to the next, they (the commanders) give you initiated activities, "Set up a checkpoint every two to three hours, just anywhere, and stop them (the Palestinians), make your presence felt." Returning to the term "making your presence felt." For example, once I was with some commander, we stationed ourselves on a relatively central route, started stopping cars, causing a traffic jam at six in the evening, when everyone is returning from work. [We say to] each person: "Get out of the car, put the keys on the roof, pull your shirt up, turn around, pick up the cuffs of your pants, take the stuff out of the car." Started driving people crazy. And little kids who are crying, all the disgusting aspects of dealing with a [civilian] population. And all of that to make our presence felt.

20

Upping the deterrence toward the Palestinians

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 931st Battalion · Period: 2013

What is the purpose of the pillboxes (small, concrete, cylindrical posts used for guarding and observation)?

Securing routes against stone-throwers or any HA (Hostile Activity, a military term literally referring to armed resistance but used to describe any Palestinian unrest), and creating a sense of security for the Israeli commuters driving on these roads, and on the other hand upping the deterrence toward the Palestinians.

And how is this done?

You have to carry out initiated activities from the pillbox at random times, which usually include of course a checkpoint on a road. All the pillboxes are located on routes.

What is actually the purpose of these flying checkpoints?

To deter. To make the [Palestinian] population feel that there's someone who's checking on them, and that it's impossible to move freely or transfer things freely without knowing that there's a chance you'll be stopped, that you'll be obstructed on the way.

How do you know that this is the purpose?

Because there are very few instances where you're told, "I need this vehicle," "I need this person," or "Find [people in] these ages." Broadly, you're told, "Do a flying checkpoint at a random time, check the vehicles randomly." There aren't any specific guidelines saying, "Do this and this to this [person] and this [person]."

What can the range of the security check be?

It's [anywhere] from looking at the ID and saying to him good day, to moving the car aside and getting all the passengers out and 'stripping' the car.

When you look at someone's ID, what do you learn from it?

Nothing, it's all a show. There is nothing for you [to check]. The ID check is part of the message conveyed to the population that they're not completely free. That is, that there's someone who is monitoring [them].

And when you say "stripping the vehicle completely," what do you mean?

[To search] under the seats, to pull out the carpet, to take out the cover from over the spare wheel in the trunk.

What makes you for one vehicle check IDs [only] and in another really do a thorough search?

It's a combination of randomness and who is standing in front of you. That is, [if it's] an older person – then probably... Obviously it depends on the soldier and depends on the commander, but somehow they'll go easy on him. And the younger guys will obviously have their cars checked more. But it's random.

How long do you have to hold the flying checkpoint? Is there a set length of time?

This also had to be random, so that there won't be any order in your operations, both in the timing and in the duration.

Is consideration of the hurt to the civilian Palestinian population a matter that's taken into account?

The ID check is part of the message conveyed to the population that they're not completely free. That is, that there's someone who is monitoring them.

I don't recall these things being addressed.

Do you do flying checkpoints at night too?

Yes. That's part of the deal.

21

Collective revenge against the Palestinians

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Armored Corps, 188th Brigade · Place: Tarqumya · Period: 2014

In 'Brother's Keeper' (a military operation that began in June 2014 in the West Bank following the abduction and murder of Gilad Sha'er, Naftali Fraenkel and Eyal Yifrah in Gush Etzion) we were once called up, it wasn't clear why. A rumor starts spreading on WhatsApp that the bodies of the teens had been found. It had started getting dark already and we were sent to Matag 83 (one of the checkpoints in the Tarqumya area) and were told to block [the way], nothing is to enter. I'm blocking the way to the quarry where Palestinians actually have a reason to pass through as a shortcut. In retrospect it seemed to me like collective revenge against the Palestinians. At some point a group of pedestrians [arrives] and asks us to let them through. We tell them we can't. It was during the period of Ramadan and they tell us that they want to eat, haven't eaten all day. We didn't let them pass. Later we were moved into one of the villages, I think it was Tarqumya. We were already really on the outskirts of the village and we were blocking the entrance and the exit, we were not allowing pedestrians or cars to go through. As some stage a power shovel arrived, placed two concrete blocks that blocked the road. Now pedestrians could pass [through] there, but cars still can't thanks to the concrete blocks. I have no idea why we did this, like, what the goal was, and I also don't know how long the concrete blocks stood there. A few days I think.

How did the Palestinians take it? I mean, that they come home hungry and you block their way?

[They] argue, but not too much. Because what, if they do – we'll allow them [to pass]? At the end of the day we're the ones with the guns. There's no room for doubt here. They know very well that if they try to enter we'll chase after them and we'll catch them.

22

It was revenge

Rank: Captain · Period: 2010

There was a terror attack in our area, a few police officers were injured in the area of [the settlement of] Beit Hagai. And that shook our sleepy area. A few hours after it happened we were running around like ants in the [Palestinian] villages, to show our presence. There was a feeling of hysteria, and the brigade commander and the battalion commander wanted all forces to go out on the ground, before a calculation was made about what needs to be done. We got [assigned] the villages closest to the incident. Everyone enters the villages without a plan, without anything, and for starters stand in central intersections in the villages. It was the deputy battalion commander's order. The idea is to arrest the person who had carried out the terror attack, but the real idea behind it [is], "We're very angry and you're going to see that we're here." [We] enter, supposedly everything was allowed. You're allowed to enter [a house] in the middle of the day, you enter a house on your own accord, do a 'mapping' (a mission in which soldiers enter a Palestinian home in order to map its interior and make a record of its residents) and leave.

You go in with ammunition, shots in the air?

Of course you go in with ammunition, as well as stuns (stun grenades). We didn't shoot live [fire] but [we had a] bullet in the barrel. You enter Dhahiriyah, Yatta (Palestinian towns in South Hebron Hills) to show that "You may have wounded our police officers, but we're not afraid." You always have to show that you're present, that you're the king of the area. On that night there wasn't a drop of intelligence, and it was driving everyone crazy. The tracks of the terrorists reached the area of Dhahiriyah or Dura. There was no intelligence, it was tracks that led to a village of 7,000-9,000 people. Eventually they caught the terrorist who did it, he wasn't even from there. On that night they told us to prepare for an operation. We had to make some mess in the village we were sitting on (operating in). "Make some mess" didn't include only driving and making noise, but we had to choose a few houses for "widows" ('straw widow', a temporary army post set up inside a Palestinian home in order to carry out an ambush or create a lookout) and houses for mappings. It was revenge. Operationally, it was the dumbest thing I ever heard in my life. There were a few [military] vehicles that drove around making noise,

Everyone enters the villages without a plan, without anything, and for starters stand in central intersections in the villages. It was the deputy battalion commander's order. The idea is to arrest the person who had carried out the terror attack, but the real idea behind it is, "We're very angry and you're going to see that we're here."

there were observation posts around, there were a few houses that we took over. We entered people's homes at night, took them out of the house, mapped [it]. When you take them out of the house you write down how many rooms there are, and the combat interrogator asks him (the father of the family) also how many people [live in the house], which family, who lives here. The ones who had cameras had to take photos of the house, but there were very few cameras. At the end of the operation we gathered everything. The regional brigade didn't want to receive it, they weren't interested in the mappings we supposedly did. Threw it away.

Did you return to those villages in the following weeks?

We returned in the same manner. It decreased, but it happened every day, and we never received intelligence. Inside the village at night there was never resistance. When we [entered] during the day they would throw stuff at us, but [at night] there was never any resistance in the village, they accepted it. Just like we are indifferent to their humanity, they were also indifferent to their own humanity. [We] don't treat them like human beings, just don't treat them like human beings.

23

There was a terror attack and now it is payback time

Rank: First sergeant · Unit: Nahal, 932nd Battalion · Period: 2014

Describe a search you conducted, from the first moment of stepping out of the Wolf (an armored vehicle used to transport soldiers) at the entrance to a house until returning to the Wolf.

You get out of the Wolf, you split into groups, there's a dog that goes with you, you enter [the house]. Weapons searches usually have dogs. [But] 'weapons search' is

a really broad term. If you feel like entering a village and turning it upside down – just say that you're searching for weapons, what do you care? You go into houses, open closets, take [things] out.

What do you do with the family?

"Come sit in the living room." And then you go and mess up closets a bit, under the beds, open boxes, look for weapons.

Is there a family member joining in the search?

No.

How deep do you search?

Not very deep. You mostly open closets, kind of take things out, open boxes, open drawers, things like that. Just [like] if you searched for weapons in my room right now – the same places you would look. Open my closet, lift the bed, open all the drawers, things like that.

Did anyone ever train you to search for weapons or conduct a search in a house? You do it based on what seems logical to you, right?

Right.

You just do it based on your own understanding?

Yes. That's it, you've left the house, "Thanks, goodbye." All their sheets are on the floor now, and you move on to the next house. Just like that.

How many houses do you go through in this kind of search operation?

There are really deep searches where you can go through five, six, seven houses. There was a terror attack during Passover of officer Mizrahi (a terror attack in which Chief Superintendent Baruch Mizrahi was murdered near the Palestinian village of Idhna). It was in our area. And then, oh man, as soon as there was a terror attack – weapons searches in every village.

In Bani Na'im, Beit Kahil, those ones?

Yes. And then you enter for a good few hours, "There was a terror attack – we're going to turn your houses upside down." No one expects to find any weapons in some house in Bani Na'im.

Why do you say that?

Because that's how it is. Like, it's a kind of revenge after all. It's like, "You've carried out a terror attack, now you're going to pay for it." Simple as that. There are going to be arrests, there are going to be searches.

Why do you say that?

It's simply that I, as a soldier on the ground... you realize that many things you do – there is no rationale behind them. Like, no one expects to find fucking weapons in

'Weapons search' is a really broad term. If you feel like entering a village and turning it upside down – just say that you're searching for weapons, what do you care?

this house or in that house. And the chance that you're going to find a gun or I don't know – what could you find? A cash-filled suitcase with hand grenades in the pantry of some Palestinian woman? – is very, very small. And for that you now have to turn an entire village upside down for hours on end? No. Why do you do it? You do it because there was a terror attack and now it is payback time.

So say in terms of practical conduct, how is this revenge manifested?

You just go from house to house, turning each one upside down.

Turning it upside down more aggressively than you usually would?

No. The upside down is always the same upside down.

24

If they annoy you then you search a bit tougher

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2014

In "Operation Brother's Keeper" (a military operation that began in June 2014 in the West Bank following the abduction and murder of Gilad Sha'er, Naftali Fraenkel and Eyal Yifrah in Gush Etzion), did you get off the buses and actually go from house to house, hundreds of soldiers?

Yes, armored buses, but within the village. There were brigades there. It was in [the Palestinian village of] Beit Kahil and all those things (villages). Every day it was in a different village, doing it (the house searches). Imagine that there were enough soldiers to search a[n entire] village in a few hours in the morning.

You say "we go from house to house." Do you actually go from house to house, or is this a metaphor?

There are strips, you see it happening to your left and to your right, times ten, times I don't know how many. We arrive, announce ourselves through a PA system, [the residents of the house] come out. We were masked and fully equipped,

separating women and men, asking one person [to join us in the house search], asking if anything is locked. If so, someone (one of the residents) leads and he opens the doors with a weapon pointed [at him] from behind. Two [soldiers] outside guard the women, pointing their weapons at the women, and that's it.

That's how you go from house to house?

Yes. In one day we had a strip of, I don't know, 25 houses. Just multiply that a few times, and you finish a village in a few hours.

What are you looking for?

We're not told if it's dead kids (the abducted teens) or if it's weapons.

Did you find weapons anywhere?

We found two guns and that's it.

What does such a search look like?

You enter, look around, check. [If] there's a pit – you want it opened, you shine a light with a flashlight and stuff. And if [they] annoy you then you search a bit tougher.

What annoys you?

Not me. If [the Palestinian residents] annoyed the officer or the sergeant by making things harder for them when they came out [of the house], or they bothered them with questions, or somebody shouted or I don't know what, in short, if they rubbed them the wrong way, then you're less careful with your vest when you're turning around next to something. If the butt of your weapon accidentally knocks something over – that's not a big deal. But it runs on [the scale of] this nuance [between] just entering and going through a house room by room after you've separated the people outside, and really digging [through the house].

This exercise, is it something you did for a day or throughout a longer period?

It was three, four days. And you see a wave of soldiers, in the hundreds, who are going [from house to house] and doing exactly what we're doing. That's the first three, four days [of the operation].

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25

A real sense took root that these are not human beings

Rank: Captain · Place: a-Ramadin · Period: 2010

We were in the South Hebron Hills. A trainees' company commander (a commander for a company of combatants in training) arrived for a weekend in the area. He wanted, on the instructions of his battalion commander, to train his soldiers. In areas A and B (areas in the West Bank under full or partial Palestinian

It was simply training practice, up to the use of zip ties. At the Wolf the practice ends and they are brought back. A real sense took root that these are not human beings. Obviously we can arrest them, but we're also humane so we'll release them along the way.

control), if you want to enter a house and arrest someone – you need authorization from the regional brigade. In area C (areas in the West Bank under Israeli civilian and security control) we didn't need to ask for authorization from anyone.

You decide at the battalion level?

Yes. A company commander arrives in the area and requests that we give him houses to make arrests. We gave him a few houses in [the village of] a-Ramadin to make arrests in. At first the objective was to arrest someone, to enter houses that we have a tiny bit of intelligence information about.

[So they] sat with a scout who looked at

houses in Ramadin. They asked her which house is suspicious, she pointed to a few houses and told us about suspicious conduct. 'Suspicious conduct' is when there's someone here who goes out to work very early. Palestinians wake up early for first prayer, around 4:30AM. He (the resident of the house) wakes up at 3AM. That means that he works far away and he has to get there on time. Or 'suspicious conduct' – there's a kid here who is always on the roof because he's bored. It was clear to both the company commander and to us that there is nothing here. He entered, made an arrest. The arrest ended with [them] taking everyone out of the house, interrogating them, putting them on the Wolf (armored transport vehicle) and then releasing them.

The whole family?

All the men. The women and children were outside. It was simply training practice,

up to the [use of] zip ties. At the Wolf the practice ends and they are brought back. A real sense took root that these are not human beings. Obviously we can arrest them, [but] we're also humane so we'll release them along the way. These were the best guys (the soldiers), [but] an army isn't intended to deal with grey situations, and this in-between state created moral and operational decay.

Did you, too, reach the point where you stop seeing them as human beings?

Definitely, yes. As an officer Palestinians didn't interest me.

26

The village was turned upside down

Unit: Nahal Reconnaissance Platoon · Place: Jinba · Period: 2012

We happened to go on a raid of [the village of] Jinba. I remember it well because it was my first burn. I arrived, and boom – the [occupied] territories hit me with all their might. Jinba is a village located next to the [Nahal] brigade training base (in Tel Arad). For your whole basic and further training, all they teach you is not to lose equipment because the Bedouin steal it. And then you arrive there and you discover that the Bedouin living in Jinba are the ones who took my beds, and they are the reason I had to stay over the weekend, and they are the reason I had to be on monitor (guard) duty at my base the entire day (residents of the village of Jinba are not in fact Bedouin but Palestinian fellaheen). And then on top of it you get the intelligence information that there's a headquarters there for transferring infiltrators (Palestinians without entry permits to Israel). The rumor was that for years [the army] had been trying to get authorization, and finally there was authorization to raid Jinba. It was a gift from the heavens, and it has the name of an amusement park (the testifier is referring to the sound of the village's name): "Are you coming to Jinba? Are you headed to Jinba?" It was massive, two helicopters and four Wolfs (armored transport vehicles), one from each direction. They decided that this time we won't let them (Palestinian villagers from Jinba) get away, we would surprise them from all directions. And I know for a fact that the order at the combat procedure [briefing] was: We're going to leave no stone unturned in order to find [stolen equipment]. There was intelligence on binoculars, on night-vision devices, on a lot of equipment. [They] arrived, one team came down from the air in the helicopter, the rest of the

It was during Ramadan. A photo was published in the newspaper of a very large tin pot with food spilt on the floor. The entire floor was full of vegetable soup, the entire cave was flooded with a layer of food, two old people standing stunned, and in the background lots of rumpled clothes. They overturned refrigerators, they overturned pots, they overturned everything.

teams came in vehicles, surrounded the whole thing, [threw] smoke grenades to create a bit of a commotion, and from there started to enter all the caves (Jinba residents, much like residents of other communities in Firing Zone 918, are cave dwellers who use both natural and handmade caves as homes and sheep sheds).

All the caves?

Yes. It was during Ramadan. A photo was published in the newspaper of a very large tin pot with food spilt on the floor. The entire floor was full of vegetable soup, the entire cave was flooded with a layer of food, two old people standing stunned, and in the background lots of rumpled clothes. They overturned refrigerators, they overturned pots, they overturned everything. [Later,] in the company's smoking area, the machine

gunner said that they opened the house, entered, [he said,] "I felt that the Negev (the machine gun) caught on something, I didn't understand what it was, I gave it a tug, suddenly an enormous pot with lots of food spilled. I really didn't mean to make such a fuss, look what they made of it in the media. All it was was the Negev getting stuck, I gave it a small tug and the stove tipped over. I didn't mean it at all." They turned everything upside down there. They overturned the closets, they overturned as much as possible. The combatants were very disappointed that there wasn't clearance to enter – there was a school and mosque there – into them there was no clearance to enter. They eventually found some night vision devices and high-end binoculars and some tent poles, pup tents. The assumption was that they (the Palestinians) very quickly hid all the equipment in the mosque and in the school. The large headquarters that they were trying to find for smuggling infiltrators wasn't found, but the village was turned upside down.

Was it in the early morning?

No, no, it was in the afternoon. 11:00-12:00 they left, and returned at 4:00-5:00PM, it wasn't long. The combatants really complained that the orders had been to leave no stone unturned, and they weren't allowed to. [There was] a soldier who raised

his hand at the end of the debriefing summary meeting and said: The order was to leave no stone unturned, but you pulled us out after a minute.

How did the command respond to the press coverage?

There was a conversation with the battalion commander. Most of his speech was, "Very good, well done," but he [also] said: There are a few newspapers over the past few days that don't really like you. But not to worry, no one actually reads them.

The Haaretz newspaper?

Yes.

27

"The Doctor's House"

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration · Place: Bani Naim

Above [the Palestinian town of] Bani Na'im there's a house that overlooks Route 60. Route 60 is the road leading from Jerusalem to the Hebron area, and [there is] actually a house that dominates the whole area, a serious house where a doctor lives. We used to call it "The Doctor's House." It's a house we would take over – it's hard for me to give a number – personally I carried out a 'straw widow' in that house (a temporary army post set up inside a Palestinian home in order to carry out an ambush or create a lookout) at least four times, to the point where I know the family members. One time he (the Palestinian owner) – he just had enough. The man bought a house, built a house, invested good money in it which he earned honestly, as he's the Bani Na'im doctor or something like that, and the army comes to him and we simply make his life miserable. He doesn't know which night we'll show up, according to which decision by a brigade commander [saying that] on that particular day we need a lookout over Route 60. And every time we arrive and [carry out] a straw widow. We come in, read him his rights, wake up the entire household, move [them into one of the rooms]. One time [the doctor] said no. He stood up: "You're not coming in." Standing there opposite a squad of soldiers. "You're not coming in." Soldiers arrived, shouting [began], they were about to arrest him. At the end of the day, he's in emotional turmoil, "Get out of here, leave me alone." And eventually they explained to him, "You'll be arrested." He understood that the situation is shit and

The man bought a house, built a house, invested in it good money that he earned honestly, as he's the Bani Na'im doctor or something like that, and the army comes to him and we simply make his life miserable. He doesn't know which night we'll show up, according to which decision by a brigade commander [saying that] on that particular day we need a lookout over Route 60.

allowed [the soldiers in]. Yet again. And I wouldn't be surprised if it happens to this day. Now, two things happen here: from the civilian and humanitarian point of view – there's no point in me even beginning to say how bad it is and how we make the lives of the family [of] the town doctor miserable. And on the military level – how easy would it be for him to wire the house with explosives? How easy would it be for him to wait for us with a gun because he's frustrated? And he has no fear. That's something that you see a lot: people have no fear from the army, no intimidation. [They] know exactly who the soldiers are, they see what they do on guard duty. Same thing with him. They lost their fear, the things that as long as we're carrying out an occupation and military control – this is the worst thing there is.

Could you throw a ballpark number of how many “widows” you did in the course of two years?

Dozens.

Did you get to return to the same house several times?

Loads. The Doctor's House is an example. There are houses where they don't complain anymore.

28

“Snack arrests”

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nachshon Battalion · Period: 2010

We would carry out arrests, mostly “snack arrests”, arrests of all sorts of unimportant people. They tell you the level of risk, they tell you if you're looking for weapons. So if they don't [tell you] to look for weapons and don't stress over the

arrest, and you don't do a thousand rehearsals but just the usual...

Then it's [something you do] while you're at it.

Yes. The arrestees who were brought to the base [following the arrest], there is a great chance that they get loads and loads of slaps, depends on who is guarding them. I remember that we once guarded a detainee, I have a photo of him, it's just that he was wearing a HaMahanot HaOlim (an Israeli youth movement) shirt and I just had to take a photo of it. [He was] zip tied, blindfolded. There were guys who came all, "Let me give him a few..." They came for the laughs, to feel like men. There were guys who would take photos. That was [a base] of the headquarters, so it was interesting for them.

29

You feel like you just arrested Dr. Doolittle

Rank: First Sergeant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2012

You come back from a patrol, suddenly you see an Arab handcuffed at the base's security post while next to him is a cage with a parrot (the testifier appears to be referring to goldfinches, often captured and sold by Palestinian trappers as pets). You feel like you just arrested Dr. Doolittle. They're held for two hours at the post and then he's released. A day later you're already chasing after the same guy, you already recognize him.

What was the story?

They catch parrots, rare birds, probably sell them. You get a report about where he (the trapper) is coming from, you go to that point, see him from afar, approach, he runs away. If he doesn't run away you talk to him and say to him, "This is not allowed, it's wrong, come with us." [He] comes without resisting. If he starts running because he already knows it's forbidden, then you run after him, try to catch him, running with a ceramic [armor] and a [combatant] vest. How fast are you? It depends on you, but it's very hard to be fast. [You] catch him, bring him in. Many times you don't catch him. I have chased without catching.

How long did he sit by the base's security guard?

Two hours, an hour.

And then who took him?

It was an area of deployment where for eighty percent of its activities you could have brought in the “Let the Animals Live” organization to do the work. The routine security tasks are done while you’re at it. I guess the JNF is not going to run across the separation barrier after a copper burner near a Palestinian village, so they send the army.

He went home.

Were you told to release him?

Yes. Sometimes you drop him off, it depends whether there’s a car that’s just leaving.

And what about the parrot?

The parrot? Good question. I think [it] stayed with us. You confiscate his cage with the parrot. You release the parrot, obviously, and he (the Palestinian arrestee) sits at the base’s security post. That’s the arrest procedure for those who are suspected of something minor. You sit them down for two hours at the base’s security post. Whoever comes to replace you, you tell him, “Release him in half an hour.”

What’s the rationale?

I wish I knew. I don’t know. Maybe it deters him, maybe he says, “Next time I’ll get in trouble.” I think a record is kept. They (the Palestinians) have to walk around with their ID in their pocket. If it’s the same guy [who is caught a second time], I believe maybe after that there’s more serious punishment. I don’t know. Bottom line is, you’ve got an Arab sitting at the base’s security post daily, handcuffed and bound – each time it’s someone else – for this nonsense. What else was there in that deployment? Lots of chasing copper burners. They want electric cables that have copper fibers, apparently they sell them. So they burn everything and it pollutes the environment. They burn everything [and this way] they’re left with just the copper.

What’s the problem with that?

The environment. It was an area of deployment where for eighty percent of its activities you could have brought in “Let the Animals Live” (an Israeli animal rights and environmental organization similar to WWF) to do the work. The routine security tasks are done while you’re at it. I guess the JNF (the Jewish National Fund, a not-for-profit organization which plants and maintains forests as one of its main activities) is not going to run across the [separation] barrier after a copper burner near a Palestinian village, [so] they send the army. [You get] a report: “Copper burner.” You drive to the barrier, already seeing black smoke on the top of

the hill on its other side. [You] open the gate, walk towards him. He flees? You run after him. He stands? You say, "Shalom, ya Salaam," bring an Arabic speaker even and talk to him. "Listen sir, this is not okay, we can't allow this, come with us." [He] comes with you. [He] runs? You've chased him? Then he probably understands already, you don't need to have that conversation anymore. [You] cuff him, take him to the base. From there on? Not your business. You've done your work.

And they take him from there?

Depends. If they (the Shin Bet Security Service) want him, yes. Usually, no.

30

It's your company commander, so like who are you supposed to report it to?

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Nahal Anti-Tank Unit · Period: 2012

There was this one time I remember really well, where a few [Palestinian] teenagers came to steal metals [from the separation barrier] and really by chance they fell into an ambush. They were a few brothers and they brought their little brother with them, who was about eleven, something [like]... really a little kid. So the ambush caught them (the older brothers), and the kid managed to run away. He started running away back to the village and we were called up as the available force already in the area in order to catch him. Now, at that moment we didn't know it was a little kid. We were just told, "There's a suspect and he's running away in this direction," and we're with him (following him) on the cameras of the scouts. So we run, full gear, ceramic [armors], helmets, things like that. [We] get to the location and we're told, "Okay, you're very very close, about ten meters from him." We spread ourselves into a straight line, really walking with our weapons ready [to shoot]. We might have cocked [the weapons], I don't remember, and we're really getting ready [to shoot] in a straight line. Those who had a laser started lasering on the...

It was at night?

Yes. The officers [point] with their lasers at the bush, and I'm like sure I'm about to arrest some mega-terrorist now, like Bin Laden at least. Suddenly something moved, I didn't see exactly. My company commander just made a few steps forward and [then we saw that] it was a kid. And he just gave him a kick that shot

There's a very clear sense there that it's you who determines the law, or your commander. Things happen quickly and you don't have time to debate now over human rights and judicial implications, and you're also, at the end of the day, a nineteen-year-old kid who gets all excited about his weapon and thinks he's chasing terrorists.

him into the air. The kid started crying and the company commander like knelt over him. Like, an eleven-year-old boy.

What do you mean by knelt over him?

Leaned on him with his knee, pointed his weapon at him. And then [they wanted] to handcuff him with a zip-tie, and the zip-tie wouldn't even close on his hand because he was such a small child. So he's crying, [we] pick him up and walk with him back to the patrol jeep, and the kid is crying. I was shocked by the whole thing. [And] then we took him back to the base with all [his] brothers.

And what did they do with them afterward, from the base?

I think they were handed to the police or the Shin Bet [Security Service], something

like that. They (the older brothers) were already waiting inside. They were waiting on the Wolf (armored transport vehicle) until we return [with the little brother]. They asked really bad, "What's going on with the little boy?", "What's going on with the little boy?" Our guys really stressed them out on that matter, threw around all sorts of remarks. And that's it, it's like another story that demonstrates really well, because on the one hand you have this awful company commander who kicked a little kid, and on the other hand you're so angry with the older brothers for bringing their little brother to a place where he could easily get hit by a bullet, and you don't know exactly where to direct your anger. On the other hand, it's just cool for you to have had some action, there's something to tell the guys. And I remember that even then I knew that something there wasn't right. On the one hand not right, on the other hand it's your company commander, so like who are you supposed to report it to?

Did you ever ask, for example, in this context, if it's okay to arrest an eleven-year-old child?

No, because there's a very clear sense there that it's you who determines the law, or your commander. Things happen quickly and you don't have time to debate now over human rights and judicial implications, and you're also, at the end of the day, a

nineteen-year-old kid who gets all excited about his weapon and thinks he's chasing terrorists. And you're still really into this thing of "I'm now protecting the homeland," and self-sacrifice, and all the good things that you enlisted for, and they're simply exploited in order to occupy a population who just isn't interested in it.

31

He only asked "Where's dad?"

Unit: Nahal Brigade · Period: 2012

I arrived, militarily speaking, very young, I didn't know much about the army. I understood that there are arrests and [that] I need to examine them (to conduct medical examinations of Palestinians arrested following their arrest), and that other than that there are additional missions of flying checkpoints and things like that. The penny hadn't really dropped about what this meant. I remember an incident where we were at the clinic and the deputy company commander's Humvee pulls over with a father and son, illegal infiltrators (Palestinians without an entry permit to Israel) he had caught. He grabbed the kid – the kid was twelve years old tops – out of the car, and throws him to me at the clinic, and says: Here, he's having an asthma attack, before he dies on me. The kid was completely hysterical, probably having both an asthma attack and a panic attack at the same time. He arrives to us all crying, his father is taken away for arrest, and suddenly for the first time I don't really know... Medically speaking, I know what to do, but we have no common language, he doesn't speak a single word of Hebrew, I'm just trying to calm him down. And that's already after he must have experienced some violence – I don't know if physical or only verbal – from the deputy company commander. Definitely verbal. For the first time it (the penny) dropped. It was clear to me that it's impossible to let all the infiltrators enter [into Israel], but I understood the degree of desperation you have to reach to take your little boy and try and jump a fence just to bring some food home. We helped him and gave him what was needed in terms of medicine, and also calmed him down. He only asked, "Where's dad? Where's dad?" We wanted to keep him with us for as long as possible. At some point the deputy company commander came back and took him, after he was a little more okay. He's a small child, I imagine that apart from scaring him a bit they don't do too much.

32

You get to the vehicle, dismantle its wheels

Unit: Nahal Reconnaissance Platoon · Place: Firing zone 918 · Period: 2012

The mission that bothered me the most was the matter of infiltrators (Palestinians without entry permits to Israel). We were in an area with no [separation] fence, in the South Hebron Hills. Since there's no fence there, [it] constitutes easy access for infiltrators. There's a 24-hour patrol – a Humvee Jeep, a commander, and three combatants – who are well aware that there's no stopping [the Palestinians] from entering Israel. The important thing is to have a military presence there, so that they know they can't move weapons through there. This patrol – it has a huge area. It's always in touch with scouts who have quite a few cameras covering the area. Every [Palestinian] vehicle that passes – you're supposed to alert the patrol and it gets to the vehicle. And that's where it starts getting very creative. The patrol is the sexiest mission, everyone really wanted to be on the patrol.

You see a vehicle, what are you supposed to do to it?

At first it was much more vague. We were supposed to show him (the Palestinian driver) that the army is there and that laws are being enforced. [So] in the beginning there was a policy that you get to the vehicle, dismantle its wheels, sometimes also take the battery, return it to the [military] base, and simply neutralize his vehicle – [you] make sure that he can't drive it again, and leave him there. Little by little you realize that they (Palestinians whose vehicles have been tampered with) get by, they get picked up. There was one story of two friends (soldiers). [They] got to a car, stopped [it], took them (the passengers) out of the vehicle, zip-ties on hands, eyes blindfolded, see that they have nothing on them. And this is where the creative part begins. In this case they simply got into the vehicle, drove it and crashed it into a concrete wall. There was a concrete wall there. I have a photo of the vehicle stuck in a concrete wall. The photo really shows the vehicle with its sheet metal on the front distorted, and a sergeant sitting inside the vehicle. You can tell that the vehicle is disabled, they dismantled its wheels. Sometimes you take them to the base, detain them for four, five hours, and release them. Sometimes you release them at the location where they were caught.

The Palestinians?

Yes. It depends on what happens. One of the most horrifying cases I remember [was when] one of my friends [from my unit] got to a vehicle with a driver and

another infiltrator with an amputated leg sitting next to him. I asked him (my friend), "So, what did you do?" And he looked at me with a really blank expression, "What did we do? The usual, we dismantled their wheels, dismantled the battery and left."

You say that it was standard procedure – to remove the wheels. Who started this procedure?

Little by little it changed. I know that later there was a new battalion commander, and suddenly you had to get approval from a certain rank to dismantle the wheels.

Little by little they got their act together, but in the beginning it was one big thrill.

You get to the vehicle, you do whatever you want to it. The phases were quite ugly.

There was the first phase of dismantling the wheels. The phase after that, we opened a parking lot [at the post]: every vehicle was brought there, there were rows and rows of vehicles. [Later] they would disappear from there, I don't know where, but [soldiers] would confiscate the vehicle [from the Palestinian owner] without any accountability. People would come to the base's security post: "You took my vehicle." I don't know what they would be told, but no one gave it any notice. All these incidents

occurred in Firing Zone 918 (an area where the IDF trains with live fire, located at the area of South Hebron Hills and inhabited by several Palestinian communities). People would end their patrols with many batteries and license plates and wheels in the jeep. We would put them all in one corner of the base, each time you would throw on more and more. It looked like a kind of junkyard, there were so many batteries and so many [license] plates, stacks. Once I was told: Go help, they're loading tires there. A routine task. I went, and I remember that the penny suddenly dropped how systematic it was, and what a massive amount it is. We filled a whole military transport truck. It's a huge vehicle, we filled it with tires to the brim. In the end we really shoved in the license plates and batteries. I have no idea where it was taken. It just illustrates the massive amount. That was just from two and a half months.

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truck. It's a huge vehicle, we
filled it with tires to the brim.

And over two and a half months, how many such trucks where there?

There were pickup trucks three times, which we loaded up from the back. We were very creative, we built a parking lot for our own vehicles with these tires, we tried to find solutions. Until this huge truck came and took away most of it.

33

“Security Buffer Zone”

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration

What is an “SBZ”?

It’s a security buffer zone, a buffer zone [around] settlements where the army doesn’t authorize anyone to be.

Anyone, or any Palestinian?

Depends which SBZ you’re talking about. There is the Kiryat Arba SBZ which is a permanent SBZ. In the larger settlements it’s a large area that includes a lot of

private Palestinian land. Nobody is allowed [to enter it]. There are SBZs that are less official, [for example] an area that’s next to a settlement that they don’t want anyone to approach, and then it’s called a “friction area”. It’s known, the [regional] brigade issues [a closed military zone order], there’s a map.

The Palestinians have the right to work their lands in the security buffer zone. The problem is that we make them jump through crazy bureaucracy. It has to be coordinated every time, you need to have a military force to open the gate, to escort the Palestinian farmer while he’s working in the security buffer zone. Three soldiers guard one person who is working his land.

Does every settlement have an SBZ?

I want to say yes, unauthorized settlements too. For example, there’s an outpost called The Booster, which has an SBZ. The Kiryat Arba SBZ, say – the Palestinians have the right to work their lands there. The problem is that we make them jump through crazy bureaucracy. It (working a land in an SBZ) has to be coordinated every time, you need to have a [military] force to open the

gate, to escort him (the Palestinian farmer) while he's working in the SBZ. Three soldiers guard one person who is working his land. So he tries to come as much as possible, [but] he doesn't profit [from it]. The [Palestinian] guy who most of the lands in the Kiryat Arba SBZ are his [only] comes in order to keep it "alive", he doesn't profit from this land.* He arrives a few times a year to work [the land]. Often the soldiers don't show up [to escort him], and that's a problem. Also, there are Jews who suddenly expand into the SBZ. The 'Federman Farm' (an unauthorized outpost where extreme-right activist Noam Federman's family lives) is located in the Kiryat Arba SBZ. It was evacuated several times and it is there to this day, but in general it's empty. And many of the Palestinians have abandoned their lands because they realized that the chances of coordinating it is so difficult, and we put them through so many ordeals.

* The testifier is referring to a law from the time of the Ottoman rule, which applies to the occupied territories to this day, according to which agricultural lands which haven't been cultivated for three years are declared "abandoned land" and are transferred into state ownership.

34

A yellow area

Unit: Armored Corps 8, 455th battalion (Reserves) · Period: 2013

A 'yellow area' can be anything. [It] can be around routes (on the sides of the roads), it can be around an archaeological site, it can be around an industrial area, it can even be around greenhouses, cowsheds. The Arabs can't go there (in areas defined as 'yellow areas'). Half the time what you do is arrest these poor people who walk on the sides of the road. Shepherds going from one point to another, clearly it's easier for them to walk on the sides of the routes, [but] they're not allowed to. Yellow areas is a part [of the job] that depends more on how soft-hearted you are, or how crazy the commander is. Usually you see the shepherd [inside the yellow area] and you don't do anything to him. You can decide that you are going to do something to him. Many times [Palestinian] farmers would come close to our base with hardly any distance remaining, and the operations room decided to allow them to get to just a few meters from the fence to allow them

to do their harvest. One day they decided not to allow them [to come close] – so they drove them away. They sent soldiers to drive them away. And then it rained and all their crops were ruined. The yellow area allows the army to do whatever it wants, because it's a regular area, regular land, where you can determine that "here it's not allowed." The yellow area allows me as a soldier more leverage to use my discretion. It's okay to even arrest them because it's a yellow area. It's up to my judgment.

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There was an issue there with Palestinian kids who came to pick Gundelia

Rank: Sergeant First Class · Unit: 5th Brigade (Reserves) · Place: Beit Hagai · Period: 2013

There was this thing with [the settlement of] Beit Hagai. There's an area called "Mitzpe something" after someone (the word Mitzpe in Hebrew means "lookout", but in the Israeli discourse it is often associated with hilltop settlements and unauthorized outposts), there are loads of Mitzpes named after all sorts of guys who fell [in battle]. In practice it's actually outside the settlement, but it's included within the settlement borders so that the Palestinians couldn't come near it. There was an issue there with Palestinian kids who came to pick Gundelia, it's a plant you can eat. It grows in that area and the kids would walk around and pick [it]. And since it's outside the settlement and isn't fenced in, they don't realize that they have entered the area of the settlement. And so we would be called over there all the time.

They didn't enter the area of the settlement?

[They] didn't enter the area of the settlement. All this is happening hundreds of meters from the houses of the settlement.

Who calls you there?

Our operations room, [and also] the CSC some of the time (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense).

But why do you respond to being called there? You say this is happening several hundred meters from the settlement.

They pick [Gundelia] a kilometer [away] from the settlement, too, but there's no fence. He (the Palestinian kid) is walking in a wadi, so here he's a kilometer and there he's 500 [meters away from the settlement]. Since the Mitzpe is included within the settlement's borders, then you can be 700 meters [away] from a house [in Beit Hagai], but you're 150 meters [away] from the Mitzpe, and you're supposedly within the area of the settlement. With the [Palestinian] kids specifically, from the moment they start climbing the spur that the Mitzpe is located on, then they're in the settlement area, and you need to come

and remove them from there. These are twelve, thirteen-year-old kids. You get there, they see you from a distance, there's no chance that we, adults in vests with weapons and helmets, can catch them. You chase after them and they run away.

Why do you want to catch them? Say you did catch them – what would you do with them?

We never caught them. It was obvious we wouldn't catch them, it was obvious that we're chasing after them so that they run away. If you're far enough and you're shouting [at them], then they don't care. The moment you come near they start to run away. And it's also a sort of a game with them, so that they feel that you don't want them to be there. I don't think we ever even talked about what we would do if we caught such a Palestinian kid.

Did anyone explain to you why they have to be removed [from the area] at all?

Because it's an area of the settlement and they're not allowed to be there. It felt like the Mitzpe was like a way to artificially inflate the area of the settlement. As far as we're concerned, the Mitzpe is an inherent part of the settlement, Palestinians are not allowed to get near the Mitzpe. It's not fenced, it's outside [the settlement], but it's an integral part of the settlement.

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Illegal Palestinian construction in Area C is much more severe than illegal Jewish construction

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration

Regarding illegal Palestinian construction, there's a kind of struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to create facts on the ground in Area C (areas in the West Bank under full Israeli civil and security control). Everyone knows where these lands are going – these lands are moving toward a diplomatic agreement. And everyone wants to keep Area C as their own land. [This is why] illegal Palestinian construction in Area C is much more severe in the eyes of the [Civil] Administration than illegal Jewish construction in Area C. It's not officially declared.

Just in practice?

That's right. It means that the inspection coordinators (Civil Administration workers responsible for monitoring illegal construction in Area C), if they go to an illegal [Israeli] outpost to check out what goes on there, [then that would be] once every two weeks, once every never. To Khirbet X (the names of many Palestinian villages begin with 'Khirbet') they would come practically every week. I don't know how

many Palestinians live in Area C, but most [of the residents in area C] are Jews. I haven't seen the figures, but in my humble opinion something like 75% are illegal Palestinian construction cases [at the Civil Administration] and 25% are Jewish cases.* This number seems curious to me – that the [Palestinian] minority is responsible for the majority of illegal construction cases.

What if a Palestinian wants to get a construction permit?

He can't. He won't get one because they don't make master plans for them. They have just started working on master plans [for Palestinians] after many years of disagreement between the Civil

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Administration and the Palestinians regarding the master plans for communities in Area C. The problem is that the [Palestinian] Authority itself is holding it up, because the Authority wants [for example] the master plan to be 4,000 dunams (1,000 acres) and the Administration wants 1,000 dunams (250 acres). Throughout an entire year, I came across only one illegal [Palestinian] construction case that was whitewashed. "Whitewashed" means that it was retroactively approved. It was the school of [the village of] a-Ramadin, near [the settlement of] Eshkolot. Why was it whitewashed? Because it's a school.

Are there humanitarian considerations in regard to demolitions?

Yes, yes, yes. There were quite a few instances where the infrastructure officer or the chief of the DCO (District Coordination Office) canceled demolitions because they didn't see the need. For instance, a house that sat on Route 60, and was built before Route 60 [was paved], and all of a sudden it's an illegal construction (the testifier is referring to the Israeli ban on Palestinian construction near Route 60, the main road crossing the West Bank from north to south). It's in Area C, it's illegal, and it will never be legal because suddenly the road goes right next to it. The road has been passing right next to it for fifteen years already, so we didn't demolish it.

Is there someone whose job is to look for illegal construction?

Yes, yes. The [Central] Supervisory Unit. Just like you have municipal inspectors who locate illegal balcony-closings (the testifier is referring to the practice of closing a balcony to create additional indoor space, which is often illegal) and issue warrants – same thing, except they do it with an armored Defender (military jeep) at their side. There are [master] plans that were made by the Civil Administration in the eighties and the nineties. [The Administration] went to the Mukhtars (Palestinian village leaders) and said, "There's a red square in which you can go wild, build whatever you like. But everything outside the square is illegal construction." There are maps like that to this day, [created] knowing that you can't suffocate the population completely.

Just a bit?

Just a bit.

* According to figures provided to the Kerem Navot organization, as of 2017 the Civil Administration had 8,001 cases of illegal construction in Israeli settlements in Area C and 16,798 cases of illegal construction in Palestinian villages in Area C.

The settlers come to the meetings

Unit: Civil Administration · Place: Carmel

How do you decide what to demolish? There's so much illegal construction, why demolish one house and not another?

You look at a map of the demolitions and you can see that they demolish where it's close to a settlement. There are a lot of Khirbes (small Palestinian villages) in the South Hebron Hills, there are so many illegal villages in Area C (areas in the West Bank under full Israeli civilian and security control) in the South Hebron Hills, and they demolish in [Palestinian] Susiya or in Khirbet a-Tuwani. It's a political discussion. Let's say, of the 70,000-140,000 Palestinian residents who live in Area

You look at a map of the demolitions and you can see that they demolish where it's close to a settlement. There are a lot of Khirbes in the South Hebron Hills [...], and they demolish in Palestinian Susiya or in Khirbet a-Tuwani. It's a political discussion.

C, the vast majority live in illegal villages.

[If] there's a village in Area C without a master plan – that means it's illegal.

Near Carmel, one of the most successful settlements in the area that is expanding a lot, they (Palestinians from the village of Um al-Kheir) make their food on a serious tabun oven (outdoor stove) that apparently creates a burnt smell for the residents of Carmel. The story was that it really bothered the settlers, and since it (the tabun) was an illegal construction, then it was okay to demolish it, destroy it, and take [it]. I don't remember whether this story was of demolishing or taking, or they just

didn't provide them with authorization. And the international organizations – this story really occupied them a lot [because] they (the residents of the village) had no way to eat and things like that, and they tried to offer all kinds of new solutions. And every time it would happen, the residents of Carmel would call us. It was a huge story that we dealt with.

In demolitions, why do they demolish this house and not that house in one village?

The considerations are either security-related – that's the deal with firing zones

for example – or civilian-related, for that matter. In many cases the brigade commander pushes proceedings to be implemented against locations that bother him. [A construction] located on a certain route, places that overlook a certain area [or] a settlement, and he doesn't want them, all kinds of things like that. He told us more than once: Ask ***** (a civilian working for the Civil Administration's Inspection Unit) what's going on with this illegal construct or that illegal construct.

He asked you about a specific illegal construct?

Exactly. A specific illegal construct for which they want to follow proceedings to completion so that they can demolish it, because it bothers them in something security-related, or because it strategically overlooks a settlement. The brigade commander is in touch with the settlers and they come to the meetings. The weekly situation assessment is with all the CSCs of the area (Civilian Security Coordinators, settlers in charge of the security of their settlements, appointed by the Ministry of Defense), and they exert pressure there.

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There's no such thing as "an illegal outpost"

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration

Was there a systematic distinction between an authorized settlement and an unauthorized settlement?

No. There's no such thing as "an illegal outpost." Except, maybe, Mitzpe Yair, which has a private water line. It's a private water line that they laid on Palestinian private land. [But] Mitzpe Yair has utility poles of the IEC (Israel Electric Corporation). In Avigayil (an unauthorized outpost) I'm almost sure they don't have electricity [supplied by the IEC], but there are generators and they have [a connection to] water. Someone set up that infrastructure [there]. There were illegal works in Asa'el (an unauthorized outpost), they laid water and electricity lines from the [Har Hevron] Regional Council building all the way to the illegal outpost. Of course we stopped the works a few times, but I assume that afterward the outpost was connected to electricity and water.

And it wasn't work carried out by the IEC?

No, no, someone's private work. Illegal work. We get a phone-call from Palestinians or from left-wing organizations reporting illegal work carried out around X: we hop over, arrive, see that there is illegal work. Apart from getting the tractor out of there at that point in time, we have no ability, authority [to halt the works]. But it's enough to have an officer whose job it is and who sees work and documents it, or without documenting it. He is authorized to confiscate a machine, to stop the works. In Asa'el the inspector (the Civil Administration's infrastructure inspector) sent a directive halting the work. From there how did it unfold? I have no idea. I assume nothing happened as the outpost was connected to water and electricity and life goes on. Most of the [illegal] works in outposts take place on Friday and Saturday. [The settlers] use the time when the IDF is convening or preparing for Saturday morning demonstrations (the testifier is referring to Israeli activists escorting Palestinian shepherds in the South Hebron Hills area), and push forward these processes. We would see that work had been carried out on the ground. We would pass on every such report to the head of regional supervision, [and] he is supposed to issue a directive to halt the work. A directive for halting construction work usually becomes a demolition order.

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No village gets water from Mekorot

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Civil Administration

There is a Mekorot (the Israeli national water company) pipe which directs water, a huge pipe that runs parallel to Route 60 (a main road which runs through the West Bank from the north to the south). And it turns out that stealing this water is really simple. The Palestinians don't see it as a crime anymore, not only because it's against Israel, [but because] they've been doing it for fifteen years. They're used to it already, they didn't know, didn't realize that they're committing a crime.

The Palestinian communities which are situated along Route 60 in area C (areas in the West Bank under full Israeli civilian and security control) – aren't they supposed to get their water from Israel in the first place? The civilian control is Israeli.

Good question. But the Mekorot pipe doesn't get to these villages.

Why?

Great question. It's the first time I've ever thought about it, that you're right, the whole area of Route 60 is supposed to be area C. What's the story exactly? Don't know. In Ramallah you always have running water.

But Ramallah is area A (areas in the West Bank under Palestinian civil and security control). That's the point, are Palestinians in area C supposed to get their water supply from the Palestinian water authority?

I don't know. They don't. No village gets water from Mekorot in all of area C. Maybe except for very very particular cases. But if you don't have a master plan – you don't get water, you don't get sewage, don't get electricity. So they steal.*

In the Israeli unauthorized outposts, where do they get the water from?

I don't know, I don't remember. There are settlements that do have [a connection to water]. When I think about it, loads of settlements do.

You said that the Palestinian villages don't get water because they're illegal construction. But on the face of it the unauthorized outposts are illegal construction, too.

True.

So how is it that they do get water?

Good question. I don't know. There are unauthorized outposts connected [to water from Mekorot]. How does it work exactly? I don't know.

No village gets water from Mekorot in all of area C. Maybe except for very very particular cases. But if you don't have a master plan – you don't get water, you don't get sewage, don't get electricity. So they steal.

* From the point of view of the Israeli authorities, the main indication for testing the legality of a community in the occupied territories is whether it has a master plan which has been approved by the Civil Administration.

Can I tell you I'm completely okay with what I did in the army? No

Rank: Lieutenant · Unit: Judea Regional Brigade · Place: Um El Kheir

To remove old people, children, women from their homes. To do it day after day after day. It's not pleasant. It's a difficult situation, a bad situation. You remove people your grandmother's age from the half-shack they live in and it breaks your heart. What can you do.

We got to Khirbet Um al-Kheir, which is right next to [the settlement of] Carmel. We went there for demolitions: we demolished a shed or two there. You get [an order about] what to demolish, you coordinate it with the [regional] brigade, and you do it. Every demolition we do, we bring movers and take out the contents, place them away from the demolition, take footage inside the empty structure that we're about to demolish, around it. We walk through the structure to see that there's nothing valuable there or that there isn't anyone there, and only after that we demolish. Can I tell you I'm completely okay with what I did in the army?

No. I don't agree with the demolitions, I think that in most cases they're wrong, [it's] simply not humane. But can I tell you that we adhered to the protocols, down to the smallest detail? Yes, we ensured that we did. We were meticulous and we knew there had already been instances where the Civil Administration was sued because it had accidentally demolished and destroyed [things]. [In that instance] we got to Um al-Kheir, it was an unpleasant demolition. The village's sheikh was lying there in front of the tractor. We had to get the border police officers to pull him [away], and there was cursing and yelling. In the end he came up to us and said: Do you hear the tractors working in the new neighborhood in Carmel? How about that? We told him: They're building with an approved [master] plan, you aren't. He goes: Does that seem just to you? We told him: That's how it is. And you know that the new neighborhood was indeed approved, and it has [master] plans, and they are working according to the plans and everything, but that [Palestinian] man who lives five meters from their fence and is illegal according to the [Civil] Administration's definitions – that's a problem. An unpleasant situation: to remove old people, children, women from their homes. To do it day after day after day. It's not pleasant. It's a difficult situation, a bad

situation. You remove people your grandmother's age from the half-shack they live in and it breaks your heart. What can you do.

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It was a pile of rocks that she was living in, really just a pile of rocks

Unit: Civil Administration · Place: Khirbet Zanutah

A story that happened in Khirbet Zanutah, 500 meters east of the South Hebron Regional Council, at Shim'a Junction. This was one of the more dismal demolitions I took part in, a pile of rocks on a pile of rocks on a pile of rocks. Two, maybe three families live there. We'd get there, and each time we would demolish around two cases (two structures; the testifier is referring to Civil Administration illegal construction cases), and leave. [In this case,] as soon as we arrived an elderly woman started going wild.

We could tell she was putting on a show, she supposedly fainted. We opened her eyes, a military medic team came around with a doctor, he gave her an IV and we took her away. We continued with the demolition as usual. Her daughter, or daughter-in-law, was hysterical and called their men from the field, and they arrived of course. The border police officers closed off the entire area, it was a sterile area, only we were inside. It was a pile of rocks that she was living in – really just a pile of rocks. We entered, walked around, the workers (movers hired by the Civil Administration) finished removing all the sacks of wheat, the things they had in there. I walk around, the tractor is already about to enter, and suddenly I see a crib with a baby. We removed the crib of course. You're about to do a demolition, and if the [Civil Administration] person doesn't care as much, or you don't pay attention while demolishing something, and the baby is inside... We do these walk-arounds inside every illegal construction [before demolishing it] in order to ensure that things like this don't happen.

We entered, walked around, the workers finished removing all the sacks of wheat, the things they had in there. I walk around, the tractor is already about to enter, and suddenly I see a crib with a baby. We removed the crib of course.



Breaking the Silence was founded in 2004 by a group of veterans who collect and publish testimonies from soldiers who served in the West Bank and Gaza since the start of the Second Intifada. Breaking the Silence aims to raise awareness about the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories, and to stimulate public debate about the moral price of military control over a civilian population and of ongoing occupation.

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The testimonies published here are unedited and presented in their original form, except for details that are withheld in order to conceal the identity of specific testimony-bearers, and brief parenthetical clarifications of military jargon and content.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the activists and volunteers who have contributed their time and energy to make the publication of this booklet possible, alongside all organizational activities. Without their invaluable assistance, these important testimonies would not reach the public.

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Unit: Civil Administration • Location: Carmel

