

**[BREAKING
THE SILENCE]**

ON DUTY

Settler Violence in the West Bank
Soldiers' Testimonies 2012–2020





Breaking the Silence was established in 2004 by Israel Defense Forces veterans with the aim of collecting and publishing the testimonies of Israeli soldiers who have served in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip since the start of the Second Intifada. We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population's everyday life. Our work aims to bring an end to the occupation.

All testimonies published are meticulously verified before publication.

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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 testifiers, and brief parenthetical clarifications of military jargon and content. The pictures do not necessarily correspond to the events described in the booklet.

Cover photo: Yotam Ronen, Activestills

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 of our organizational activities. Without their invaluable assistance, these important testimonies would not reach the public.

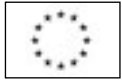
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INTRODUCTION

Violence perpetrated by settlers is an inseparable part of daily life in the West Bank since its occupation in 1967. The motives of this violence are ideological, and its goals are strategic – the expropriation of land from Palestinians and the effective takeover of as much as possible of what many settlers consider to be the 'Land of Israel,' all of which is achieved through a sustained effort to intimidate the Palestinian residents of the West Bank. This widespread phenomenon has intensified significantly over recent years, a phenomenon made possible due to the absence of any significant attempt to enforce the law by the State of Israel's various governmental bodies, ministries and agencies, most prominently the Israeli police and military.

This booklet presents testimonies by soldiers about violent actions perpetrated by settlers, and follows on from 'The High Command,' a testimony booklet that we published in 2017 about settler influence on IDF conduct in the West Bank. These testimonies, like many others, describe a reality marked by unending harm to and threat toward Palestinian people, property and land. The acts described here include different kinds of violent attacks, including beatings, stone-throwing and burning of agricultural fields and groves.

In addition, some of the testimonies describe violent attacks by settlers against IDF soldiers. These occur for the most part, in response to instances in which soldiers act against the settlers' desires and goals. Thus, many testifiers have described how, in incidents where the military sought to prevent harm or harassment of Palestinians by settlers, they themselves became the targets of the violence (see, for example, testimony 1). This violence, too, ranges from physical attacks against soldiers and officers to damaging the IDF's property and military bases.

However, these incidents describe only one angle in the complex relationship that exists between settlers and soldiers. The testimonies in this booklet also shed light on the close relations that form between these groups – relations based on national identity, ideological or religious identification, and close personal ties. This relationship is further strengthened due to the fact that many IDF bases are located within settlements or directly adjacent to them. Many testimonies describe how settlers visit the soldiers at their guard posts, host them in their homes, and even give them gifts (as seen, for example, in testimonies 8 and 16). The personal and

communal ties that are formed on this basis make it difficult for soldiers to carry out their task impartially when they are required to prevent or halt the violent attacks carried out by their newly found friends.

These social affiliations, which are diametrically opposed to the relationship between the soldiers and the Palestinian population, further entrench the systemic discrimination that results from the fact that the two population groups living in the same area are subject to two different legal systems: the Israeli population – to the civilian law enforcement system; and the Palestinian population – to the military one. Thus, though the role of the IDF as the sovereign authority requires it to maintain the safety and security of all residents of the occupied territories – Israeli citizens and Palestinian residents (who do not have the right to Israeli citizenship) alike – when they attempt to enforce the law, many soldiers are uncertain about whether and how they may assert their authority on settlers.

This lack of clarity is created, among other things, as a result of vague guidelines. Many soldiers testify that they are unaware of how they are to act when settlers carry out a violent attack (see, for example, testimony 3). Some testify that their commanders did not give them the authority or tools to act in the face of such incidents, and that they believe their role is limited to calling the police – the only body that seems to hold the authority to enforce the law on Israeli citizens in the occupied territories. Thus, many IDF soldiers see the sole purpose of their presence in the occupied territories as protecting Israeli citizens. This reality results in a general lack of enforcement of the law on an entire population group, enables acts of violence, and in so doing, empowers the perpetrators.

Settlers, who are well aware of how to take advantage of this situation, often use the cloak of protection provided by the IDF to promote their goals, at the forefront of which is deepening their control of the area and pushing the Palestinians off of their land. Thus, in many instances where settlers set out to attack Palestinian farmers (as often happens during the olive harvest period), the military's intervention is most often limited to removing everyone present from the area in order to 'prevent friction' and 'maintain order in the area.' A number of the testimonies (including, for example, testimonies 27 and 34) illustrate how the soldiers identify the insistence of Palestinian farmers to stay on their land as a 'disturbance,' and use riot dispersal means to remove them (testimony 35, for example). A reaction of this kind, which is

characteristic of the military's conduct in these cases, serves the settlers' interest to prevent the Palestinians from working their land, and turns the soldiers into indirect tools of attack at the settlers' hands.

Another aspect of the settlers' use of the protection provided to them by the military for violent means can be found in the religious and political events held by settlers deep within Palestinian cities and villages in Areas A and B of the West Bank. In order to secure these events, the IDF deploys large forces which cause major disruption to the daily lives of the Palestinians in a given location (see, for example, testimonies 31-33). Thus, in the name of providing protection for Israeli citizens, the IDF assists settlers to establish their superior status and display Jewish presence in the heart of Palestinian communities – often while putting IDF soldiers at risk. As in other incidents described in these testimonies, the soldiers are enlisted in the interests of promoting the ideological and political aims of the settler movement, and to implement its goal of establishing itself on as much of the occupied territories as possible.

The phenomenon of settler violence is an inevitable consequence of Israel's occupation and policy of settling the West Bank. Were it not for the IDF's continuous control over and presence in the occupied territories, this violence would not be a possibility. Ending the occupation is the only way to bring this violence to a full stop.

TRANSLATORS' NOTE

The testimonies in this booklet, as in all of our previous booklets, were given as part of in-person interviews which were then transcribed and translated. Translation is always in itself a type of commentary. As part of our mission at Breaking the Silence to amplify the voices of soldiers who choose to share their testimonies, we have tried to preserve and remain as faithful as possible to the exact wording used by the testifiers, at times even at the expense of the texts' readability. All of this is done so as not to put words in the testifiers' mouths, to minimize our role as commentators, and to give our readers an unmediated account of what the testifiers told us. For that reason, the texts in this and our other booklets sometimes sound a little unnatural, and reflect the specific tone of the Hebrew language in its spoken form. Where necessary, we've added short explanations in parentheses or as footnotes.

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THE WEST BANK

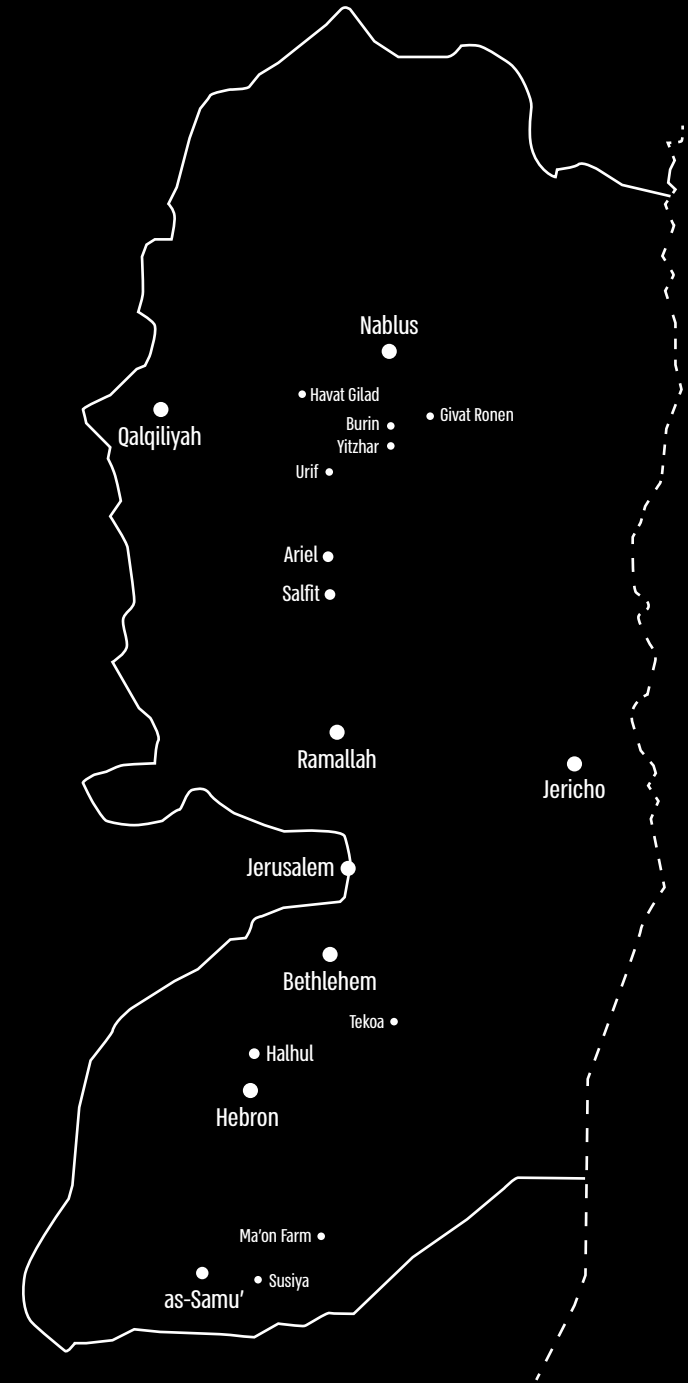




Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz, Activestills

[1]

THEY WERE THIS CLOSE TO HANGING UP HIS PICTURES WITH “WANTED” ON THEM

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Paratroopers Special Forces | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2016

We were [there] during the olive harvest, when Palestinians come to harvest their olives and settlers tend to come and disturb them from harvesting and mess with their agricultural crops and trees.

What’s your role in that situation?

To remove them, like, prevent friction.

Remove who?

The settlers.

And how do you do that?

[You have to] tell them. I have an amazing story from the harvest: there was a harvest, and some guys from Yitzhar came to disturb the people harvesting. The sniper team was called up to get rid of the settlers. The settlers refused to leave and surrounded the team commander, about six of them, and he cocked his weapon in the air. It was like “If you don’t fuck off right now, I’ll put a bullet through you,” to the settlers. They were violent toward him, and I’m pretty sure that one of them punched him in the face. And then that team commander was well-known in Yitzhar, like, they were this close to hanging up his pictures with “Wanted” on them; he was targeted.

The settlers refused to leave and surrounded the team commander, about six of them, and he cocked his weapon in the air. It was like “If you don’t fuck off right now, I’ll put a bullet through you,” to the settlers. They were violent toward him, and I’m pretty sure that one of them punched him in the face.

[2]

IN THE END, WHO ARE YOU GOING TO WANT TO PROTECT?

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Location: Hebron | Period: 2016

Ideally, a soldier isn’t supposed to have an emotional connection, either with the Palestinians or with the Jews who are there (in Hebron). He comes to do a job that really needs separation in order to do it well. In practice, the feeling is that we’re coming to live with them (the Hebron settlers) for six months. Do you understand? Like, we

eat at their houses, and we do Kabbalat Shabbat (a Jewish prayer service held on Friday night). And why does this happen? Like, why? [Because] in the end, who are you going to want to protect? Is the Arab, who you feel – [because of] the demonization – is the reason your life is shit, the one who should be protected? Which is surreal of course, because the situation [is] that because the Jews decided to live there, you’re there. But no. This Arab who’s walking on the street – you have to guard because of him. Are you going to want to protect him, according to your principles, or a person you had Friday night dinner with a second ago? And this person might just be creating a provocation to irritate Arabs, so that [soldiers] come and there’s going to be chaos because of it. But you’ve had Friday night dinner with him, you know him by name. Like, there are 800 people (settlers) there, there are about ten very prominent people there that everyone knows. Like, you know him by name, you had dinner with him two days ago. Who are you going to protect? Even if he’s doing the worst thing in the world, you won’t even know it’s a terrible thing and that’s really the issue.

Ideally, a soldier isn’t supposed to have an emotional connection, either with the Palestinians or with the Jews who are there. He comes to do a job that really needs separation in order to do it well.

[3]

AN ACTUAL JEWISH RIOT STARTS

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal Engineering Unit | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2017

Can you enter to carry out mapping or arrests in a Jewish settlement that’s under your jurisdiction?

No, no, no. The only activity I ever had in Jewish settlements was in Yitzhar. In Yitzhar, they’re, like, wild, they’re hard core hilltop youth. Often, when military forces pass through there, just to get to other villages or something like that, an actual Jewish riot starts. One time, Israelis, Jews, injured the operations officer’s hand.

Why is a Jew who acts violently treated

From your point of view, Jews are the people who bring you food and, like, are nice to you when you’re on patrol, and, like, “thank you so much for protecting us.” When you get to a situation where they’re also throwing stones at you, then it’s suddenly a complex situation, it’s not that simple, like, it’s not that simple to use means (riot dispersal gear) against them. Don’t forget that they’re, like, “our own,” not to be touched.

differently from a Palestinian?

Because one's Jewish and one's Arab. Like, he (the Jew) is in a settlement, a settlement is a place where your job is to protect him, only to protect him, you're the gatekeeper of the settlements and you're, like, the angel who guards the area. From your point of view, Jews are the people who bring you food and, like, are nice to you when you're on patrol, and, like, "thank you so much for protecting us." When you get to a situation where they're also throwing stones at you, then it's suddenly a complex situation, it's not that simple, like, it's not that simple to use means (riot dispersal gear) against them. Don't forget that they're, like, "our own," not to be touched. Like, it would make sense to arrest them, but it's more often the police that does this stuff, it's not like some hilltop youth would be brought into military detention. Arab detainees would come sit in the base's security post and you'd have to guard them, Palestinians, but never Jews, like not that, that wouldn't happen.

In the event that you identify a Jew behaving dangerously, what's your authority as a soldier in the field?

I don't have the authority to do much. There were no clear procedures for this, but I'm sure that if I was in a situation like that, then first, I would call the company commander, of course, and more forces would come. I wasn't in a situation like that, but if I had been, according to how I was trained and the military training I received, I wouldn't try to stop him. I would protect myself, defend myself, if he throws stones at me, then [I would] try and dodge them and try to talk to him.

What would happen if a Palestinian did that?

If a Palestinian did that, suspect arrest procedure right away. Cock the weapon toward him, fire in the air if necessary, call forces immediately.

[4]

SETTLERS THREW A STONE AT HIM

Rank: Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2014

What is a Jewish riot? Do you remember any such story?

It angers them (the settlers) when, say, you try to drive them back to their settlement, so that they'll, like, stop throwing stones at Palestinians. Then suddenly stones are also thrown at border police. There was this story during the period of plowing [season]. The plowing period is just like the olive harvest when you have to guard

Palestinians (from settlers) and it needs to be coordinated with all the areas in which there's friction. One of the officers in the District Coordination Office (DCO) went up to Yitzhar on a Saturday morning. There was plowing on the route leading up to Yitzhar and settlers threw a stone at him. I know that as far as the senior ranks are concerned, that's one of the things that really got on their nerves.

That settlers threw a stone at an officer?

Yes. It broke his car window and was a big deal. It's simply a vehicle that's identified with the Civil Administration so... if you defend Palestinians – then you're not on our side.

How did that story end?

He returned to the DCO, filed a complaint with the police, and that was it.

Throwing a stone on an IDF jeep is something that you encountered in the past year?

By settlers? Yes, it happens a lot to border police jeeps. It simply bothered the DCO officer personally, [hurt] his ego. Somebody else would maybe simply... It's so arbitrary, these things. Maybe if the glass hadn't been smashed and it would've just hit the door then he would've taken it less seriously, he wouldn't have been as angry, it wouldn't have hurt his ego as much.

If you defend Palestinians – then you're not on our side.

Is this the first time you encountered puncturing of the wheels of the brigade commander (the question addresses an incident in which the Samaria brigade commander's car was damaged while he was at a meeting in the settlement of Yitzhar)?

Now it's the second time.

The second time this happened to the same brigade commander?

Yes. The first time was a few months ago. He parked, he was at a meeting with [the leaders] of the settlement. It was something formal. I don't know why nobody guarded his vehicle or something, and they came specifically to [damage] his car.

And the second time?

I think it was the same. He parked, and was at a meeting with the settlement. The thing is that the first time he didn't say anything about it, only the Defense Minister reacted and said it was a disgrace and all sorts of stuff. And he (the Samaria brigade commander) didn't issue a statement, as far as I saw. He continued meeting them, of course. He continued to have cordial relations and didn't want to create friction. I remember another time with a different commander in a unit that also had a stone thrown at them. A snowball of sorts with a stone inside. And it didn't hit them, so he didn't make a big deal out of it. If it had hit the target, it might've reached someone. And that's exactly the issue, it's so arbitrary. The commander decides if he'll report it or not, file a complaint with police or not.



Photo: Michal Hai

[5]

WE REFUSED TO BE THEIR TOOL

Rank: Captain | Location: Nablus | Period: 2014

What were the dynamics like with the settlers?

We had a lot of friction with the Jewish residents there because we refused to be their tool. In a way, we were. Meaning, the [settlers'] regional council Civilian Security Center had the officer's phone number, and this center would send me text messages. I didn't get an order at the time, [but] we understood it was recommended, that information often came from this Civilian Security Center. Now, the problem with this Civilian Security Center was that it sometimes had a lot of fake news, and I'm telling you the company commander and the deputy company commander, the whole battalion was connected to this security center.

I think that as a soldier in the army, you're automatically going to side with the Jew in this story. For you, he's more of a citizen, or more worthy of rights.

What would they write?

On the way up to [the settlement of] Har Bracha, there's this miserable little freshwater spring, and in [the outpost of] Givat Ronen too. So, I could get texts that Palestinians were fighting settlers, and it's always biased towards the settlers – "a group of Palestinians are beating up a Jewish man at the spring." You get there, and there's some 16-year-old [Palestinian] kid who wants to swim, and the settlers are telling him to get lost.

And would you react according to the text messages?

Sure, we would react to it, at least check it out.

Why did you continue if you saw that it was fake news?

I just realized, at some point, to take it with a grain of salt and not say, "this is the be-all and end-all."

When there were altercations between Jews and Palestinians at the spring, what would you do?

I think, generally, we'd kick out the Palestinians who were there. Meaning, we automatically tended towards it being a spring that belongs to Jews, and we had to kick out the Palestinians who went there.

But you're saying Palestinians were allowed to be there?

I'm not absolutely sure about that. I have to tell you that this is also an interesting extrapolation, because, presumably, if it had been spelled out, then I would have remembered it like I remember open-fire regulations, for example.

On the face of it, there's no reason for it to be off-limits to Palestinians, right?

Right, right. It wasn't even inside a settlement; it (the spring) was really on the way up [to the settlement].

So, why, in a situation like this, of friction, is your default position to remove the Palestinians?

Because I think that as a soldier in the army, you're automatically going to side with the Jew in this story. For you, he's more of a citizen, or more worthy of rights. As much as I was personally very critical of it, that's the way it is. The narrative through which we told our story over there [was] that we were watching over the settlers.

So removing the settlers wasn't even an option?

No.

[6]

I WOULD SAY THAT IT ISN'T ETHICAL THAT IT ACCEPTS GIFTS FROM THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Rank: Major | Location: Hebron

The Jewish community [in Hebron] had a clear interest having the army on its side and in its favor. There is a very general atmosphere, set by the leaders of the Jewish community, to hug the soldiers, embrace them and help them. There are all sorts of reasons for this, and I think that part of this is Zionism, and part is the will to give, and a huge part is that they want the soldiers there to feel good about being there and feel positive about the Jewish community. Eventually, you understand that you're on guard there because of them, every soldier knows that he's there because of them, because of the Jewish community. Our mission is to protect the Jewish community, so the Jewish community has a very strong interest to cause identification with the Jewish community. When the IDF is there, I would say that it isn't ethical that it accepts gifts from the Jewish community because that's exactly what can make it not objective in cases when it needs to be objective. I'll give you an example, if a kid from the Jewish community comes and starts beating up a Palestinian, he should be stopped,

If a kid from the Jewish Community comes and starts beating up a Palestinian, he should be stopped, arrested, taken to the police, period. But if that same kid sits with you and you laugh together and he gives you presents, how can you come and arrest him now? It doesn't work.

arrested, taken to the police, period. But if that same kid sits with you and you laugh together and he gives you presents, how can you come and arrest him now? It doesn't work, so in principle, there should be a separation.

They would invite you to dinner and you would go to dinner?

Yes, sure. I ate dinner there a few times. I was hosted.

And when soldiers were invited, you didn't object to them going to dinner?

No. I approved it.

Do you know if there are any limitations or guidelines as to, say, such meetings between soldiers and civilians?

I'm not aware of any limitations.

[7]

THE COMPANY COMMANDER REGULARLY [HAD] SHABBAT DINNER AT THE [HOUSE OF THE] CSC

Rank: First Sergeant | Location: Hebron

The company commander regularly [had] Shabbat dinner at the [house of the] CSC (Civilian Security Coordinator, a settler in charge of the security of the settlement, appointed by the Ministry of Defense), [he's] friends with his wife, friends with the kids. They were really good friends, the two of them. It's all joking around and comradery over there between the company commander and the CSC's family and the CSC himself. It was felt, say, in a situation where the CSC made his own decision, contrary to the commander's decision. It was felt with the settler kids from the 'Red House' (one of the Israeli settlements in Hebron. A combined military base and residential compound for settlers), when we had to do something about them because they threw stones and behaved in a way that would get a Palestinian kid their age arrested on the spot. [The settler children] behaved really inappropriately. I couldn't do anything to them, my hands were tied. Why? Because their parents thought it was okay, and the company commander is friends with their parents so the company commander won't do anything against their parents' will. That's it. It was felt mostly in decision making, which, I knew all along that the settlers and the CSC and Ofer Ohana (a well-known settler in Hebron) himself [who runs] the 'warm home' (a hospitality center providing free refreshments for soldiers, run by the Hebron settler community), that would host the battalion commander, and the company commander, and us, and the officers, of course – that's where the big meetings would take place, of course. And our

officers, as I said, the platoon commander, company commander, deputy company commander, and battalion commander, would often hang out there. Sometimes even just as buddies, like, for fun, eating popcorn, and often, if I remember correctly, there was a room in the back, where they would actually sit for proper meetings. Can I tell you what they talked about? If it was really something security-related? I can't say because I wasn't there, but I assume so. The whole group of settlers, the so-called 'gang', who [I] don't know if intentionally, I don't want to just say something without backing, but [the gang] that was always connected to the company's senior officers, the company and the battalion in charge of Hebron, were very friendly, the platoon commanders, deputy company commander, company commanders, and battalion commander. And it was felt, it was felt [that] we're constrained around them. It was felt as if we were carrying out decisions that they had made sometimes, and not our commanders.

That's where the big meetings would take place, of course. And our officers, as I said, the platoon commander, company commander, deputy company commander, and battalion commander, would often hang out there.

This thing that you keep saying that you're constrained, settler kids throw stones, and you can't do anything to them, all these things, the examples you gave – is that something that you're told? That's what they told you, they gave you some sort of situation where "okay, here's what you do if a settler kid behaves violently"? They told you what to do?

No way, they never talked about it as if the settler kids are alright. "They're a bit naughty", they do silly kid stuff, no one really talked about throwing stones at Palestinian kids, as if that wasn't happening, they don't care about that. When we approached the company commander directly with this problem, including in private meetings and personal conversations, the answer every time was that we should try to stop them, like with other kids who are being silly, or reach out to their parents. [But] the parents thought it was okay, so they said: Let it go, they're kids, a bit of goofing off, and we couldn't stop the kids, we're not allowed to touch them physically, we're not allowed to deal with them. That was unequivocally clear.

Let's offer the other side, the comparison. What do you, as a soldier, know you're supposed to do when you see a Palestinian kid throwing a stone?

Oh, that's clear. I can arrest a Palestinian kid. They (the commanders) never spoke to me about age or anything like that. I can just arrest a Palestinian kid of any age if I see him throw a stone. I never felt that if I used more force or less force, and if the

child was younger or older, and if it was with a piece of cloth over his eyes or without, and if it was this or that type of handcuffs, I never felt that there would be any... that I would be told, "wow, you've done something wrong."

[8]

TO CONSTANTLY REMIND THE SOLDIERS WHOSE SIDE THEY'RE ON

Rank: First Sergeant | Location: Hebron | Period: 2016

Right next to the base there's a religious yeshiva (the 'Shavei Hebron' seminary) and next to it there's the Hebron Chabad emissaries' house, and their mission is to, like, do nice things for soldiers and maintain good relations between the Jewish population and the soldiers – to put it nicely. My interpretation, how I experienced it, to put it less nicely, is [that their mission was] to constantly remind the soldiers whose side they're on. It became apparent in that both on Fridays and on Saturdays, they'd bring us to them for meals, everyone who wasn't on guard duty.

Bring [you] where?

Their house, their second story is like this kind of hall. It's a really big room, and you can fit loads and loads of tables in rows. It's like a real event. Pretty much everyone who's in Hebron comes there, [anyone who is] not at the [guard] post at that moment, comes. Because when you have the [military] cook's food – it's doubtful whether he knows how to cook, and on a Saturday he definitely hasn't got the energy to cook, and he's not allowed to, so he cooks on Friday, and it gets warmed up on Saturday and it's this dry Hamin (a slow-cooked stew traditionally eaten on Saturday) – so in contrast to that, when you're given meat dishes and salads, and everything is in like disposable dishes and you don't have to worry about dishes afterward, and you're given soft drinks and things like that, then regardless of what you believe, of course you're going to go there. Like, because you're already stuck here for 21 [days], [some] people got 28 days at the base, of course you're going to go eat delicious food, that's what keeps you going. And then there, I think that in conversations with them, it feels like they're always trying to remind you that, see, we, like, take care of you, like, be on our side.

Do you remember, like, what they say?

I think they talked about how like we're all Jews, and we have to be [there] for each other. They really emphasized it, the Jewishness, as [being] distinct from the Arabs. There's us, our side, and there's them. Now, there was this incident where a few Jewish kids, seven, eight, were really provoking the Arab kids, and they stole their bikes or something. There were, like, two guys soldiers at the post.

The Jews stole from the Palestinians?

The Jewish community heard about it, and they, like, got on their case, they really took it hard in the sense of, "How can you be on the Arabs' side? We're so here for you, and look how you betray us."

Yes, the Jews stole from the Palestinians and then the soldiers got involved and gave them back the bike like as part of maintaining order in the place. The Jewish community heard about it, and they, like, got on their case, they really took it hard in the sense of, "How can you be on the Arabs' side? We're so here for you, and [look] how you betray us."

Did someone say this to you?

There's this stand where they make coffee for soldiers, Anat's Cafe. And then when they heard about it, they swapped the sugar for salt that day at that stand, on purpose, exactly on that day.

They took revenge on you.

Yes. And it was like, "What are you, children, what are you doing swapping the sugar for salt." We laughed at how pathetic it was, and also – how is that what you're bothered by.

[9]

ONE OF OUR SOLDIERS WAS PUNCHED IN THE FACE

Rank: Captain | Location: Givat Ronen

There was a period there when we turned into the bad guys because during a very big riot that happened there, older people from Burin came up, not just the kids we'd get into fights with daily, and then masked [settlers] from [the outpost of] Givat Ronen ran down to pick a fight with them. We held the settlers off and one of them punched one of our soldiers in the face, we complained about him to the police.

In this case of the complaint that you filed, did you know who the assailant was?

Yes.

Did you see him?

Yes, yes. It all played out right in front of us.

And do you have any idea whether anything was done with it?

In my estimation [it was] just the complaint, in my opinion nothing happened with it later. The soldier who took the punch and some commander went to give testimony at the Ariel police [station], but after that I don't know what happened with it.

Is this conflict with the settlers something you wouldn't usually do?

For me personally, it was important for me to maintain a certain position with the people from Givat Ronen, that I'm here and you're under my responsibility and the area and so on. But I was very tough in relation to any violent or aggressive attempt against my soldiers. Meaning I looked at them with a very very critical eye, specifically the settlers at Givat Ronen. In my interpersonal experience with Palestinians, there isn't anything where I was insulted or angry at a Palestinian ever. By contrast, with the Jews, whom I was there to protect, there were very many instances of friction and things relating to swearing.

When settlers come down from Givat Ronen, what do these settlers do?

Either come to throw stones at them (at Palestinians from Burin) or come pick a fight with them.

And what do you do about it?

We kick the settlers out of there.

What authority do you have when it comes to the settlers?

I have no idea.

You're supposed to be the law in the area, aren't you?

Yes, yes.

So how does a representative of the law get threatened so brazenly?

One of our soldiers was punched in the face, they left him with a black eye.

They really threaten and physically hurt representatives of the law and you don't actually do anything, how can that be?

I think the brigade commanders in the Judea and Samaria Area are figures who really become part of the community. They ultimately determine the level of pressure that's put on settlers there [according to] how much the brigade commander goes along with the settlers' vibe, or how much he doesn't go along with them. I think I was [there] at a time when, relatively speaking, there was this dynamic that tried to maintain the status quo, to not go head to head with them (with the settlers), but also didn't go along with them too much. I think there just wasn't anything official from the battalion or the brigade in relation to the settlers. I personally went once to someone in [the settlement of] Har Brakha, knocked on his door and told him, "Hello, I'm the deputy company commander here, I'm hearing from my soldiers that you're threatening and badmouthing soldiers here, I'm asking you to stop it, otherwise you'll have me to deal with." And that was it, I never heard from him since.

In what situation did he threaten soldiers?

Say a soldier is in a static post in Har Brakha, [he] comes and rants at him and swears at him, threatens him and all kinds of stuff like that.

I think the brigade commanders in the Judea and Samaria Area are figures who really become part of the community.

[10]

I JUST SAW THE VIOLENCE

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 932nd Battalion | Location: Hebron | Period: 2018

We were once on patrol and I think it was Rosh Hashanah, it was packed there. There's a [Palestinian] boy with only one hand [and he lives] on the path to the Tomb of the

Patriarchs from the Jewish neighborhood. And there was a boy, also 14 years old I think, who was talking to Yusuf (the Palestinian boy).

A settler kid?

Yes. A settler kid but not at all from Hebron, he was like visiting someone. He suddenly punched Yusuf in the face and I didn't know what had happened, I just saw the violence and we ran to him. But he ran away to Beit Rachel and [Beit] Leah (a Palestinian house in Hebron which was taken over by settlers in 2018) and we didn't enter the house. The police arrived and they didn't either, no one entered Beit Rachel and [Beit] Leah, [only] the settlers did. We knew he was there because he wasn't anywhere else.

Then why didn't you enter?

I don't know, I don't know what happened. I was also annoyed there because I saw that Yusuf hadn't done anything. Suddenly I saw a punch to the face, there was blood, my company commander arrives and the police arrive... I think they have a post close to the Tomb of the Patriarchs so it wasn't much time. I see it as like a law, he (the settler boy) did something wrong but I don't think that everyone wanted to catch him.

Why do you think they didn't want to?

I think that he was close to the post and close to someone who was with me in the company, and I think that if they had wanted to catch the kid, they could have.

The soldiers?

Yes. I saw the boy enter a house, I didn't see the police enter the house. I also saw the boy walking around the next day.

If the situation were reversed, say a 14-year-old Palestinian boy punches a Jewish boy, how do you think the incident would have unfolded based on your experience?

You already know... He's automatically arrested. Within a second two soldiers jump on him and...

Arrest him?

Yes, of course.

I didn't know what had happened, I just saw the violence and we ran to him. But he ran away to Beit Rachel and Beit Leah and we didn't enter the house.

[11]

TWO OR THREE HOUSES WOULD CONSTANTLY GET HIT BY THESE STONES

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Egoz Reconnaissance Unit | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2015

[The settlement of] Yitzhar sits on a hill, on a hilltop, a very high hill. Under which there was a village and a valley extending outward. The kids (from the settlement of Yitzhar)

would play with this slingshot that they make, get from somewhere. And they'd always go farther down, approaching the valley, to a distance where they can reach the first houses. They would turn the slingshot and throw the stones at the first houses, until people in the village actually woke up, and then [they would] go back.

And then what happens, what makes them turn back?

I don't want to say without knowing for sure. I remember there had already been a story where things had got intense and they (the Palestinians) had already come out to retaliate. There was always this fear that the village would go crazy in the end and catch the kids.

They came to retaliate from the village, the Palestinians?

Yes. [But] in the end there was no retaliation, and the kids keep doing it on a daily basis as a kind of game, all the friends go together with a slingshot. Whoever gets the farthest. Like that. And then, each time, the scouts would identify the children, or one of us who was constantly watching the area, would identify the kids and say, there are kids, there are always a few [soldiers] on call, [they] would quickly throw on the vest, start chasing the kids. Obviously we wouldn't catch them because they're little kids, and they immediately go between their friends' houses and then good luck getting them out of there.

And they'd always go farther down, approaching the valley, to a distance where they can reach the first houses. They would turn the slingshot and throw the stones at the first houses, until people in the village actually woke up, and then they would go back.

What's the distance between Yitzhar and village, more or less?

A few hundred meters. In my opinion, most times [the kids] wouldn't even get [to the village], but sometimes they'd approach and get very close [to the village], [throw stones] at cars, a row of houses, two or three houses would constantly get hit by these stones.

And the dynamic is, essentially, that they (the kids) go down, you get the report and then the moment you start heading towards them, they run away?

Exactly.

So how come they're not caught? Because they run to Yitzhar, right?

Right.

So, you come from Yitzhar and they're farther away.

Yitzhar has a valley. We're at the edge of the valley. There's a distance between us and Yitzhar. We're exactly between the village and Yitzhar. The village is below, and we're elevated. They (kids from Yitzhar) come kind of between us, throw [stones] at them, and we run and try to catch them, and they, in a second, sometimes we'd try hiding in-between, all these games and... It didn't work.

And if you did catch them, what could you do to them?

That's just it, that according to the arrangement, [we'd] catch them and report on the two-way radio that we caught them and then the Shin Bet (Shin Bet Security Service) would come or something. We were told the objective is to catch them.

And were you told anything about your powers, are you allowed to handcuff them?

Nothing, we were told clearly: You're not allowed to cause them pain, we were told: If you approach, if you, if it's either catching them and knocking them down on the ground or letting them run away – then let them run away.

Was that specifically about the kids or in general?

Specifically for this area.

[12]

THERE WAS A PERIOD WHEN THEY WOULD THROW STONES FROM THE MOUNTAIN ON CARS PASSING BY

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Armored Corps, 188 Brigade, 71st Battalion | Area: Nablus | Period: 2012

Tell me, were there any 'price tag' incidents (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds. On a number of occasions they have included murder) when you were there?

Near [the settlement of] Yitzhar, there was a period when they would throw stones from the mountain on cars passing by.

From Huwara?

On the road that goes to Jitt.

There's something called the Huwara corridor over there, do you remember it? It's as you enter Huwara.

Yes, a road with a row of shops – before the shops. Right before the shops, right next to Yitzhar, right from Yitzhar. It was right from there, Yitzhar is on this hill and there's a road, and they would throw stones at military cars or...

Military?

It was a period where they were going to be evicted from Havat Gilad, that was like the period when we were there, when the Border Police had to go evacuate them and demolish houses. And then they started, like it was an interesting deployment. It all started and we're chummy, we're friendly with them, and they're bringing us food.

You're speaking generally.

Suddenly they throw stones at a Border Police vehicle, stones at a vehicle they thought was a Palestinian vehicle, an Israeli civilian's vehicle, an Israeli civilian's vehicle if I'm not mistaken.

Yes, and we know their names and sometimes we sit with them when they play the guitar to have a cigarette. And we keep going, a month goes by, two months go by and they're supposed to be evacuated, they're not as nice anymore, suddenly [they throw] stones at a Border Police vehicle, stones at a vehicle they thought was a Palestinian vehicle and it hit a civilian vehicle, an Israeli civilian's vehicle if I'm not mistaken.

In Yitzhar?

I think that was Havat Gilad, I can't say for sure if it was Havat Gilad or Yitzhar, but I think it was Havat Gilad.

So what happens from your perspective? How do you manage an incident like that?

I never managed this kind of incident, you wouldn't do very much, you really wouldn't.

As a soldier, are you allowed to arrest a settler?

I never ever did that, nor was I part of it when it happened.

Did anyone ever address it, whether positively or negatively?

Among us, among the guys, it was like, we wish we could arrest them, but it's not... I remember I would go home and unload on my parents, how do they not get arrested. And it wasn't like...

What I'm asking [is], was it even an option as far as you were concerned?

I don't remember any talk about it being necessary, about us having to go arrest them. No, not at all.

It's a theoretical question because you say you never were in this kind of situation. But say you have to, you see a settler from Yitzhar throwing stones at the road, [then] what?

Say, call it the battle between Yitzhar and Burin (the testifier is referring to a previous section of his testimony, in which he describes a fight in which settlers from Yitzhar went to Burin to assault Palestinians), it's not... We could have arrested them and we didn't arrest them. We didn't arrest anyone there.

Could you, were you allowed to? Not were you were able to physically, were you allowed to, that's what I'm asking.

I don't remember it being an option, that's the thing. I don't know if it was allowed or not, but I don't remember it being an option.

[13]

IT'S THAT UGLY AND THAT SIMPLE

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Salfit | Period: 2013

In cases that you monitored following a 'price tag' incident, how long did it take until

forces arrived at the scene?

I believe it was a matter of minutes, literally, very few minutes. I don't remember that it took more time than other incidents.

What do you mean by other incidents?

Any incident of rock throwing, it doesn't matter by whom, forces really arrived quickly, quite quickly. The thing is what you do in order to prevent [the incident] and that's a different matter. In this case there's a difference between incidents [by] Jews or incidents by Palestinians.

What's the difference?

I think there was an event or two in which the operations officer told me that the settlers were caught and simply released. I remember at least one time when the operations officer said: listen, my opinions are right wing, but I think this is really wrong, what happened. That the army caught settlers who undoubtedly threw rocks, or whatever it was, and simply released them, in contrast to the Arabs who are caught and arrested or taken into custody. At that time he said it about a few other cases, that generally there's this norm of sorts that the moment you catch settlers, you scold them and release them.

Do you have any idea why they're released? Did the DCO (District Coordination Office) ever try to find out why it happens?

I don't recall any specific case in which the DCO complained to the brigade about settlers not also being arrested. In my opinion that's already connected to the political situation, that the IDF identifies with the Jews [settlers] and the soldiers on the ground, despite there being procedures that they must behave exactly the same way toward both sides, so what can we do, the soldiers are Jews who, from their point of view, protect the Jewish settlers and there's no equal decree for Jews and Arabs. It's that ugly and that simple, that is to say...

Are soldiers allowed to detain settlers?

Of course. They're supposed to detain them if they do something like that, like throwing stones and breaking the window of a Palestinian's home. According to the orders, the army should arrest these settlers.

From what you know, do soldiers know that's their duty?

For me, it's not obvious that the soldiers know these are the orders. Maybe they do, maybe they don't, because I didn't see it on the ground, that's clear. I don't know if it's because they received the orders and on the ground something else happens, or if the orders didn't make it down to them in the first place.

the IDF identifies with the Jews [settlers] and the soldiers on the ground, despite there being procedures that they must behave exactly the same way toward both sides.



Photo: Tag Meir

[14]

THEY SIMPLY WANTED TO CAUSE A COMMOTION ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN BEING ALLOWED TO OPEN HIS STORE THERE

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal Engineering Unit | Location: Hebron | Period: 2015

Those times that they [the settlers in Hebron] come and talk to you and are nice to you and offer you food and drink and invite you over, that's when you feel the hypocrisy issue. On the one hand they offer you food and drink and show you how much they care about you and how grateful they are, but the moment you get in their way, they won't give a damn about you, and they'll push you, "Don't get in my way."

Did you encounter such cases?

Yes, near the Tomb [of the Patriarchs] there are many Arab stores that have been closed since the Intifada. Once, they were open, and today they're not allowed to open them. And a group of adult settlers, 30, 40 or older, simply set up a plastic table with food and drink. They simply sat opposite an Arab store that was allowed to open, and waited there. At first I didn't understand what the story was there, they're sitting with a plastic table with food and drink, and they offered us food, and were really nice and talked to us. I didn't understand that they were having a demonstration in front of the store. The moment the Palestinian came and opened his store, they began to riot, began to attack. We tried to stop them and they pushed a Givati soldier to the ground. One of the soldiers tried to use his body to stop one of the settlers, whom we had been talking to about three minutes earlier, and we had a really good conversation, and it was nice, and we smiled and talked amicably, and suddenly he [the settler] had an aggressive expression: get out of here, don't get in my way.

What did they want?

They simply wanted to cause a commotion about the Palestinian being allowed to open his store there. There were also babies there, and pregnant settler women.

What did you do about it?

We tried to stop the riot. After that, the Givati platoon commander sort of quipped: they always do that, bring babies and pregnant women, to make it harder for us to deal with them so that we won't apply too much force. They always use that filthy trick. That's what he said.

They always do that, bring babies and pregnant women, to make it harder for us to deal with them so that we won't apply too much force. They always use that filthy trick. That's what he said.

So how are you supposed to handle such an incident? You now see the settlers attacking the Palestinian storeowner – what are you supposed to do in such a situation?

Listen, when there's an officer [there] and a company commander as well, he naturally wants us to try and stop it, not to let it happen.

In this case how did you try to stop it?

We simply blocked them with our bodies, nothing more than that, because ultimately the soldiers are afraid because these settlers come to you all the time and say: I'll submit a complaint about you, you're not allowed to touch me. Stuff like that. And the army says so as well. You're told such things in briefings before heading out for patrols or guard duty. Usually the company commander wants you to try and prevent things like that but tells you: be careful, there are these limitations.

And how do you feel in such a situation?

You're mostly angry with them. I come and protect you and risk my life, I do hard work, dirty work, all in order to protect you, and there's this enormous crazy apparatus here with many resources just to protect a handful of people, and they do whatever they want. So you're irritated both by the level of hypocrisy and the fact that they don't give a damn about you.

[15]

THERE WAS NEVER ANY POLICE, MILITARY ATTEMPT TO DO SOMETHING THAT WOULD PREVENT IT

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Civil Administration | Area: Salfit | Period: 2013

Were there any 'price tag' incidents (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds.

On a number of occasions they have included murder) in the area?

Yes. I don't remember all the places where it happened. Here and there we'd get a phone call from the brigade, there's been a 'price tag' [attack], meaning at the very least [the words] 'price tag' had been graffitied in such and such a place. [There was also] a Palestinian resident who had land in the vicinity of Salfit. Settlers were always going down and throwing stones at his house, and later the IDF would also go down there, as well as our representative (a representative of the local District Coordination Office, the Civil Administration's offices operating in the occupied territories), who'd see that there were broken windows there and all sorts of things

like that. Now, this happened a number of times to this same Palestinian. So, if you characterize 'price tag' [attacks] as some kind of activity, a riot by settlers, then certainly. Also cutting down olive trees in all sorts of places wasn't so rare.

In this case near Salfit which happened several times. Was there any kind of action to prevent this recurrence?

Not as far as I remember. Essentially – how do you hear about an incident for the first time? From the Palestinian side, not from the brigade. The Palestinian [resident], either he calls the Palestinian DCO and tells them, I'm being attacked, and then the Palestinian DCO tells the [IDF's DCO liaison] officer who he's in touch with, and then he calls [the DCO operations room], who tells the brigade. That's the chain.

How long does this process take?

Very little time, I think. I think it could take two to three minutes to reach the DCO operations] room from the moment it happens. The operations room tells the brigade and they (the brigade) have to send the forces there. By the way, they always sent the forces. But what did happen was that when the forces arrived there, as far as I know, and this was true generally – a chase after the settlers, an attempt to arrest the settlers, an attempt to see who it was so it doesn't repeat – that never happened. Meaning there was never any police, military attempt to do something that would prevent it from happening again.

What does attempt mean? What can be done?

Checking the findings on the ground, and you can sweep the area for example and see if you can catch someone. Often a force that isn't too far away is called up or if the site isn't far from the battalion then you can call up a civilian emergency response team from somewhere that's really close by. It's possible, in my opinion at least, to try to catch the people who did it, and I know this from the fact that when there were opposite cases, where Palestinians threw stones etc., then much more effort was put in, they swept the area for very many hours, a force stayed behind to see if there was something suspicious [such as] people going back there. When the Palestinians did something like that, then there was much more of an effort to catch them, and when it was settlers, then a force would go see what happened here, report to the brigade: Okay, we have a house here with a broken window and so on and so forth, and leave after a while.

Settlers were always going down and throwing stones at his house, and later the IDF would also go down there, as well as our representative, who'd see that there were broken windows there and all sorts of things like that. Now, this happened a number of times to this same Palestinian.

[16]

A CHABADNIK IS STANDING WITH ME IN THE PILLBOX

Rank: Lieutenant | Unit: Kfir, Nachshon Battalion | Area: Salfit

We were in a pillbox (a small, concrete, cylindrical post used for guarding and observation) during Hanukkah above [the settlement of] Ariel, there's an awful pillbox there; it sits on the highest hilltop in the area, it's bitter cold, and at some point, we were three soldiers [there], me and two other soldiers. It's Hanukkah, in short, a Chabadnik (of the Chabad Hasidic movement) car arrives, I'm upstairs and I see it coming. Now there's a lock on the door. One of the soldiers must have opened it, and let them into the post and they entered and at some point, they come up to me at the post. A Chabadnik is standing with me in the pillbox, giving me donuts. Now, like, on the face of it, nice, cool, lovely, but come on now, [this is the] army. You don't enter and walk around here wherever you want. There are weapons, there's classified equipment, I don't know, there's all sorts of shit going on there.

So here I want to ask, did it seem wrong to you? The fact is they entered.

Yes, it seemed wrong, and it was explicitly forbidden. Like, in terms of the instructions for the area, they were forbidden from entering.

What are the guidelines? Whose guidelines?

The company commander, who received them from the battalion commander.

The company commander said: You don't take things from settlers?

No, that's a general IDF guideline, don't take anything from anyone.

No, but where did you hear it?

Pre-deployment training guidelines. During pre-deployment training all soldiers are told this briefing: don't accept gifts from settlers and definitely don't accept gifts from Palestinians.

Is food a gift?

Yes. It came with... Like, what were we told? They explained something about settlers to us, for example, that if we stood at the junction, for example, Ariel Junction. We would stand there because this was when the stabbings were happening and we would stand there at [bus] stations so they [the Palestinians] wouldn't stab. And then we were told: If a person comes, [he had] bought food from a restaurant – that's what they do, they actually arrive with takeout

If someone brings you something tasty now, and comes a few days later and you have to detain him or tell him to stay back or something, you're suddenly in a situation where you feel uncomfortable telling him: Listen, get the hell out of here because you're not allowed to be here.

food from "Ad Haetzem" (a restaurant), or – don't say "no" to them, that's not cool. It's impolite. But if they come and say this and that to you, say: No thank you, we have that.

Wait, now a man with a pot of hamin (a traditional Jewish stew) that his wife made [comes and says]: Take it. Would you take it?

We'd take it.

So when wouldn't you take [things]? What if he said: Do you want me to go bring you a pizza from... now?

And that happens a lot and all sorts of things that aren't food, [you] certainly don't take, like, [you] say thank you very much but no. But yes, it's a very complicated situation, in the end, a person comes and brings you food, what will you say to him, no?

And why is all that?

Because if someone brings you something tasty now, and comes a few days later and you have to detain him or tell him to stay back or something, you're suddenly in a situation where you feel uncomfortable telling him: Listen, get the hell out of here because you're not allowed to be here. That's exactly what happened with those Chabadniks. They came with donuts, what could we tell them: Leave? In the end we told them: Leave. Like: Listen, thanks very much, but you can't be here at the post.

Did they leave the donuts?

They left the donuts. Of course.

[17]

THE JEWS WOULD HARASS THE ARABS

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Maglan Reconnaissance Unit | Area: Hebron

There's a pool, which for certain hours [is] for Jews and for certain hours for Arabs. There, the Jews would harass the Arabs [even] more. They would come during the Arabs' hours, steal their clothes. There's a line that I'm not allowed to let the Arabs cross, so the Jews, the moment some Arab crosses, I have to go there, make him (the Arab) leave, tell him, "Get out of here." They're usually obedient about this because they know they're really not allowed.

Do you see the Jews stealing the Arabs' clothes?

You don't see it. The pool is over there so they run to you and he's about to cross the line, like a three-year-old kid, and then you have to come, to stop him: "You can't come in here." And then they tell you, "My clothes have been stolen," and I

can't do anything about it because they (the settlers) are not wearing their (the Palestinians') clothes, they've put it somewhere. Like a preschool teacher.

Does the Palestinian come over naked?

With a bathing suit on.

[18]

IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE COMPANY COMMANDER HAD NO SAY AGAINST THE SETTLERS

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Area: Hebron | Period: 2016

What do the relations between the soldiers and the settlers in Hebron look like in your experience?

In my platoon, I think that a lot of guys, there was a lot of awareness of right and wrong. I think, the relations... It came from a few different places, it came first of all and prior to anything else from the attitude they displayed toward the Palestinians, whether it was the [settlers'] children who would throw stones at Palestinians near the 'Red House' (one of the Israeli settlements in Hebron that is a combined military base and residential compound for settlers), and their parents who don't care. First example. [Or] whether it was how settlers would intervene in events, in [operational] call-ups, in [Palestinian] terrorist attacks, in all kinds of things that happen, intervene and try to change the reality that our officers decide [on], that's second. And third, one of the things that we were really angry about, [was] that settlers determine the policy on the ground; what does determine policy on the ground mean? For example – settlers from the Red House, I'll give [an explanation] here for those who of course don't know, on Fridays and weekends and holidays, you take the whole of the Zion Route,¹ which connects [the settlement of] Kiryat Arba to Hebron and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and you 'sleeve' it – that's what it's called in the military slang – with loads and loads of soldiers, usually in basic training, so that the settlers from Kiryat Arba can walk on the Zion Route without any Palestinian cars, they're not allowed [to drive], like with confidence that Palestinians won't hurt them, all the way to the Tomb of the Patriarchs below. So very very significant manpower is invested so that they (the settlers) have this sleeve every weekend. The Red House settlers weren't satisfied with walking on the Zion Route, like everyone else, they decided that they want to walk

The desire is to stop Palestinians from doing particular things. And that will simply isn't there when it comes to settlers.

to the Tomb of the Patriarchs through a Palestinian neighborhood, which means what? That every Friday, the front command squad, sometimes the front command squad couldn't, so then it was the Red House civilian emergency response team; of course, there's no need to say, soldiers who hardly get any sleep, barely three hours per day, would have to come and escort a bunch of settlers, with ### at the lead, and the rest of the Red House residents, sometimes they brought friends and family from outside Hebron, and their settler children – and walk through the Palestinian neighborhood, of course provoking [people], even if they didn't say anything, of course [it's] provocation, a crowd of settlers and soldiers walking into the Palestinian neighborhood, there's no doubt this is serious provocation. Every time on a Friday [we had to] take them down to the prayers and bring them back home from the prayers. Why? There's no reason, purely to make their presence felt in the Palestinian neighborhood, they have a whole sleeve that exists especially for them, they brought guys in basic training to stay the weekend so that [the settlers occupying the Red House] can go down to the Tomb like everyone else. Why do we do it? Because that's their request and it's – not because it's a request, because that's what they've decided. And I remember that none of the settlers told us this explicitly, but we knew with certainty that from their perspective their attitude was "Don't come with us, we don't need you, we have pistols, I don't need a soldier to protect me." This kind of contempt. They didn't really believe that we were a serious security force. "We're going, do what you want." It was a very clear feeling and understanding that we weren't deciding whether the settlers would pass through the Palestinian neighborhood, it's a really stupid decision and really bad in security terms too; they decide they were going – "if you want to, escort us, and if you don't – don't escort us." And it was clear that the company commander had no say against the settlers, it was clear that there wasn't anything he could say to them. If they've decided they're walking through this neighborhood, then they are. It was clear to me that no officer would go and tell them: Listen, I don't have the manpower [needed] for this, it doesn't make sense, it's not operationally [sound], and it's not safe, don't do it. You have the regular route that everyone has. It was clear this wasn't going to happen.

I don't understand, I'm the IDF, I control Hebron, [so] there are rules. Does this mean that if a Palestinian decides to walk wherever he wants, the IDF will let him?
No.

Meaning, you have the ability to stop people from doing things.

Absolutely. The ability is there, [but] the desire is to stop Palestinians from doing particular things. And that will simply isn't there when it comes to settlers. What brings this about, is the chumminess and the reciprocity, the fact that the deputy

company commander and the company commander and all the top brass in the battalion are friends of the settlers in Hebron. That's just undoubtedly what brings this about, it was clear to us that he (the commanding officer) has dinner with him (the settler) on Friday evening and a second before that would he tell him: Listen–; an hour before he comes to his place, Friday dinner, and to play with his children, would he tell him: Listen, you're not going [down there], we're not bringing you a force and you're not going down through the Palestinian neighborhood. It's clear to me that that's not going to happen.

1. Since 2000, Palestinian vehicles have been prohibited from driving on this road. Following a petition to the Supreme Court, in 2011 the IDF decided to implement a number of 'humanitarian relief measures', including opening the Zion Route to Palestinian residents who live on the road, have passed extensive background checks and who hold an Israeli mechanical license and have bought insurance from a recognized provider. As of 2021, around 70 vehicles hold this permit.

[19]

WHAT, YOU'VE COME HERE TO PROTECT THE ARABS?

Rank: Captain | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Location: Givat Ronen | Period: 2012

In terms of the atmosphere in Givat Ronen generally, it was a settlement where they were relatively very cold, the adults, toward the soldiers. Like, you didn't have many "Warm Corners" (coffee stations run by settlers offering free snacks and refreshments to soldiers) and things like that. They let us sit in the synagogue and drink coffee for example, but we were never invited to meals and things like that.

How many [people] live there roughly?

I'm not sure, 20 trailers max. Now, in terms of the atmosphere there, those who talk to you mostly are the children. It's a window into [understanding] how the children there treat... What they receive, what they hear. None of the kids there say they're willing to go to the army. They all want to serve in [King] David's army. From their perspective the IDF is the Arab Defense Force and that's how they view the IDF acronym and that's [also] their attitude toward you all the time. Now, the kids were curious all the time and they're sweet so they come and talk to you and that, but their vibe is always like "What, you've come here to protect the Arabs? You've come to bother us? We don't need you here, we believe in David, we're David's army." That's it.

In situations where settlers [from Givat Ronen] head down towards Burin (an Arab village), you as a soldier, is there anything you can do other than calling the police?

You can go and confront them. Meaning, the confrontation with them won't be using riot dispersal means and it obviously won't be firearms and it won't get to the point of physically holding them, unless we do see something very severe. But usually you see them walking [towards the village of Burin] and you walk over to them and you start arguing with them. Also in the end they usually, unless some incident has occurred, they don't head down during daylight. Like, the hilltop youth don't head down during daylight hours to do their activity in Burin.

No, not 'price tag' attacks (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds. On a number of occasions they have included murder), but throwing stones.

Yes, so it's "the opportunistic" [incidents] that happen. I imagine it stems mostly from boredom and from like you know, they have nothing better to do, so come on, let's go make life a little miserable in Burin. So if they can just fight with you instead of fighting with Burin then they'll fight with you. I mean, you've already come there, stood right in front of their faces, they're not going to pass by you and go. They'll tell you: What do you want? They deserve it, you don't know what they've done, you don't know what went on here, you don't know...

The confrontation with them won't be using riot dispersal means and it obviously won't be firearms and it won't get to the point of physically holding them.

The question is whether it will stop the stone throwing. It's just that, I'm asking because there are lots of videos that come out all the time of soldiers standing there next to the settlers who are throwing stones and I assume, like...

We knew that we have to be proactive. You have to be proactive for it not to happen. If you just stand there then they'll just go past and go and throw [stones]. If you tell them: Guys, no, don't do it, I'm calling the police. Don't come through here, I don't want [you to], you can't keep approaching [over] there, then they'll argue with you and they won't throw stones. If they're very determined to throw stones, you'll be faced with a problem. Meaning, you don't have many tools to do [anything]. You can try to restrain them physically and... You don't know where it will lead.

How long does it take until the police arrives?

In our case, we didn't have, like, excessively unusual events that I remember. Usually they arrived fast enough for me not to have to restrain anyone myself in this manner. And also many times, you know, the moment they've heard you go on the two-way radio, then they stop and they leave.

[20]

HE'S A LIAR, A PALESTINIAN, HE'S A CHEAT

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Location: Hebron | Period: 2016

I have a story about the 'Red House' (one of the Israeli settlements in Hebron. A combined military base and residential compound for settlers) that was one of the toughest because it was more... Well, you'll understand from the story. I remember that me and the other guy went to stand at the Red Post (a checkpoint adjacent to the 'Red House'). When we arrived there was already some kind of chaos with the pair we were coming to relieve, there was like something going on there, a Palestinian, there was a dwarf Palestinian, I don't know if you know the stories, but it's a dwarf Palestinian. There are two Palestinian dwarfs who are allowed to pass through the Givat Avot checkpoint with this mobility scooter of theirs. So one of them is allowed to get to that point with his mobility scooter. He gets there, and there were lots of settlers there, mostly kids from the Red House, and this pair of soldiers we came to replace. There was some kind of incident, something had happened and there was a commotion and we were coming into this incident. The soldiers we replaced vaguely filled us in because they really wanted to leave and go rest, they told us: Listen, there's a donkey here, the settler children claim it's theirs, and the Palestinian claims that they stole it from him and that it's his donkey. Okay. They went to sleep and we were left with the situation, a complete mess. The dwarf Palestinian has relatively decent Hebrew, [he] explained to us what was going on. The settler kids naturally said: This is our donkey, he's a liar, a Palestinian, he's a cheat, and all sorts of swearing of course, that he should get out of here, why are you defending him, things like that. I remember that one of the settler kids' mothers joined them and told me: Are you the Israeli Defense Forces or Palestinian Defense Forces? You're supposed to protect us, why are you even listening to him, he's not one of your people, you're supposed to protect your people, that's your job here. And we, like, tried to stop the commotion, we realized that we weren't succeeding, we called our officer on the two-way radio. He got here, and I said that, like, all of us, we just want things to be quiet, that we'll try for a second to understand what's right, and try to resolve the problem somehow. He arrived, wasn't really interested, of course he was of the 'crew', one of the friends of ### (a well-known settler from the

He has no police to turn to, he doesn't have the basic rights of a citizen because he's not a citizen of anywhere or anything. That's it, it was a really sad case.

Red House), one of the friends of the settlers of the Red House. So he, like tried to resolve it, listened to the Palestinian for one second, mostly listened to the settlers and then said: Okay, listen, just tell him to call the police or I don't know, he should get out of here, quick. We're standing there like, unsure what to do, like, what do you mean 'quick'? The Palestinian here, he's here saying that his donkey was stolen. What am I going to tell him: Go? It's your problem? And also this kind of thinking of like "I'm the military and I'm here, who am I protecting here and what does it mean to protect, what am I supposed to be doing? After all, most of the things I do are like [the job of] a police officer but if something criminal happens, and I'm not a police officer, what can I do about it? I don't know." So we told him, the Palestinian: There is a police [station] in Givat Avot, maybe go to a police station, tell them? Then I remember that he told us, and only then the penny dropped for me. Until then I said: It's the police, what, [of course] they settle [conflicts] between civilians. Then he said to me: Why? This police has never helped, do you know how many times I requested their help? They just take my request and then I don't hear anything, they're not interested, I remember he actually said that, he had good Hebrew. And then the penny dropped for me and for the guy who was with me at the post, that, like, he had no one to turn to. He also told me this, that he has no police to turn to, he doesn't have the basic rights of a citizen because he's not a citizen of anywhere or anything. That's it, it was a really sad case. In the end he just he had to go, after a really long time we simply told him: There's nothing we can do. Also, the officer arrived again, and again ### (the well-known settler from the Red House) came down, the settler. Ultimately he (the Palestinian) just gave up and left because, like, he couldn't bring about justice with the help of anybody or [anyone in] the entire command – when I say command, again, it's both the settlers and my commanding officers – it didn't occur to him (the officer), he wasn't really interested in hearing too much from him. [The command] was simply of the opinion that, okay, let them be, it's their donkey, the settler kids', and go away. That's it. I just remember [it] as a story that drove me crazy, more than the donkey, the realization that a Palestinian simply has no one to turn to because he's simply not a citizen of anywhere and just the most basic human rights that a human has, like us here in the country – he doesn't have. And that was a feeling, I don't know, it was a difficult feeling. Like, I entered his body and felt, like I'm being bound and I simply have no one to tell the truth to, I have no one to turn to, I have no one to talk to. And the other (the settlers) will always win, like, a kind of struggle that they (the Palestinians) will always lose, no matter [what].

[21]

YOU'LL HAVE TO BE UNDERSTANDING IF JEWS SHOW THEIR FRUSTRATION HERE IN THE COMING DAYSRank: First Sergeant | Unit: Armored Corps, 7th Brigade, 82nd Battalion | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2012

Wow, the settlers, that was completely unreal. That's something I really remember, and it really scarred me. A Jew was murdered in Huwara. I remember that after that, there were some 'price tag' incidents (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds. On a number of occasions they have included murder), there were, like, some things that the Jews did. Then she actually came to us at the base and spoke with us, and we all sat and listened to her, even the officer.

Who is "she"?

Some woman from Yitzhar. She actually came, and I remember we actually sat down, we listened to her. She said "Listen, this incident happened that's really, it's unthinkable. You'll have to be understanding if Jews show their frustration here in the coming days." Like, that, I really remember. And I was, I like, died, I don't know what. [I wanted] to hit her in the head with the butt of my rifle or something so that she'd get the hell out of there, really. Like, somehow it always feels to me as if the Jews [there] make much more of a mess.

Explain.

Aside from the fact that first of all, they came to the base, like, twice and knocked over the chemical [toilets], knocked down the tent. That happened about once or twice. And there's a sense that the Jews, because they know that no one would ever really do anything to them, allow themselves to do much more than the Arabs. So there might be fewer incidents where Jews have confrontations with Palestinians, but when there's a confrontation with Jews, it's always more significant. If Jews are involved in something like we said, arson or something, it always ends in more significant incidents, because then the military gets, like, entangled.

What's the entanglement?

What's the entanglement? That you, there are Jews that you're allegedly supposed to protect. But in practice, the Jews started this wrong thing, but now the Palestinians are heading out and you as an army, you're totally programmed that you need to drive the Palestinians back into the village, and you need to, like, speak to the Jews

You're totally programmed that you need to drive the Palestinians back into the village, and you need to, like, speak to the Jews nicely, politely ask them to go back.

nicely, politely ask them to go back. And the guys in Yitzhar are really difficult guys, it's truly the bottom of the right-wing [barrel] in Israel. It's all kinds of guys who came to the yeshiva, who came from broken families, I don't know, and they're also people with a very violent character who also have extreme opinions. And that's it, when it comes to such cases with them, even though they're really dangerous people, you treat them more gently because they're, like, the ones you're supposed to protect.

What's your authority in the event that you see a settler behaving violently? Like, as someone who's supposed to maintain order? Do you know?

I don't know if we had authority. Maybe we had authority and we weren't informed of it. I don't remember there being a settler arrest or anything.

Do you know if you were allowed to, say, arrest a settler?

Truthfully, no. I know we were allowed [to arrest] Palestinians, as for Jews I don't know. Jews I don't remember.

How do you explain that? You say that Yitzhar is a place that is well known, and you, it also sounds like you experienced many of these violent incidents, sometimes against you, sometimes against Palestinians. How can it actually be that you don't know what your authority is regarding settlers? It was like something you needed [to do] many times.

All the time. I – my feeling was that the army was constantly really scared to mess with the settlers. That it wasn't even an option to bring them to any kind of justice, or try to [think] how you prevent this thing next time. Like, with the Palestinians there was always this thought that "if they [do] that [riot], then we'll deter them." But the Jews, because it's a messed up situation, and they're also citizens of the State of Israel, but on the other hand they're really the ones who cause, I don't want to say all the problems – the Palestinians were also involved in things – I'll be fair, but I'll also say that the Jews cause many problems within that. And like, it feels as if you have two monsters in the room, and one monster you'll try, I don't know what, to kill with a bayonet, and you'll try to beat back the other monster by petting it. It won't work.

[22]

THERE'S A VEHICLE THAT'S GETTING READY FOR A 'PRICE TAG' ATTACK

Rank: Captain | Area: Givat Ronen

You were a deputy company commander and you had to instruct your soldiers [on how to deal with settler violence]. How did you instruct your soldiers?

I think what we told them was to prevent [it], we wouldn't shoot [tear] gas at them, that's for sure. I acted [out] only once, I thought I was like some kind of sheriff there. One time, some masked [settlers] came down from [the outpost of] Givat Ronen and I shouted toward them and they didn't stop so I allowed myself to fire in the air and they ran away from there. [I did it] on the pretext that if I'm asked, I'll say, "Oh, I didn't know, some masked people advanced towards me carrying sticks, it could be a terrorist."

You fired a live bullet in the air?

Yes, I fired a live bullet in the air and they ran away. An atmosphere had been created there that they were afraid we'd find out who they are, the guys from Givat Ronen specifically. One time, during an operational deployment there, we get an urgent phone call, me and the company commander, "Listen, there's a vehicle that's getting ready for a 'price tag' attack (acts of vandalism and violence undertaken by settlers against the Palestinian population on ideological grounds. On a number of occasions they have included murder); there's gasoline inside, or whatever it might be, go now, in ten minutes they're supposed to reach such and such intersection, drive over there, stop them." We drove over there, [and] stopped them.

And what did you do with them?

We detained them until the police came and took them away from there.

And do you have any idea what happened with it later?

I have no idea.

One time, during an operational deployment there, we get an urgent phone call, me and the company commander, "Listen, there's a vehicle that's getting ready for a 'price tag' attack; there's gasoline inside, or whatever it might be, go now, in ten minutes they're supposed to reach such and such intersection, drive over there, stop them."



Photo: Yotam Ronen, Activestills

[23]

NO, THERE'S NO WAY THIS IS HAPPENING

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal 50th Battalion | Area: Hebron | Period: 2016

The hill (Hill 18, an unauthorized outpost adjacent to Kiryat Arba) is right across from Hallel's house (Hallel Ariel, a 13-year-old settler who was murdered at her home in 2016) and there's a gate [leading out of Kiryat Arba] right on top of the hill. And they (the settlers) just opened the gate, crossed the fence, and settled on the hill. Seriously, you could like throw something into Kiryat Arba, into [the neighborhood of] Harsina. Which is really, you look at it, and you say – a child was murdered in her bed inside Kiryat Arba, and there was nothing that could be done about it. And it seems logical to you to actually leave the fenced area?! Like, the one thing that still somehow stood in the way of the terrorist? You're like, what excuse do you have for it? Because it's obvious that the goal is either to bring tons of IDF [forces] over here and ultimately to start building there, like do a sort of creeping annexation. Or someone will get murdered, and then what do you know, we have another reason to fight.

It's obvious that the goal is either to bring tons of IDF forces over here and ultimately to start building there, like do a sort of creeping annexation. Or someone will get murdered.

And what's the talk among you when you come and see it happening?

First we say "no, there's no way this is happening", like no way. We see it in front of our eyes and we say, "no, it can't be". They went up yesterday; tomorrow it's over. Like, you come, and I already have a headache from the number of tasks, and then I'm told, "oh, you [go] to Hill 18." And I'm like, "What is Hill 18?! What the hell is it?" And you say, there's no way that with initiated [operations], the Red House (a combined military base and residential compound for settlers), the Worshippers Route (a trail that settlers use to go from Kiryat Arba to the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron), with Harsina, our patrol would also take [responsibility for] a significant sector around Hebron. There's no way we'd go along with it. And in the beginning we sent a whole platoon up there too. Which is, you know...

And you went along with it?

What do you mean, "went along with it?" There are orders.

No, I'm saying, the army went along with it?

Listen, I wasn't with the brigade commander and the division commander and so on.

Obviously, obviously, I mean what you see on the ground, you say there's no way we're going along with it, and on the ground?

On the ground, we see they're there, and no one says anything to them. [So] we started laying out barbed wire, and we also started laying it out in a way that would make it possible to pack it up after, because we said, okay, this is what's happening. You lay out barbed wire because you can't defend without barbed wire. You have to lay it out according to the topography; it goes through an orchard, with or without a water cistern. Like you understand you're... that that's just how it works. And this barbed wire, [who's going to] remove it after. It's this razor wire; it's something that's really hard. So we start like, for real... we open a [military] post there.

[24]

DO YOU KNOW THE CIRCUS?

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal 50th Battalion | Area: Hebron | Period: 2016

Oh wow, do you know the circus? The circus, I called it the 'Hill 18' fair (Hill 18 is an outpost that was built by settlers from Kiryat Arba after the murder of Hallel Ariel in June 2016). We're notified there's a rumor about a fair in the afternoon, and we're like "okay, fine, a fair... whatever... a fair", and they didn't tell us anything? Okay, whatever... and then, like, towards the afternoon, we're told "okay, listen, we forgot to let you know there's a fair...".

What does that mean?

Good question! So people start coming. They bring this rolled up inflatable [bounce house], open it up, stick an air pump in it and start blowing up this inflatable slide. And there are two ways to get [there] – one at the northern edge of Harsina (a neighborhood located in Kiryat Arba), northeast-ish, which goes out to the Arab vineyards of Hill 18, and there's the gate that's right next to the hill, so they opened the farther gate which is about a 500-meter walk. That means about three more soldiers do a sleeve (meaning soldiers standing at short distances from each other along the route to protect movement of Israeli civilians and to ensure that Palestinians are unable to approach the route) on the way too. So we needed to call reinforcements for this nonsense.

For the fair...

Yes, and I go to my soldiers and say: "Listen, you're staying here on guard duty, and I don't know until when..." Three hours, they wait for it to end... I tell them "listen, I don't know when you're getting off [guard duty]. I'm joining you, like I have no idea

what's going on. I'm sorry it's like this. I'm really sorry, but I have no idea, just know you're guarding now until the fair ends". It's frustrating as hell. And kids arrive, and open a pizza and popcorn stand, and then an older [child], we knew him because he was a bit of an abandoned child, at-risk youth, from Harsina, a really big guy, comes and says "I want to open up a cotton candy [counter] here", inside our sun shelter. I tell him— no, no. And he brings the cotton candy and opens, now this guy is two-meters [tall], weighs like a hundred kilos, you can't move [him]. He decided that he won't [move] and there's nothing you can do...

He just opened?

Yes! He opened his cotton candy [counter] right next to the cot, between the cot and the table.

How come you don't arrest him?

How can you arrest him?

You can't?

How do you arrest a person like that? Someone smaller, you might grab and move.

I don't know, soldiers...

Soldiers, okay, we have weapons, what, we're going to cock the weapon at him? There's nothing we can do. We got in his way, I think we also pushed a table to block him, like we made it not worthwhile. He said, "My poor mother, she needs shade, how are you not ashamed of yourselves?" Something like that. In the end, he just got tired of it, like we made it too difficult for him.

Did he give you any cotton candy?

No, we didn't want [it]. He's a dumb kid. You're not interested in scoring points with him. So these inflatables are happening, and this cotton candy station is happening, and then I don't remember if it was Marzel, or Ben Gvir or Gopstein (three leading right-wing figures in Israel), or all three of them together, were there, there was some representation from the higher-ups in politics. We were there two-three-four hours in the afternoon like... [We] start getting ready to go, reducing [our] presence little by little, closing up the sleeve when we see people aren't really coming through anymore. And there's some presence, and you say, it could be that we get off guard duty now and then go back up to guard in half an hour. [So you say], rest up, whatever, drink a lot of water, there's nothing we can do about it. There's no one to go up to guard. You're getting off guard duty first because you'll still go up to guard. And pizzas, after that they tried selling us.

You understand, from this, how as far they're concerned, you're a slave. The Arabs are the enemy, and you're a slave, like you're one step above them the Arabs as far as they're concerned.

Selling?

Yes.

From the event?

Yes, they tried, selling us [pizzas]. We said – we don't want your pizzas! We don't want [them]! You think I'm going to pay for this? You'll pay me, more like. I was just free security, and you want me to pay you for something? I don't want the pizzas, go shove them. I think we really did find them in the garbage afterwards.

I don't believe it...

Like, I don't know if they threw them out or [if] in the end they did us a favor, as if. After all this and they gave us like half a pizza. But I do remember seeing the pizzas in the garbage and saying, seriously, if I had any empathy left, that's where it ends. You understand, from this, how as far they're concerned, you're a slave. The Arabs are the enemy, and you're a slave, like you're one step above them [the Arabs] as far as they're concerned. As far as they're concerned, we really are servants.

[25]

THEY JUST DON'T LIKE IT WHEN THE ARAB POPULATION GETS SO CLOSE TO LAND THAT THEY THINK MAY BE THEIRS

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Artillery Corps, Meitar | Location: Pnei Kedem | Period: 2015

During the olive harvest period there are intensified preparations in general, and what happens is that entire Arab families come to harvest their groves. And I remember that on one of the Saturdays, the guys from the settlement (settlers from Pnei Kedem, Tekoa area) went, say 10-12 people, women and men, and just tried to drive them out of there and tell them: This is not yours, why are you doing this on a Saturday, why are you doing this here? And things like that. And I was just... The aim was obviously both to prevent friction and also to provide security for photographers, whether they were foreigners or Jews (activists in Ta'ayush, a grassroots Israeli-Palestinian volunteer organization) who would come to film everything that was going on there, because the settlers don't really like the photographers either.

I remember that on one of the Saturdays, the guys from the settlement went, say 10-12 people, women and men, and just tried to drive them out of there and tell them: This is not yours.

Is there someone who leads the settlers?

There is the... What do you call him?

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

CSC. He actually isn't usually one of the leaders of this thing (the harassment of Palestinian farmers), but you do see him in the area, and [it's] usually the same people, because it's a very small settlement. I can't point to anyone specifically. They just don't like it when the Arab population gets so close to land that they think may be theirs.

[26]

I KNOW HOW TO WALK FROM THERE, I DON'T NEED THE IDF'S HELP

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Location: Hebron | Period: 2020

There's the route above the Red House (one of the Israeli settlements in Hebron. A combined military base and residential compound for settlers) that leads to the Tomb of the Patriarchs via another road.¹ I don't remember what it's called. On Saturdays, when they walk from Kiryat Arba to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, we're told "don't let the Jews pass through there" because it's an area where cameras (military security cameras scattered throughout the city) don't see very well, [so we were told] "Don't let them pass through there." By the way, there was this talk there – say Jews were being violence violent towards me, so what do I do? And even then [they told us] "stop them and the company commander will come and sort it out." The company commander, the deputy battalion commander, someone will sort it out. Then I remember there were a lot of guys (settlers) who – we would just be standing there, telling them not to pass, and they'd pass anyway. You, like, run after him, but I won't, I won't push, I won't pull anyone. Like, it wasn't part of our regular conduct to hold someone (a settler) by force. Because it's also, like, a guy who says "Shabbat Shalom (the traditional Sabbath greeting), what's up, all good?" He, like, walks by with his two little kids with, like, yarmulkes, [cute] kids, white clothes. Am I going to grab him by the shirt and stop him?

Like, it wasn't part of our regular conduct to hold someone by force.

And then you have to escort them?

No. Then they just say something like, "I've lived here for 20 years, 30 years, I know how to walk from there, I don't need the IDF's help."

And what do they (army officials) say to that?

Then they tell you off a bit. But, like, they know it's a two-minute walk. So they can, like, tell us off a bit for it, but they realize it's not the end of the world. It does put you in a strange situation with the settlers, who come, like... I don't get it, it's clear that we're there so that you can live there. It's possible, desirable to argue over whether it's good or not, but at least show the minimum respect that if we ask something of you then do it.

Were you ever told to be tougher?

Yes, yes. Of course, of course. Especially the 50th Battalion, who have a reputation for being a battalion of gays and leftists, like "when the paratroopers were here, when Golani was here, they knew, they knew how to behave and you're failing." The truth is that it didn't really interest me.

1. The standard route the settlers are expected to take is "Worshippers' Route," which passes through one of the Palestinian neighborhoods in the city and is secured by soldiers.

[27]

TODAY HE WON'T TEND TO HIS LAND, FROM MY POINT OF VIEW NOTHING BIG HAS HAPPENED

Rank: Captain | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Area: Nablus | Period: 2012

Often the argument [in the outpost of Givat Ronen] isn't with the village (Burin) but about the [question] of who owns which orchard. So they (the Givat Ronen settlers) say: These are our orchards and [the Palestinians] are not allowed to [come]... Usually, why do they head down during the day? Because some Palestinian farmer has arrived at his orchards and then they come to scare away the farmer. That's usually the daily dynamic. And then you tell them: Fine, fine, I'll go take care of the farmer, you wait here. And then they usually let you go take care of the Palestinian farmer yourself.

What does "take care of the farmer" mean?

So you go to the farmer and you tell him: What are you doing here? And he tells you: This is my land. And then you tell him: But do you have a permit to come here? And he tells you: I don't have a permit to come here, but this is my father's land.

From your point of view, if the day has ended without any stones being thrown that's better than a day that ends with stones being thrown.

What permit does he need to go there?

I don't know, how would I know?

So why do you ask him this?

Because, like, what, am I like the [person working on the] Tabu (land registry deed)?

How would I know who owns each plot?

Excellent question. And then how do you figure it out?

So you ask him. Many times you ask a question in order to see what the response is going to be. So usually if his story starts developing and he says to you: No, this is my father's, then you tell him: Then your father should come. And then he tells you: No, my father doesn't live here. And then you know that maybe he's bullshitting you.

And maybe not.

Maybe not. Usually in the end you say to the Palestinian: Okay, talk to the DCO (District Coordination Office, the Civil Administration's offices operating in the occupied territories). If the DCO approves it, I'll let you through.

When is he going to talk to the DCO?

Now. He could make the call. Pick up the phone. [Or] go home, call the DCO.

Do you think they pick up?

I don't know. I don't care.

Are you even required to know whether it's true or not that it's his (the Palestinian's) land?

During the harvest period [they're] very concerned with clarifying [this] to you. The regional brigade gives you a map. They give you the maps and tell you every day where it's been approved and where it hasn't. You don't know. You, from your point of view, if the day has ended without any stones being thrown, that's better than a day that ends with stones being thrown. And the fact that you've done an injustice to the Palestinian person, again, truly in the sum of all of the injustices, this gets tossed in a very very low place. Like, the fact that he... Today he won't tend to his land, from my point of view. Nothing big has happened.

But tomorrow he also won't be able to.

Tomorrow I'm not going to be there. That's always the perception. Tomorrow I'm not going to be there. But when I'm here today, today nothing happened and the day has ended in a sort of quiet way and that's what I wanted to achieve. As far as I'm concerned, if the DCO comes and says to me, you know, in a situation assessment, they say to me "Listen, today we have a permit for so and so to come," then yes, I'll guard him. We did that many times. We guarded [people] when there were permits. But if he (a Palestinian) has suddenly come up in this direction, then no, like "Go

back to the village," "Come back tomorrow." You don't feel like something terrible has happened.

But did someone brief you that you need to ask him for a permit? Like, why did you ask for a permit and does a permit even exist?

No. I suppose it stems from the fact that when there were instances where there were permits, for example the olive harvest, for example instances where we knew in advance, like it came down from the brigade, the DCO has authorized such and such, and then we concluded that all the rest of the cases where you don't have permits are not okay.

[28]

WHEN THESE PEOPLE INVADE THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE MILITARY SECURES IT, I ASSUME THEY'RE SCARED

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Area: Hebron | Period: 2018

Hebron on Shabbat Chayei Sarah (a weekend named after the Torah portion, that tells the story of the purchase of the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron) is just the most extreme. 30,000 people arrive at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, looks like Woodstock. A friend of mine said it's like Burning Man for the ultra-orthodox Jews, but at the end you burn an Arab. A lot of people came, and it was just a really intense encounter, how the military conducts itself with the settlers. The Golani deputy battalion commander who commanded us there was a really good man and tried to do the best he could, but at a certain point they (the settlers) simply started walking through one of the Muslim quarters there, so we had to go in, the whole reinforcement company, into this neighborhood and secure the passage. We were there for hours, the military secured movement there that isn't supposed to happen. It passed and it happened.

Are you supposed to secure the Worshippers Route (a road connecting the Kiryat Arba settlement to the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron)?

Yes. The movement is on the Worshippers Route from Kiryat Arba and there's a path to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, a path that's open to Jews on holidays. The thousands of worshippers go in and out of Hebron, they're sometimes very violent and invade Palestinians' stores that are located there, break things, and that's a constant point of friction between soldiers and Jews. I was there for a whole day and I got into fights

Palestinians' stores that are located there, break things, and that's a constant point of friction between soldiers and Jews. I was there for a whole day and I got into fights with Jews and it was a very interesting experience but this incident specifically, [was] at the top of the route. A stream of people starts passing through the Kasbah and directing people to go there, a pretty big movement of Jews through the Kasbah.

Their own initiative?

The settlers' own initiative, and what happens is that the Golani battalion has to secure this road now because it passes through a hostile Muslim neighborhood. So, at this point, they go and open a passage there, everyone is pretty stressed and panicked, all the officers, because it really is a difficult and complicated situation to secure.

What are the repercussions of something like this in terms of the people who live in the area that's being passed through now?

They can't leave their house and it's probably very scary because these people know they (the settlers) don't want them to stay there or live there. So when these people invade their neighborhood and the military secures it, I assume they're scared.

The force that's there, can't it prevent this thing? After all, it's probably dangerous both for the soldiers and for the settlers.

The force that was there really wanted to prevent it. The Golani deputy battalion commander who was on duty that weekend was really level-headed on this thing and was really displeased, but they're Jews and they're the masters, so you can't really stop them.

But it's the military who's responsible for law and order in this area, isn't it?

When the first ones (settlers) went and directed [others], they (the soldiers) didn't realize it. They caught on to this movement only at a later stage, and by then, there were already dozens of people who had already done it, and were potentially inside the neighborhood already, so they decided to secure it.

Hypothetically, can Palestinians who live in that same spot, where the Jews turned, also go into the Jewish area?

Of course not. The military invests loads and loads of resources to ensure that there won't be any spontaneous access to Jewish spaces in order to secure them.

If the military wanted to prevent this movement of Jews, could it use the same means?

Of course it could. Anything is possible; It's clear that they don't want to.

The force that was there really wanted to prevent it. The Golani deputy battalion commander who was on duty that weekend was really level-headed on this thing and was really displeased, but they're Jews and they're the masters, so you can't really stop them.

[29]

THEY BROUGHT US A LOT OF PRESENTS

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 932nd Battalion | Area: Hebron | Period: 2014

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

Do you know if later, the soldier who did that received some sort of gift?

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

From whom?

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

Settlers?

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

What do you mean "did something?"

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

How do they know?

They watch from their roofs, they ask us, they hear from the police, from the other soldiers. It's a small community, they know everything. They know the people there who really cause problems and start riots. They know. They know one another.

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

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

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

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

Why?

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

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

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

Anat's Café.

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

He brought cake, a gift for someone. He would say some religious blessing and then almost every time he would end the blessing with: "and the Palestinian motherfuckers."

[30]

WE WERE JUST TOLD: YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO THEM

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal Reconnaissance Unit | Area: Nablus | Period: 2014

There was a story that shocked me when we guarded, there are lots of [Palestinian] villages around [the settlement of] Kedumim. There's Kafr Qaddum which is kind of the most cut off from the area.

From the Palestinian cluster?

Yes. The growth of Kedumim pretty much cut it off from Nablus and that's why they have a protest every Friday, but in the day to day, all these villages around, like there isn't a fence that separates them. There are all kinds of lands that get cultivated and people go and pick things. I had a story, like there's a security call center inside Kedumim which is, like where they have cameras and it's not a center that's staffed by the IDF, it's a private company I think or maybe it belongs to the settlement itself. There are the military's cameras too, but, for example, for anything that relates to the security of Kedumim, their cameras are more relevant. So they identify people approaching, there's some imaginary red line that Palestinians must not cross. So we were asked by this call center to go to some place, to this kind of grove in an in-between area.

A grove between Qaddum and Kedumim?

Between Qaddum and Kedumim, an olive grove where they just saw people from Qaddum walking around. So we got there and it was a man and a woman, relatively,

like 40-50 or so, and they're like picking leaves on bushes that grow between the trees, picking all kinds of leaves, I don't know what it was. And that's it, we came and said: Okay, you can't be here, you have to leave. And then they said: Okay, we're in the middle of picking these leaves here, we only need ten minutes, we're just filling up our plastic bag and we'll go. So it seemed fine to us as soldiers, we said: Okay, we'll wait here, you finish up. So we called the call center on the two-way radio and told them what happened, and they said: No, they can't stay there. They've already crossed the red line and you have to kick them out. It really angered me. These were people my parents' age so I said, like, let's let them finish. And then we gave them a few minutes and I had the thought of helping them. It seemed ridiculous to me. We got on the two-way radio again and asked for five minutes and again they said: No, they can't be there, kick them out now, now, and in the end we just didn't let them finish and we kicked them out. That's a story that showed me how ridiculous this whole thing is.

Tell me, in this operations room in Kedumim, what's your relationship with them like? If they say that you have to kick those Palestinians out of there, do you do what they say, or how does it work?

Yes. I don't think it was that clear. Ultimately they're not our commanders, but they're kind of understood as, I don't know, as locals who know the area better than we do. We arrive for a few months, you know, and learn the area and leave. I think we were just told: You have to listen to them. Even though they weren't really, you know, our direct commanders.

Who told you that you have to listen to them?

I don't remember that, like, someone told me explicitly. But it's sort of self-evident. Usually, you're a soldier on the ground, on patrol or doing settlement security, you do what you're told. Like, it's obvious, of course we have to do what the officials in the operations rooms in the area [say we] have to do. They were seen as a [military] operations room for all intents and purposes, kind of.

You knew they weren't soldiers and weren't from the military.

Yes. Right. But I think they're considered part of the defense system. There isn't much of a distinction made.

Are they on the same frequency, for example?

Yes, the center in Kedumim was on the frequency, on the same two-way radio with us.

So we called the call center on the two-way radio and told them what happened, and they said: No, they can't stay there. They've already crossed this red line and you have to kick them out. It really angered me. These were people my parents' age.

The issue of the red line, you say you were told they'd crossed the red line, did you know where this red line passes?

Yes, more or less we did know, more or less. I remember we were told where it is, I don't remember if it was something I was really aware of at the time because it wasn't really my role, we were just told they'd crossed some red line and I took their word for it.

You take their word.

Yes. Yes.

[31]

I SAW HATE

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Kfir, Nachshon Battalion | Location: Joseph's Tomb, Nablus | Period: 2016

There was this tomb that the settlers wanted to pray at, at this tomb. And so we made, really, along the whole path which is the main path in the village (the testifier is referring to the city of Nablus), forces were deployed so they could pass through there. And it was like 3:30 A.M., entire busloads. Listen, I'm telling you, more than a thousand people, easily more than a thousand people came to pray that day. So we stopped the whole central path, [the] forces were deployed, and they (the worshippers) start coming. The first waves were okay people, walking quietly until they get to the tomb and go to pray, but in the middle and up to the end, the other waves, people really started showing up with guitars, singing and yelling, and you see they're doing it on purpose; they want to wake up the [Palestinian] village; they want to fuck with their heads; and we, me and my friends, when we were at the post where we were [stationed], we told them: listen, if something happens – it's not you who'll [have to] do something.

It'll fall to us. And then I like, then I asked myself, why did I get out of the house to like come here, so like this asshole can come pray? And it was also one of the moments when I saw, I'm telling you honestly, like, I saw hate. These people really wanted to disrupt the natural everyday order of the village.

Along the whole path which is the main path in the village, forces were deployed so they could pass through there. And it was like 3:30 A.M., entire busloads. Listen, I'm telling you, more than a thousand people.

How long does all of this take approximately, these entries?

Hours. In a soldier's head, it's endless. Lots and lots of hours, because we get there hours ahead to take up positions, and then, by the time everyone comes and by the time everyone gets in, and then they all have to go back, it's a ton of time.

How many soldiers approximately?

Wow, we were like, maybe a whole battalion.

Is it something that gets talked about after? Are there any questions asked?

With the commanders, with the soldiers – does anyone talk about it? Because it sounds like it really pissed you off.

Yes, it pissed me off.

Did you have anyone to talk to about it after?

It pissed me off because most of the people in my platoon, they took it totally for granted that it's perfectly fine for these people to come pray here. It's perfectly fine that we're here to protect them. But no, there's no response, like who am I going to talk to? My commander could agree with me 100%, still, it's an order, and that's what you do.

[32]

IT WAS A REAL OPERATION

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal, 50th Battalion | Location: Halhul | Period: 2017

I happened to do security for a visit to the tomb of Nathan the Prophet in Halhul. Loads of buses with ultra-orthodox [Jews], really hard core guys. About 400 people enter Halhul, something like that. Buses enter, and we secure the entire convoy. Inside, we just blockaded the tomb at a radius of 200-300 meters so that no one would enter. Very quickly, tons of Palestinians came and threw Molotov cocktails and paint and things at us.

Meanwhile, they (Israeli worshipers) are praying there?

They're praying there inside, and we're guarding so that no one approaches the tomb. What I remember best is that there was a westerly wind and I was relatively on the more eastern side, and the dumb Border Police officers, even though the battalion commander ordered us not to shoot [tear] gas because of the westerly wind, they fired [tear] gas, and it got into the vehicle, loads of [tear] gas and it was a nightmare.

Is it in the middle of the city?

Middle, city center. It's a mosque in the day-to-day, Palestinians pray there on a daily basis. It's a place of worship for Palestinians and just like that, in the middle of the night, for two or three hours, they closed it and let 400 ultra-orthodox Jews in and then you have to fend off all the protestors who are there at night to get them out.

What size is the force needed to secure it?

We were two to three companies, say a platoon or two in each company, and more Border Police officers. There are a lot of people there, loads of military vehicles enter, it was a real operation.

[33]

IT WAS PROBLEMATIC [BECAUSE] THERE WAS A MOSQUE QUITE CLOSE TO THE SYNAGOGUE

Rank: First Sergeant | Location: as-Samu' | Period: 2018

One of the things I happened to do twice was [accompanying] the Rosh Chodesh (first day of the Jewish month) prayer or something at an ancient synagogue in [the Palestinian village of] as-Samu'. There are ruins there of an ancient synagogue, where I think every Rosh Chodesh a group of Jewish worshippers comes. A synagogue – like, let's not exaggerate with the description, there was a synagogue there once like two thousand years ago and now there are ruins. So we had to provide security for them (the Jewish worshippers), the company sent a force and there were drones. It was problematic [because] there was a mosque quite close to the synagogue and so the Muslims come to pray. In practice, we let them through but it was supposedly against the order. The order was no one can come close to the synagogue. In practice what we did [was] we only let in those who said, "I'm going to pray at the mosque," and apart from that we told them to use alternate routes.

How big was the force?

I think half of the company was there, [maybe] a third of the company.

And how many worshippers?

I understood it was like two busloads of Jews.

It's a place of worship for Palestinians and just like that, in the middle of the night, for two or three hours, they closed it and let 400 ultra-orthodox Jews in.

In practice, we let them through but it was supposedly against the order. The order was no one can come close to the synagogue.

[34]

TO MOVE THE PALESTINIAN AWAY

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Armored Corps, 188th Brigade, 71st Battalion | Location: Havat Gilad | Period: 2012

Did you happen to encounter Palestinian shepherds in [initiated] operations?

Yes, of course. Shepherds, farmers. Yes, of course. With them it's a whole thing. You also approach them, pester them.

What's the thing?

Havat Gilad tells you that a shepherd from Fara'ata is getting close to them, so you go and try to move him away from their territory. And he says to you "No, but my goat is there, I need to bring her." You start escorting him, you bring the goat and bring him (the shepherd) back. There's this issue of borders that are not borders, there's no... It's not what's mine is yours, what's yours is mine. Everything is together somehow and this territory... This tree is mine and that tree is yours and they're close [to one another]. You understand? In the end there's a situation where the old lady is harvesting the olives here and the shepherd is there... There are conflicts on the ground.

Do you as a soldier know where this border is?

How would I?

So how do you know...

Exactly, that's exactly part of the issue. He (the Palestinian farmer) tells you listen, these are my grandfather's grandfather's trees, this here has been ours for 200 years. [If you tell him] show me [the] Tabu (land registry deed from the Ottoman period), [he will respond] there's no Tabu, there are no papers. You understand? You don't know, you have no idea. That's part of the whole issue in Samaria. Part of the issue with the settlements is this issue, that there's no real Tabu on the [occupied] territories.

But in the end you do move him away. So on what basis do you decide to move him away?

Based on the instructions from higher up.

Who is the higher up?

Company commander, battalion commander. The senior commander in the area at that time.

Did you have situations where, say, a settler is with you in this thing? While you...

Yes, of course. You're like coming to move the Palestinian away, or the opposite, yes? If say Havat Gilad enters Fara'ata then you kick them out, but not forcefully, through talking. And if the Palestinian tells you like "No, I'm not moving," then you... At

some point, even if you showed up as cool as can be, at some point it will reach a kind of "Okay, get on with it." You like push him with your hands, not strong pushes, but you sort of clear him from the area. If the settlers called the [military], reported it and you come, then they stand behind you and shout at him. Of course. Loads and loads and loads [of times].

Is there any chance that a settler tells you something like that and you don't move the Palestinian away? You tell him, "Listen, he's far enough away." Did that happen to you?

I had an incident where we moved him away to a place where they said it's okay.

Who said?

The settlers. We moved him until [they] said "Okay, fine."

It sounds to me a little like the person deciding the situation in this instance was them.

Yes. It's them, yes. Without a doubt. Without a doubt, but it's not... In the end the company in the area is also trying to help them somehow. I don't know how to explain it, it's such a surreal situation. A surreal situation.

[35]

THE GOAL IS TO DRIVE THEM OUT

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Armored Corps, 7th Brigade, 82nd Battalion | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2013

A riot is usually, it would often come from Yitzhar, in general. I guess most people know that it's a settlement that often has very negative connotations in terms of everything that's going on in Judea and Samaria. A riot usually begins with a few things: first of all, there was the issue where sometimes Jews themselves would start fires in the surrounding hills, which automatically draws Palestinians out. Which also on its own, a fire can go on for two hours in Judea and Samaria, until some sort of firefighter arrives. We would get sent to, like, put out fires sometimes. I'd get sent with a jerrycan or something to try to put out a fire. Like, on that level, there's no one in charge.

If say Havat Gilad enters Fara'ata then you kick them out, but not forcefully, through talking. And if the Palestinian tells you like "No, I'm not moving," then you... At some point, even if you showed up as cool as can be, at some point it will reach a kind of "Okay, get on with it."

What, like, arson?

Arson. And there's no one in charge, like, you can wait for firefighters as if you're on hold on the phone with social security, you can really wait for three hours until someone answers you.

Where would these arson [attacks] usually happen?

In the hilltops surrounding Yitzhar.

And then what happens?

The Palestinians come out of the village. It often comes down to where, like, both the Palestinians and the Jews would – it was a very powerful tool there – to commit arson sometimes, just to stir things up a bit. Jews would do it, too, and so would Arabs. And that's it, and then it happens. Usually, the confrontation was only with the Palestinians, but it also happened a few times that Jews would also head down and then there's like an exchange, conflicts suddenly start, and then we have to head down to separate. I really remember that there were also clashes when the Palestinians really walked up almost all the way to Yitzhar and then, like, fled, and then they (settlers from Yitzhar) told us to try to catch them and whatnot.

Let's try for a moment to understand the chronology of such an event. You say, settlers come down from Yitzhar, set some field on fire, Palestinians leave the village, and...?

Then a physical confrontation begins between people who don't like one other. It's like two drunk guys in a bar who slept with the same girl. I'm just kidding, but yeah, it usually comes down to physical confrontations. It reaches a bit of cursing, a bit of that.

And then you're called up to the site.

We're called up to the site. We're often already there, say at 'Baz' (an IDF base located near the settlement of Yitzhar) you often see it happening live, from the base.

So how do you respond to such an incident?

Wow, they were terrible incidents. They're usually the incidents, say if the Jews started the fire, you come with these [fire] beaters, put out the fires. I remember now how we would put them out with those beaters. If it's Jews and Arabs then it often also comes down to firing [tear] gas grenades, smoke grenades, stun grenades.

In which direction?

In the direction of the Palestinians. I don't remember us using riot dispersal gear toward Jews.

The goal is to drive them out. You're driving the Palestinians out with riot dispersal gear.

How does the arson of a field result in a Palestinian riot?

Because it just creates automatic friction. They see a fire and it's already really familiar, both sides know what leads to what. Like, they see a fire on a hilltop, they know it didn't just happen on its own, it's likely one side trying to provoke the other. Whether it comes from the Palestinians, whether it comes from the Jews. And it's simple, it's the same chronology every time. The soldiers just arrive, try to put it out. If the Jews come, then they try to separate.

How? That's what I'm trying to understand.

The goal is to drive [them] out. You're driving the Palestinians out with riot dispersal gear, which sometimes also reaches [the stage of] rubber [bullets], and rubber [bullets] are a really unpleasant tool. I really didn't relate, so to speak. And [with] the Jews it's just, like, more through dialogue like, really trying to be gentle with them.

And with the Jews it's just, like, more through dialogue like, really trying to be gentle with them.

[36]

HIM WITH HIS MICRO, AND YOU CAN SEE HIM, REALLY TRYING TO START A FIRE

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal Special Forces | Area: Nablus

If we're on the subject of Yitzharniks, there was someone who was in the anti-tank company (one of the companies in the Nahal special forces unit), a maslulnik (soldiers still in their training period), who lived in Yitzhar. So it, like, brought a little more complexity to the whole situation, but even more than that...

What do you mean that he was on maslul (in training)?

He was on maslul while we were on deployment.

Oh, so on weekends he would go home...

So that's it, that actually happened once, we didn't see it at all but B'Tselem filmed him and a few of his friends trying to start a fire in one of the villages, on the weekend [while] he was at home, him with his Micro (Micro-Tavor, a type of rifle), and you can see him, really trying to start a fire. This was while we were on deployment. I don't know the details of what happened in the end. What I can tell you [is] that this person stayed in the unit until the day I was discharged. I would see him, he didn't go to jail. Two weeks after this incident, I think they'd taken him out of maslul already, but he was still walking around with a weapon.



Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz, Activestills

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Over 50% of our funding last year came from foreign
governmental entities. 100% of our testimonies came from
soldiers who served in the occupied territories.

"You're the gatekeeper of the settlements and you're, like, the angel who guards the area. From your point of view, Jews are the people who bring you food and are nice to you when you're on patrol, like, "thank you so much for protecting us." When you get to a situation where they're also throwing stones at you, then it's suddenly a complex situation, it's not that simple. Like, it's not that simple to use riot dispersal means against them. Don't forget that they're "our own", not to be touched."

Rank: First Sergeant | Unit: Nahal Engineering Unit | Location: Yitzhar | Period: 2017

