

**T**his booklet is a product of "Soldiers Speak Out", the testimonies collection project of *Breaking the Silence*. Since 2004, we have collected hundreds of testimonies from those who have, during their service in the IDF, the Border Guard and the Security Forces, played a role in the Occupied Territories. We are talking about the best of the sons and daughters of Israeli society, sent by that society each and every day to control a civilian population. The encounter with those who have lived under military control for more than 40 years leaves an impression but is nevertheless hidden from the eyes of society, which are inclined not to recognise the character of the mission on which it sends its youth. Only those who wear uniforms are acquainted with the daily realities. The cruelty required to fulfil the mission and the dissolution of ethical sensibility under the routine of controlling neighbourhoods, communities and families are missing from the public discourse in Israel. In contrast to widely held beliefs, the mosaic of testimonies that only continues to expand proves that we are not dealing with a fringe phenomenon that touches only the bad apples of the military but a gradual erosion of ethics in the society as a whole.

This booklet comes in a long line of publications and testimony collections that *Breaking the Silence* has published in the past few years; it is also the first of its kind. The testimonies collected here are all from women who served in various units and roles in the Occupied Territories since the year 2000. This collection uncovers a reality that many female soldiers were exposed to during their military service. Female officers, commanders and soldiers, who served as combatants and in supporting combat roles, describe how they dealt with complex situations on the ground.

Many of the testimonies in this collection alternate between a semi-external perspective, observing the action from the side, and full participation in what occurs. These perspectives shed additional light on what happens in the backyard of the state of Israel. The booklet that is in your hands contains testimonies selected from interviews with more than 40 women breaking their silence, who join hundreds of soldiers whose testimonies have been published in the past. This booklet is an additional example of the ethical and societal cost of the missions with which the security forces have been charged.

These women breaking their silence shed light through their testimonies on how acts that were defined yesterday as "exceptional" become the norms of tomorrow, how Israeli society continues to slide down an ethical slippery slope together with the entire military system. This is an upright stance against the stubborn majority who refuse to know the facts that are created by the extant reality. This is an urgent call to Israeli society and its leaders to wake up and evaluate anew the results of our actions.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers and supporters who made possible the publication of this booklet. Without their support and assistance, these important testimonies would never reach those who must come to know them.

### Testimony 1

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** General

Somehow a female combatant has to prove herself more, on the ground too. Again, a female combatant who can lash out is a serious fighter. Capable. A ball-breaker. There was one with me when I got there, she'd been there long before, she was – wow, everyone talked about what grit she had because she could humiliate Arabs without batting an eyelash. That was the thing to do.

*The entry 'ticket'?*

Yes, kind of. When I got to the company, they were on operations manoeuvres and I got the highest marks, guys included. I was in the top ten. They were all impressed and at first I had a really good reputation, until I was out in the field and they realised I wasn't that tough. On the ground I wouldn't apply my capabilities. Like, she's fit and she can punch and she's a 'karate kid' and all that doesn't really show when she's out there... So I had a problem. But right at first people really appreciated me.

*What would you talk about with your room-mates?*

Depends which. Again, it varies.

*Was it obvious or implied that this was the 'entry ticket' for girls, to belong?*

I think guys need to prove themselves less in this respect but it was not clearly stated. We did talk about how the tough female combatant has no problem beating up Arabs. It's obvious, you don't even need to spell it out. This one means business, you should see her humiliating them – there was no problem to say something like this out loud. Take a look at that one, a real 'ball-breaker', see her humiliating them, slapping them, what a slap she gave that guy! You hear this kind of talk all the time.

### Testimony 2

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Hebron Regional Brigade/Education Corps Officer

**Location:** Hebron

As an officer in Hebron, one day I went out to the gate to hitch a ride. It was extremely cold and I was wearing my fleece jacket which does not show my officer rank. I stood

there with the other guys. Across the road was this kind of bus stop where Palestinian detainees would be seated to wait for the Shabak to pick them up and take them to the \*\*\* detention centre. The guys on guard duty at the brigade HQ base were on routine security shifts, they are assigned for these ongoing security runs from all kinds of office jobs in rear units like the air force and so on. They would stand guard at the camp gate. So standing there I see these two guys pacing around a detainee – blindfolded, his hands shackled behind his back. Suddenly, I see that one of the guys simply approaches him and, without any warning, knee-kicks him in the head.

My gut reaction was instant: I leapt at this guy, caught him and said: "You're coming with me now." He didn't understand what on earth a woman soldier is doing ordering him around. He shoved me off, this was a big guy – he pushed me away and ran into the barracks. I was all wound up at



that point. I left the gate, hurried upstairs straight to the brigade commander's and deputy commander's office. The commander wasn't there, the deputy was. I went up to him and told him what happened and he said: "Go with our deputy operations officer and find that fellow."

I went with the ops officer, the guy must have hidden somewhere on the base, we couldn't find him. When we returned to the deputy commander and told him we hadn't found him and that we'd go looking for him again

in a few hours, he said: "Let it go, it's pointless. Anyway, there are and there will be many such cases" or something in that vein. I don't recall his exact words but that was the message: let it go, no need to pursue this. It was one of the instances I had a very hard time with.

### Testimony 3

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

There was this 5-1 patrol authorised around Umm al-Fahm. And there was a patrol on foot, for some reason called 'look-out watch' although most of the time it was not doing that at all, it was simply a foot patrol amongst the trees there, meant to seize as many illegals (Palestinians illegally inside Israel) as possible. In theory, catch every one of them, check his ID and, of course, see if it's green or orange, namely Palestinian. Check it against the diarist who would check it on the computer and if some sort of investigation is called

## TESTIMONIALS

for – he is to be detained. If not – “go home!” get back. And, of course, make sure he doesn’t go around the trees right back into Israel.

*You said there are huge numbers of illegals.*

Sure, and it cannot be totally prevented. That’s why when I’m asked for my opinion of the Separation Fence, politically I cannot oppose it one hundred per cent. Something has to set a border because it was really... And they crossed over, they crossed every single day. You cannot ignore the fact that they did. Our aim was to prevent the maximum possible and especially by this ‘lookout watch’, on foot, usually two soldiers, often neither of them a commander – simply two combatants. Often I’d be with a combatant who was younger than me and I was in command and we simply hid in spots where we knew we would not be seen, among the trees, and we’d suddenly leap out and “come here, show me your ID” and all of that.

*Was there violence?*

All the time.

*What kind?*

First of all, just plain harassment. Keeping them on their feet because if you’re really gung-ho and got up that morning rearing to go and catch some, you could easily hunt down thirty people in a half-hour. The point is you had to detain them. You couldn’t get them and check them out one by one. You had to catch the guy, seat him and wait for others. And often they would come in large groups. Again, when they move in large groups obviously they’re not out on a terrorist mission, that’s not exactly the recommended mode of action... So you catch them and make them stand in formation.

*Formation?*

Yes. Stand in formation, and there’s that famous Border Patrol rhyme – *Wahad hummus, wahad ful, ana bahibbak Mishmar HaGvul* (One plate of hummus, one plate of beans, I love you Border Patrol)... They’re made to sing it. Sing and hop. Just like rookies, the kind of hazing stuff in basic training about which soldiers’ parents are always raising hell. It’s the same thing. Only much worse. If anyone laughs, or the soldiers decide he’s laughed, he gets punched. Why did you laugh? Boom, a fist. He doesn’t really have to laugh to get that punch. I feel like punching him. Why did you laugh? Boom.

*How long does this last?*

It can last for hours. It depends how bored the soldiers are, they can stretch it out for two hours. It’s an eight-hour shift. Got to get through it somehow.

*And who is made to stand in formation?*

Everyone, all age groups.

*Women? Children? Elderly people?*

Yes. Whoever shows up. Whoever shows up stands in for-

mation. There were the more sensitive soldiers who’d let the women and elderly go. I’d say the elderly were less harassed... Some had absolutely no restraint and abused anyone.

### Testimony 5

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** General

I don’t exactly recall my own deliberations but I do remember not always managing to deal with my own reactions. I knew I was not real, I knew that something here was just not right. If I pass a seated person and spit at him and call him a terrorist because I’ve decided he’s a terrorist then something here is just not right. And that’s what I tell everyone: come take a look at the blood of someone who’s dead, it’s not right. I remember having that feeling but still you get carried away, people encourage you. And that a certain incident

has not been ‘action’ enough yet, let’s turn this into ‘action’, let’s laugh about it and get our pictures taken with the detainees because it’s okay for me to get this photo with two guys, our soldiers, smiling and someone with his eyes...

*Did they give this to you as a gift?*

Yes.

*What did you think of this gift?*

Cool. I showed it to my mom. Yes, cool. And I tell her: I was next to him, I saw it happen.

*Were you photographed too?*

No.

*Did you take pictures?*

No.

*Why not?*

Because it scared me. I was scared I’d get, I don’t know, I’d get thrilled with guys who did get their pictures taken: Yes, take his picture, take his picture. But not, somehow something like this did seem a bit shocking to me. Having in my own camera a shot

like that. I don’t know, even though it’s cool, I thought it was cool. Look what kind of action I’m a part of in the army, and I’m a woman soldier with a low profile and look what kind of stuff I get to witness, and where I’ve gotten to and what fun.

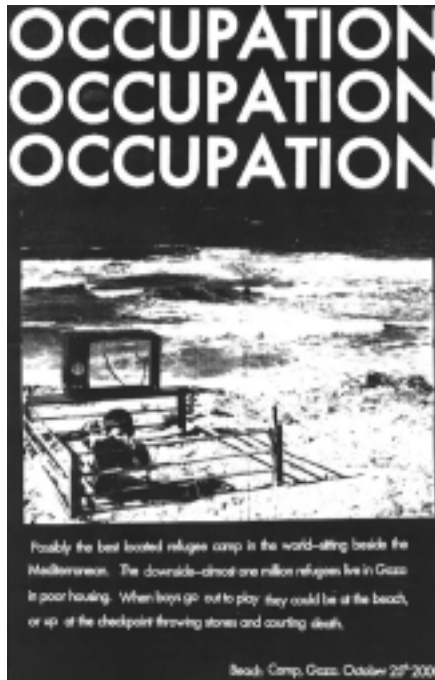
### Testimony 6

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Paratroopers **Location:** Nablus

My boyfriend at the time lived in the central part of the country. We always travelled from my parents’ place to his parents’ and once on a bus he was really stressed.



## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

I asked him: what's wrong? Normally, he was always the clown, everything he did was really funny. So he said: "I'm troubled by some things that happened last week on one of our patrols." He was crew commander and they were off searching for a wanted man or something like that, he told me about some things that happened there and suddenly it all opened up and I think it was the longest ride I ever took to his place. Then he said they knocked on some house door, knocked hard and no one opened. They said, okay, either people inside are busy hiding something or they're getting ready to attack us. He wasn't sure whether to break in or not. They went on knocking on the door and then he pushed it open and saw a crippled old lady without legs, creeping on the floor and trying to reach them, she simply couldn't make it. He told me he had never seen anyone so terrified and he'd seen a lot, this was after about four years in the army. And then he ordered everyone to move back and they closed the door and simply went away. But it doesn't always end that way.

### Testimony 8

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Jenin

There was this one occasion that was – to this day I don't know what exactly happened there but I don't think anyone tried to really find out exactly – there was this patrol where they detected someone near the fence. They chased him, saw him somewhere close to the fence and began to chase him. He managed to escape, ran, jumped over the fence, they yelled at him to stop and fired. They shot in the air – as they say – shot in the air in the lungs... They chased him within the Israeli zone, near the fence, he jumped over the fence and they shot and killed him. When he was already inside the Occupied Territories and constituted absolutely no threat. He was killed by the first shot so it was not shooting in the air but rather "the air in the lungs". He was hit in the belly. The guys claimed he mounted a bicycle and that's why his legs couldn't be targeted.

*Who was there?*

It was a patrol of four Border Patrolmen.

*And each had a different version?*

Same version. They fitted up their version that very moment.

*What were they concerned about? The investigation that would be held if someone got killed?*

An investigation was carried out. First they said it was really an unjustified killing. He was a child, about nine years old. Something like that.

*Nine?*

Pretty young, yeah.

*Where did this take place?*

Around Jenin. Eventually, the army claimed he was doing something there, like checking escape spots for terrorists. I don't know how they suddenly came to that conclusion. I'm sure the patrol at that point didn't assume that anything explosive was involved. And that was that, the file was closed.

### Testimony 14

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

I recall patrolling the Fence and a group of tiny children were standing near the fence and throwing these little stones at the vehicles of the fence construction firm. Never mind that



most of these stones got stuck in the fence and they didn't even manage to really throw them. We got there with the patrol and the commander's jeep arrived and I was ordered: "Okay, load rubber ammo." Okay, I loaded rubber. I said, okay, let's aim for legs. For the ground in front of them, which is mostly just frightening. Naturally, I've heard all the stories about taking apart the rubber ammo but had never done it. This ammo comes in units of three bullets each.

*Tampon.*

Exactly. The Border Patrol tend to take them apart because that hurts more.

*They peel the pellet too? (Some soldiers like to peel the rubber off the steel pellet which makes it more lethal.)*

Some do that, I didn't witness it. But we know it's unofficially legitimate. So anyway, I inserted a cartridge of rubber ammo – one tampon, I inserted one tampon – doesn't that sound great? – into my gun and fired at the ground in front of their feet. Again, these kids didn't seem to me to be an immediate threat to our lives. These were, let's say, boys in their very early teens. The operations officer got annoyed. He took my gun: "You don't know how to shoot." I said to him: where do you want me to shoot? "Let me." He came along, fired. "Where? Straight at the belly." Fortunately, he missed. But he fired straight at their belly and, of course, they ran.

*Did he hit anyone?*

He hit someone in the leg but his aim... Like what were they doing? Throwing these little stones at the fence. That's not something that would hurt or endanger anyone. Give it a laugh, drive off, they'll give up. They'll feel frustrated, get upset. If you

## TESTIMONIALS

wish, stick around to make sure it's not really some kind of distraction and that someone will really do something while they're throwing stones. But, seriously, shooting? Well, firing rubber ammo at their legs, okay. But he couldn't even conceive of the option of shooting rubber at their legs. I mean, why?

*What were your open-fire instructions at that time around Katzir?*

There's the usual regulation of "Stop or I shoot!" then a shot in the air, then a shot at the legs.

*Was there the idea of gradually scaling up the use of force? If he didn't stop? If he came any closer?*

No one really took this regulation seriously...

### Testimony 16

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Jenin

On the one hand, now I do feel guilty about not having said anything, on the other hand, I still believe it wouldn't have made any difference. I could have changed something for the moment. It's not the mentality of this force. Perhaps in other companies it would – I mean, other companies are certainly less extreme. When I got to Jenin Border Patrol later on and saw less of this, still, it's not that different. There is still an air of violence and yes, 'things get boring so let's invent an incident!'

*What do you mean?*

I don't know, make up an incident. Get on the radio and report: Stones have been thrown at me on this street. And then you detain someone and start questioning him. Eventually, he's released, or not, depending on the person who invented this incident, if he'd identify him or not. There was this (Border) policewoman who'd say, I'm bored, let's say someone is throwing stones at me. She'd be asked, who? "I don't know, some two guys in grey shirts, I didn't see exactly." So two guys in grey shirts would be caught and she'd be asked: "These guys?" Naturally, when they're caught, they're beaten up too. "These guys?" "No, I don't think so." Well, there you have a whole incident. People got beaten up. And nothing had happened there that day.

### Testimony 17

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Field Intelligence **Location:** Etzion Regional Brigade

*What is done to stone-throwers?*

They get beaten up and taken to brigade headquarters. (...) They know you take pictures.

Who, the soldiers? They know... As soon as I see stone-throwing, it happens at certain times, there's a history to this, you know the routine. So at that time the forces are closer, they're not napping in their jeeps, say, they're patrolling. Or they're napping in the jeep at a good spot and then they arrive right away.

*What happens to the stone-thrower?*

They beat the hell out of him or take him to division headquarters. Or they bring him to his father, which is the worst. It's worse than beating him up or taking him to brigade HQ.

*Why?*

Because his father does worse things to him.

*Beats him up, I guess.*

No, worse.

*At situation assessments they say it's worse to take him to his dad?*

Sure. They talk about everything there. Bring up everything. Who's present? The battalion commander, all the company commanders and yes, they discuss everything, every single event that has taken place.

*So taking the stone-thrower to his dad is allowed, or not?*

Depends on the commander at the time. Usually, they prefer to take him into custody.

*There were battalion commanders who preferred to take them to their dads?*

If there was a kid who didn't talk, or didn't tell on his friends, he'd be taken to his dad.

*After he had been in custody?*

No. Before. He'd be questioned on the ground: where are your buddies? I don't know, I don't know.

*Taking him to his father is an effective option?*

If you don't have too much on someone, not enough to really take him into custody, not too many incriminating evidence or legitimate reasons, you can take him to his father, you can close up the village. Many things were done there. If kids throw stones – all the shops in the village would be shut down.

*Who decides this?*

The battalion commander... I think in our area there wasn't too much of this, it's a grey routine, you know? We also had about 40 illegals every day, in the morning, and there's also nothing to be done with them, nothing definite. Anyone decides on his own what to do at a given moment.

*What do you mean, anyone? The sergeant?*

If it's about illegals, it's the sergeant's judgement. In cases of stone-throwing, it's the company commander. In cases of Molotov cocktail-throwing, it's the battalion com-



mander who intervenes, usually. About illegals, not a single battalion commander will tell you what to do. So you can take your own initiative what to do with them at the checkpoint.

### Testimony 18

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Reserves Sergeant

**Unit:** Hatikva **Location:** Qalandiya Checkpoint

...You're in this absurd situation where, first of all, in the briefing you're not told anything really, it's just this hollow, minimal briefing – this is the area, and then you go on up to the checkpoint. And then the day's rumours begin, about alerts, I don't remember who, but suppose the intelligence officer says one thing and the DCO another.

So everyone is certain of different things, not that they really care, I mean, I'm talking about the soldiers at the checkpoint themselves. So say you're coming from Bethlehem and you want to cross the checkpoint. Possibly the soldier checking your line will let you through and the soldier checking the other line will not because the

one heard one thing and the other heard a different instruction. They sit next to each other but there's no communication between them and you feel that... you have to argue with the person, explain to him that he cannot cross over, and what are you arguing about, actually? I mean, what is your point in this argument if the guy next to you contradicts you? You feel that everything you're fighting for, as it were, that you want to have some sense of national mission or purpose in the mere fact that you're there, doesn't really hold water. Nothing is based on any kind of alert that you can rely on. All the information gets crossed and that really drove me out of my mind. It was uncontrollable. I tried, I said: Okay, if I'm there anyway, I'd pass by the various checking posts with a notebook and update the soldiers but it was impossible to get anything, any kind of coherent information. This is something that really worries me and I can only imagine it annoys the soldiers there too, very much.



### Testimony 19

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Education Corps/Border Patrol **Location:** Gaza Strip

I can begin with my experiences in the Border Patrol which are, first of all, if we speak chronologically, which is easier for me – my first experiences were of a lot of chauvinism and power play against me.

*Specifically against you?*

Specifically. I came to the battalion as an education corps NCO of the unit. I mean, there were other women on the base: a literacy NCO, a welfare NCO and a secretary, but all the rest there were guys. The first comments were really crass, I don't remember the exact words but something like: Hey, a new NCO is here, now she can make us coffee. They were

really crass. I was constantly picked on. Another officer, a captain, would show up in my office and blame me for not working at all, which was pure bullshit. As an 18-year-old girl, I was so delighted to keep writing those weekly lectures; I was working incessantly. But he would say: You're sitting here all day, doing nothing. Every time he'd barge in and constantly pick on me. Once he forced a kiss on me and simply stuck his tongue into my mouth, like 'Frenched' me, it was the most repulsive thing in the world. And I didn't

react, as though... You know, he being a captain and me – an NCO.

*What was the hierarchy like?*

He was an officer in this unit and I was just beginning my duty there so I was sort of in awe. There was a very clear division between officers and NCOs.

*How did you react to this sexual harassment?*

I wasn't familiar with this term. This was in 1998, it wasn't such a... When I told my mother, she said: you've got to complain. But I thought she was crazy to think of that, after all, it wasn't such a big deal and, honestly, I wasn't working as hard as they were and, I don't know, all kinds of excuses. But these were my very first experiences, I was very humiliated, belittled.

Slowly, with time, I grew closer to all of them, both officers and soldiers. I heard all kinds of stories from them, it was a time of the joint patrols, they were working eight-hour shifts intermittently. These were joint patrols with the Palestinians. Eight hours on duty, eight hours off, and they

## TESTIMONIALS

were tired all the time. In their eight hours off they'd play backgammon and watch porn and soaps and told all kinds of stories from their joint patrols, which sounded to me especially humiliating to the Palestinians...

### Testimony 22

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Sachlav **Location:** Hebron

Our girls got rather polarised, on both sides of the spectrum. Some came out and said plainly: 'Enough, I'm no combatant, I'm cut out to be a secretary' and that's what they became. There was one who was reassigned as a driver and was just driving the company jeep. She didn't do guard duty, she handled no one, she was always there in the jeep with the commanders. Others went psycho and became worse, tougher than the guys.

*What does that mean?*

An Arab says something to her that he shouldn't, for example – she calls some four guys from her company to come handle him. A Safari-load of guys comes down to beat him to a pulp and then she detains the Arab.

*Do you recall a specific incident?*

I'll tell you an interesting story. I was standing in the post and we were about to be replaced, one of the girls there was very extreme in her views and stuff. And it was this time, I don't remember exactly why but we were on alert, with a bullet in the chamber. We had to be on standby with a bullet in the chamber the whole time. Gun cocked, bullet in the chamber and a finger next to the trigger. Not on the trigger. And then there was this boom, we heard a shot and, of course, I was on patrol so we ran over to see what happened and there's a girl soldier standing like this, facing an Arab bleeding on the ground, and she says something like: "He tried to attack me. He tried to attack me." We look at him and he's shot in the belly and we tell her – I mean, he has a bullet hole in his stomach – we ask her: What did he do? How did he attack you? What do you mean he tried to attack you? The soldier who was there with her was all confused and didn't know what to say: "Whatever she says, whatever she says." Something like that. This all happened when I was already there for quite a while. And she told some story about her asking him for his ID and he wouldn't show it and then he attacked her and somehow she tried to get away and turned around and shot him in the belly, something of that sort. You look and see an Arab who's been shot at point-blank range and he's holding his ID. And you say to her: Listen, this is impossible. Your story just doesn't add up. And what happened to that other soldier that he's so afraid

to talk? Then there were inquiries and stuff. Apparently she had asked to see his ID and he approached to hand it to her and he got too close – that's what came out in the last briefing we had. She then shoved him off with her rifle and a bullet shot out right in his belly. Now, first thing we hear, instead of 'Oh no! What have I done!' – we hear her saying "He tried to attack me." This girl finally admitted he really got too close to her and the bullet was already in the barrel and she shoved him away in the belly so he got shot in the belly.

*She admitted it?*

Yes. Eventually, at the inquiries she did. And she was not prosecuted, I think. She left that company. She was kicked out. Yes, she was reassigned to the Military Police. That was her punishment.

*What happened to this person?*

I don't know. He was driven away in a Palestinian ambulance... This incident shocked me. A girl shoots a guy in the belly and the first thing she says is 'he attacked me'. What did the guy attack you with? His ID? He was holding his ID, what did he attack you with? (...) I remember that right after that soldier shot the Arab in the belly and we all got there, I kept asking her: What do you mean, what did he try to do to you? And everyone – at some point, suddenly, the commander who was with me, who got there very quickly, said to me: "What do you want? What is this? Just stop it! Stop asking her what she means! Enough of this! She's telling you he tried to attack her, what's there not to understand?" And I said, okay.

...That was the greatest fear, to end up in jail because of them, because of the Arabs. I'll go to jail because of them? So I'll shoot a guy in the belly, I'll spit in his face, but never get caught. I think that this determination 'never to get

caught' really shows that what I'm doing is wrong – so I mustn't get caught. It pretty much says that, I think. It means everyone was pretty much aware of what went on there and that it's not right.

*But people did it all the time.*

Yes.

### Testimony 23

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

Also, to see those children in Hebron walking by and to take pride in the fact that they are afraid... I mean, these are kids, and I can recall who they were afraid of. They feared the Israeli kids. Not that they did anything to them but they (Jewish settler children) would throw stones at them as



they passed by. And their parents would say nothing. The parents stood by, you could see a little kid standing there, throwing these small stones and shouting something at them. And it became routine. You would come to Tel Rumeida any day and see this. It had already become a norm. And their parents hanging out there, I don't know if these were parents, but, anyway, these adults would hang out there and say absolutely nothing to the little ones.

*Doesn't it seem strange to you to see a child throwing stones at another child?*

Since the one was Jewish and the other Palestinian – it seemed 'all right'.

I remember saying aloud that it was sort of okay but thinking to myself, what's this kid, screwed-up? And the Palestinian had done nothing to him. I would think: That's what brings about this whole mess, these quarrels, these things that the children bring on. I know this kid's parents teach him to hate Palestinians. They give him perfect legitimisation to throw stones and swear at them. And obviously, this

would lead to a major mess. And you can't figure out whose side you're on. I'm a Jewish Israeli soldier and I'm supposed to be against the Arabs, who are my enemies, but I'm here next to the house at the outpost and I think that they're wrong. That the Jews are wrong. So wait a minute, no, I have to switch my mind and go on hating Arabs and justifying the Jews. But wait, they're still not okay, they (the settlers) start this and we're here because of them, they make this all happen, they pester them (the Palestinians) and scare them. It's all so...

*So why make the switch?*

Out of loyalty to your own kind.

*What age children are you talking about?*

Little ones, five-six-year-olds run around outdoors...

## Testimony 24

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Hebron

That's the incident I remember most from Hebron. That day there were many Shabak (Security Services) guys on our base. Now, the combat companies in Hebron were the least belligerent. There were Nahal and Paratroopers, the Lavi bat-

alion was still being formed while I was there, so we were less combative. Then one day when there were lots of Shabakniks on the base, you see stuff happening. I was driving the company commander crazy, of this combat company, with my wanting to come along on a weapons-search mission. It took him a long time to finally let me come with them. Anyway, I was there and another girl, an ops sergeant. We were the only two girls.

I was unarmed. The only one without a weapon. God knows how they took me along, and luckily nothing happened because they would have paid big time – for taking along an education corps NCO on a weapons-search at two a.m. in the Occupied Territories. So anyway, we went, I remember this like a movie, how we left the base. On the jeep you're still inside a movie, like you're a part of some cool movie there.

I tried to ask the Shabak guys who were there with me what's about to happen: We get to someone's house and then what, wake them up? The guys didn't really answer, they said: Just follow us, when we run, you run. That was the



most frightening moment because that was when I realised we were there in empty, quiet Hebron, in zones I'm not familiar with at all. It was sometime around two o'clock at night. And then they got off the jeep and we ran. I didn't know what to do with myself, suddenly, I realised where I was and god, I have no weapon, everyone there is wearing their helmets and bulletproofs. There was this one large

house and another smaller one next door so first we climbed the steps to the large house. I clung in fear to the company commander. Like suddenly, I didn't know, I wondered what the hell I was doing there. We could be shot at from any direction here. That's it. So we woke them up, the guys woke them up. I kept clinging to the company commander in sheer fright.

*The company commander himself entered the house?*

Yes. But he was not the first to enter. The Shabak guys were first and I was with him and he was not the first. There was the operations officer too, who I was friends with, so the two of them, I kept switching from one to the other. Crazy. I'll never forget this. So we entered these people's home, the father opens the door for us, in his robe, and the mother and grandmother and two little kids woke up too. Now they look at you with this look, like you're entering our home at two o'clock in the morning! The kids were absolutely horri-



fied. And we turned – I see this as if I was part of it because I was there – the soldiers turned their whole house inside out, I never imagined it like this. You go in, after all, you could open a drawer and look inside and you can open a drawer and throw all of its contents out and leave it like that. Now, I was still asking the company commander as we went from room to room, I'll never forget this – we found some porn tapes and the father's embarrassment as he went with us from room to room to room. So I asked the company commander if we help them sort it all out afterwards. Just so you understand how naive I was. Everything was just so messed up. And he answers and the father tries to ask, the owner tries to ask questions and talk and none of us even bother to speak to him at all. The soldiers go on, opening and trashing and trashing just about everything in that house, turning the whole place inside out. A year ago, on Passover Seder night, my flat was broken into. I got home and everything was upside down. The first thing that came to my mind right there was that this is exactly what it looked like. All the drawers, the closets, everything. And we didn't find a thing. Nothing. In the first house, they needed someone to search. So I was taken along, me and the female operations sergeant, to search the women for weapons because men are not allowed to do that. We were there for about an hour and they hadn't found a thing and were going nuts because they were certain, they had information, I don't know what, they were confident they were going for a find.

So they trashed and trashed and left not one thing in its place. Then we went on to the second house, and I couldn't understand why we do it this way. And that was the first moment I realised why we are looked at like that and why we are so hated. You enter in the most disgusting manner, without a drop of humanity, because the disrespect in the answers the man was given – the wife and children were not even addressed – I mean, no one even looked at them. We were sent off to a side room near the kitchen to search the women for weapons. Now, if I were in this position, I'd think: What the hell are you doing here? What weapons? And what if she explodes right there with you now?

*That's what you were thinking at the time?*

Sure. Listen, originally I just said to them, for curiosity's sake, take me along, I realised something was going on. I wondered what would happen. How this works, this whole thing, what they do nights. That's why I also kept going to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, because it was really important for me to know how they relate to this and what they do all day, what they do there for eight hours. Next to the Tomb of the Patriarchs there's this – I don't know if it's still there –

but when you go up the stairway, there's this command post of the Border Patrol, a little one. I was really curious what goes on there and why they get so frustrated. What do they do all this time and why...

The fact that the Jews there were fanatics and even tried to run me over once when I was crossing the road, and the soldiers would come back from patrol and their jeep would be smeared with raw eggs the Jews would hurl at them, I mean, those were routine things. You deal with it somehow, thinking, okay, so this side is not my side. But I was a lefty when I enlisted so I came there with this view that as far as I'm concerned you shouldn't even be here. That's how I started out.

*So you are inside that house and searching that woman...*

I can't even begin to describe to you the shame I felt, ashamed of the way we were behaving, entering their home like that, that we... I'll never forget this as long as I live, I'm telling you. I have this picture in my head, of those kids staring at me. And I go, frightened to death. First of all it was the first time I had ever been inside a Palestinian home. Everything there, I mean, there were pictures of Jerusalem

on the wall and it was so odd for me to see they had them too. So really, if until now they hated us, now that I enter their home and behave this way, and they're still looking at me like, I mean, I was without a weapon, nothing. And these kids looked at me and I just wanted to die right then and there. Also, when the company commander asked me, when I asked him if we'd help them clean up afterwards and he laughed, I felt even dumber, I realised I was far out of this whole thing and that I'm upset because it's my first time to see such stuff but they do it like machines. Soldiers go along, shake out drawers, turn out closets, trash-trash-trash, they don't regard the people at all, don't talk to them. And the owner keeps pleading with them, saying: "don't this to me". Trashing the place.

*Where was the whole family?*

The father went with us from room to room and the mother, grandmother and two kids were not allowed to make a single move, they were placed in some corner, there was this hallway, and a first room we entered and then passing from room to room.

*How did they react?*

They were silent. That's the point, they simply had this look. The children didn't understand, I think they were sort of, like they were seeing live what they had always been told. There, now hate-hate-hate. Look, see why you hate. They were looking at us with such a look of not understanding, and they're too little.

*How old were they?*

I think one was about five or six, he understood a bit more, and a girl who was younger, I think. Yes, the mother



## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

held her close. When I went, when they told us (girls) we had to go search – they didn't tell me ahead of time I would have to search her for weapons, only at this point did I realise that was the reason they agreed to have me on this mission with them, because they needed another woman to search for weapons, so only when we were told to go to a side room and search did she let the little girl down. She was wearing a robe and clothes and I remember my revulsion even at the mere smell of her, I was revolted to have to touch a stranger and search her. I was laughing at myself for behaving like in the movies, that I don't know how to do it. What, I mean, how do you search? So you touch like you see in the movies because you really don't know what to do.

*How far down did you strip her?*

Not much, I'll recall in a minute. My thought from a certain point on was this: I don't care if I get blown up, just let me not be here. Just to get this over with. The ops sergeant with me was more skilled, she had already gone out with the guys once before and she had a gun and knew what to do with it. I didn't.

*She knew what to do in a situation like this?*

She showed a lot more confidence but we were both embarrassed. When the company commander left the room and left us with this mother and then with the grandmother – it was this very little room so one came in and then out and the other came in. So we removed her blouse and she remained just in a shirt and pants.

We stuck our hands in her pockets, touched her blouse, I remember that. I didn't care what it was then, at some point I thought: I don't care what she has, I don't care. And I also remember \*\*\* asking me: And if she had stuck something up her cunt, how would we even know it's there? I told her I didn't care, I just wanted to get out of there, just get out.

*Did you think about where she was hiding things?*

Yes. I was terribly sick at the thought and I was terrified suddenly and I also couldn't believe I was really there. And then, no, I tried to do it. I tried but couldn't. When I was told that this is what I had to do, I said: okay, so we went in and started to do this, I only wanted for this to be over already.

*How long were you in there?*

It took a few minutes. Some minutes with the first one and then the second and then we left. I mean, the younger woman, then the older and then we left. In the yard was another house, a smaller one which we entered also, but it was only two rooms.

*How long did the search take?*

The search? A few minutes.

*So you enter with one of the women and you were alone in the room with her?*

No, myself and \*\*\*, the two of us with one woman.

*How did you talk to them?*

We didn't. That was just the point, you didn't need words. They may have talked, I didn't exchange a word with them and I remember even thinking about it, that you can't even talk to them, you can't say anything to her. I saw the kids. I saw the faces of those kids. I thought to myself: If I could just say something. Like now, when I walked around in Hebron and saw the kids, I said, you can't even say anything to them. They hate you, they don't want to see you, they think you're the enemy, and you are wordless. You have nothing to tell them.

*Did you think about your not knowing Arabic?*

Yes. Especially about not being able to communicate. Because in this situation, even had I been able to speak Arabic, I wouldn't know what to say because I was entering their home at two in the morning, I was waking them up, sticking them in a corner. The women and children were in the corner while we kept moving around the house and they couldn't go anywhere. I can't even tell you whether anyone told them not to move or that they were simply petrified. They kept following us with their eyes. I remember I had a really hard time because they were watching me. I had a hard time with the children and



"Jewish Blood will be accounted for": Graffiti, Hebron

with the mother, she was watching me the whole time and I remember feeling I was doing something wrong as a woman. To her. I was going into her home and waking up her kids. I felt that men were much more crass than we were in this situation.

*Were you on other arrest missions?*

No way. I wouldn't, I didn't even want to go.

*So why did you go in the first place?*

I wanted to see what we do.

*Out of plain curiosity or for kicks?*

Listen, I remember the moment we disembarked from the jeep and they began to run and I remember my panic as I suddenly realised where I was. Before, I just thought, okay, there's plenty of Shabak guys if something does happen so let's go. I used to ride around with them in their jeep, ask them to take me along on patrols. All that would take place in daytime. Nothing at night. Suddenly, you're in those places. ...After we got back from this arrest mission, I kept asking the company commander, I walked with him and asked

## TESTIMONIALS

if this is what's done all the time. And he said there's no other way. He says to me: You have a gun, you have weapons here, how do you want this to be done? If you tell the guys that the education corps NCO says this or that, they just say: she's being self-righteous. Many of them. So I said: "Well, is this what we do, then? This way? Just like that?" I told you, I was a lefty when I enlisted and this was the first moment I simply understood why they hate us. I would have hated you too. Perhaps I told him this: if you were to enter my home, no matter how old I am, and break into my life and into my privacy like that, I'd hate you too.

*Was there any slapping, kicking?*

Kicking, yes. Just when the guys entered. They kicked the father. In front of the kids, yes. In front of the kids.

*What is so important about taking the mother into a side room and doing everything by the book, as it were, and hit the father in front of his own kids?*

Because as far as they're concerned, first of all I think they thought we stripped the women completely, I'm pretty sure, I mean, the company commander. He didn't really see us inspecting. I also thought, if you take me along and let me inspect a woman, you don't even check to make sure I'm doing it right.

### Testimony 25

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Hebron Regional Brigade/  
Medical Corps **Location:** Hebron

They liked to carry out all sorts of experiments on seriously wounded people. I mean, trying resuscitation even though it was obviously too late but just to let doctors and medics get some practice.

*What do you mean?*

A fellow seriously wounded, haemorrhaging all over, no chance. Or I don't even know if it was an already dead body. The reports are about... If the doctor decides to confirm death, he does it on the spot and there's no more treatment. If he says there's a chance, they do continue. But sometimes it was sort of uncertain. They didn't confirm death although officially it was, in order to carry out some more treatment – practise intubation, emergency surgery. These kinds of field procedure. Sometimes the doctors would come back from their event and say: 'Yes, he was already finished but we did practise some intubation' or this or that. Practice. It's not that we tried to save the guy, he died on us. Practice.

*We're talking just about Palestinians, no settlers were in this kind of situation?*

No. Just Palestinians.

*You heard this and did nothing about it?*

I wasn't in any position to blame anyone. To check whether it was right or wrong. That was the given situation. Practice? Okay, practice is all right. I mean, no criticism was voiced anywhere. This was all very welcomed.

### Testimony 26

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Binyamin Regional Brigade **Location:** Binyamin Regional Brigade HQ

On our base there was this – what I call – pen. A small detention cell, a shed with a little yard, right across from the war room, at the outer edge of the base.

*What base is that?*

Binyamin Regional Brigade, at Beit El. Now, when they tell you there are arrests, at the end of the arrest mission the detainees caught in our area are brought to this detention spot until they are tried. Then they're taken to Beit El military court and that's that. Something like that. Anyway, there were always detainees there and whenever we'd go out with the trash from the war room, there would be people outside in the yard.

*It's fenced in?*

Yes, but open, I mean, they see us, we see them. Sometimes they were blindfolded, sometimes not. When they weren't, we wouldn't go out. It was embarrassing. They'd make cat-calls and whistle. It was highly unpleasant. Once an arrest mission took place, I no longer recall which battalion did it, and the kid, I mean, this soldier kid, didn't know what to do with the person he arrested so he brought him to the war room. We were

there, four girls on the shift, maybe less, no officer, and it was night-time. He simply brought in this detainee blindfolded, his hands shackled, and asked us what to do with him. There were screams, one of the girls started crying and ran out.

*Why?*

Because when you dehumanise someone, it seems to you as if Hitler just walked into the war room. We didn't regard this as simply a person who's been detained. Everything gets blown out of proportion. We were terrified. We began to yell at him: What are you doing? You are not supposed to let them in here. Now this detainee stands there, it was really embarrassing and scary. Because it's scary when someone, never mind if he's an Arab or Israeli or Russian, comes in blindfolded and shackled. It's not something you're supposed to deal with, not as an ops sergeant or anything. But I have



## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

a problem when I see anyone being dehumanised, never mind what race or gender or whatever, I get really upset. I realised after some moments of hysteria – everyone was screaming, it was such a scare about this person who had been arrested, and I didn't know if he had done anything or not, he was standing there and everyone was screaming and he has no idea of his rights and what he's supposed to do – it really bothered me...

### Testimony 27

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Sachlav **Location:** Hebron

I was in Hebron once and there was this stunning little

blond girl, "\*\*\*\*, the Little Demon" (a Jewish girl from one of the Hebron settlements). She would pass us by near the outpost in her Shabbat dress, all neat and cute, and smiling. And then she saw some Arab walk by and she grabbed this huge rock and ran towards him, leapt and boom! She banged his head with it.

*Just like that, without throwing?*

Just like that, boom. She leapt up to him and banged his head with this stone. And this man was just an old man walking along the street. Then she started yelling: "Yuck, his blood is all over me, so sickening!!" And he turned to her and went like this, and the soldier who was with me charged at him and punched him as though he was threatening this little girl. I stood there in absolute

shock. I didn't know what to do with myself. An innocent little blond girl in her Shabbat best has just banged an Arab in the head with a rock and the soldier has punched him in the face for turning around and yelling at the girl. Not to mention another four types who came from their own base to spend Shabbat in the Jewish settlement and approached him like showing him, just try us. So the Arab just put his hand on his wound and ran for his life.

*How old was he?*

Elderly. Over fifty, I think. Really old.

*How old was \*\*\*\*?*

About eight, I think. A little girl. Seven or eight years old. I remember she had a baby brother, in a pram. She'd hand him little stones and say: "Throw it at the Arab, throw it at the Arab." And he was this tiny thing in the pram and he'd go like that and throw. Naturally, it would hit his toes because he was sitting and he was so little but that's what she'd show him: "Throw it at the Arab."

### Testimony 29

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

Here's a specific incident. I don't quite recall exactly when it happened but I believe it was late 2002. I was on a patrol

with several combatants and another one was sitting in back with me. Could be we were on a foot patrol or something because usually on a jeep we were only three of us. But anyway, we were sitting two combatants in the back of the jeep, another guy and myself. We caught some five-year-old kid. I don't remember what brought this on, where we brought him from. He was Palestinian but I remember we went to bring him back into the Territories or something. So that kid was there and he was picked up and slapped around a bit, taken into the jeep, and this kid is crying so the guy next to me goes: "Why, don't cry!" He starts smiling at him so finally the kid smiles too and then – boom, a punch in the belly. Wow, I wouldn't punch even a strong adult like that. A kid – all of five or seven maximum. Tiny. Boom. Why? "Don't you dare laugh at me!"

*Was he laughing at the soldier?*

I don't think he was, I didn't see him laughing. Certainly not at the soldier, he was shaking with fear. All that "No, no..." pleading with them not to harm him.

### Testimony 32

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

Let's say I put together this bulletin board for the soldiers and wanted to post some excerpts of 'Breaking the Silence' testimonies. The company commander had some on his computer.

## TESTIMONIALS

*What did he do with them?*

I don't know, read them I guess. The company commander is a very moral guy but also extremely militant. Very loyal to the system. So on the one hand, he had that stuff on his computer, on the other hand, he wouldn't let me post it up for the soldiers to read. He did say, though, it's 'not because I don't think the soldiers should know about this, I just don't want them reading that stuff a minute before they go out on a mission. I don't want them to have that on their mind when they go on a mission'. He wants them to focus on their objective, see?

*Did you ask him why?*

It creates empathy and could cause a soldier to say: 'I don't want to go on this mission'.

*And that's what he was afraid of?*

I think so. Or how it would affect his own conduct on a mission. I suppose there was that too.

*Why did you want to post this?*

That was in the beginning and it seemed right to me to understand where you are from a slightly critical point of view, one that no one else would discuss with them, wouldn't expose them to.

*And did you ever try again since, to open this...*

No.

### Testimony 33

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

I think that perhaps on my second or third shift I was with some guy, we stopped someone again, on that foot patrol. So the soldier caught him and said: "What are you laughing at?" Again, the guy was not laughing. "You're laughing? Really, well, no problem," he took off his shirt and said: "Now I'm not a Border Patrolman, let's fight." Obviously, the guy is not going to punch him back, what does he mean, he's no longer a Border Patrolman?? The fact you've taken off part of your uniform doesn't make you just someone on the street, does it? He beat him to a pulp.

*And the Palestinian didn't hit back?*

No. The soldier lashed out wholeheartedly and the Palestinian did not hit back, only pleaded and pleaded with him to let him go. And the Borderman goes: "Come on, come on, hit me back." I think he knew quite well, as did the Palestinian, that he wouldn't. What could the Palestinian do? Hit a Border Patrolman? What is he, an idiot? He could get arrested for something like that, as absurd as it is, and I remember standing there and he goes, "Come on, show your stuff." I say: leave me alone, it makes me sick. I don't want to touch him. Let him get out of here. Again, right away I realised I wasn't going to hold any political discussions here about my own views. (...)

### Testimony 36

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

As an NCO, I slept at the outpost of one of the companies based in Hebron. Because there were no girls' quarters, I shared a room with guys. I remember that one night, around four a.m., one of the commanders came in, I think he was a sergeant, and sat on my bed, waking me up. I jumped up, he sat, with his ceramic bulletproof vest, his helmet, his gun, just down from guard duty. I ask him: "Has anything happened?" He sits there, his eyes glazed, and says: "I had this dream." I ask: "What did you dream?"

"I dreamt that the Jews are beating me up and Arabs beat me up and I stand in the middle and can't do a thing about it." Then I asked him: "It was no dream, was it? You've just

come down from guard duty and something has happened." He said: "Yes." The soldier was stunned. They just removed some settlers who had entered Palestinians' shops in Hebron. The Palestinians came to protect their own shop. The settlers tried to break in and the soldiers were there right in the middle of things, getting hit by both sides. And the soldier was simply in shock. I had to actually help him remove his vest and helmet and go to sleep and forget about it. He came back stunned from this incident. It was one of the things that really got etched in my memory.

### Testimony 37

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Gaza Division/Education Corps  
**Location:** Gaza Strip

I used to visit the war room quite a lot, as well as the lookouts' screen rooms, and see all kinds of films. And I remember that the first time I was really shocked, I saw a video recording that showed some old Palestinian farmer who got too close to the fence by mistake, too close to the fence, and you simply see the tank shell coming and blowing him up. I looked at the Palestinian, and at the female lookout watching it, and thought about the soldiers in that tank and it was simply, I don't know... When you get out of things for a second, it just doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense and it's inhuman. When you're in it all, if you don't... When you're inside, it's got to be normal otherwise you can't function. (...)

*And tank fire, shelling people, is that routine there? Part of the open-fire instructions?*

I think these instructions were changed quite often while I was serving at the division HQ. But I think they were changed

## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

so frequently that they never managed to reach the rank-and-file soldiers before they were remodified again. But, I mean, it was pretty common. He got close to the fence? The lookout detected him, what does that mean? It means he has to be taken down somehow or another.

*Do you recall other such incidents?*

There were many I heard about but I think that after that one time, I decided I wouldn't watch any more.

*What cases?*

Cases where Palestinians didn't mean to infiltrate or anything like that, as it came out in inquiries after the fact, but were shot because they got too close to the fence or were suspected. I mean, I'd seen enough films of terrorists who did try to infiltrate the fence and you see their head popping up and disappearing, and again, and it's obvious they're on a hit mission. And I also remember it looked to me like some kind of video game, you're not really seeing a human being, you see someone running but it doesn't look like a real person, like it's not happening.

*And what was the reaction to cases where people were hurt and the inquiry revealed they hadn't intended to carry out any terrorist activity?*

I don't remember anyone except for myself who reacted to this, I never heard anyone talk about it, respond, think, feel. Nothing at all. It's something I absorbed and seemed wrong to me. But like this was war and there are no laws in war, it's like the general spirit of things.

### Testimony 40

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Golani Brigade (Infantry) **Location:** Training Base

I can tell you a funny story. Before we went out to the Occupied Territories, we had some training. I sat in on an Arabic class my soldiers were getting.

*They had classes in Arabic?*

They had these lessons in very basic Arabic, to learn the most fundamental stuff like 'open the door' and all that.

*Checkpoint Arabic?*

Exactly. So I sat there with these guys who were really gung-ho, extremely militant about anything Arab. And their

songs, I mean – I cringe at them to this day. Never mind. Anyway, there was this really delicate girl soldier, 'a yellow' as they're commonly called here. She comes and tells them how to tell people to stop, teaches them the 'open-fire instructions' in Arabic. I'm sitting there in class with them and she's saying: "Stop! Stop or I shoot!" trying to explain this to them. Exactly five minutes into class time, a guy stands up – I won't say his name but he was a true-blue Golanchik (nickname for Golani Brigade soldiers) – he got up and said to her: "Listen, cutie, forget it. Stop... Stop or I shoot... We don't talk. We shoot. Then maybe we talk."

Why am I telling you this story? It's a would-be laugh. But come to think of it, it isn't that funny at all. In actual fact, even suspect-arrest procedure isn't that respectful, guys don't really take it seriously. They slip through it. I mean, the bit about calling out 'Stop, stop or I shoot!' – they don't do that. At least not from what I can gather talking to them. They seem to find that a kind of fairy-story bullshit.

*How do they respond to the killing of innocents?*

They don't see them as innocents. It's not that these people are guilty of anything as far as they're concerned but for them it's very common to compare this to our side: Why, don't children die in suicide bombings? Don't suicide bombers kill innocents? It's a reaction that keeps coming up. There were often

stories about situations where innocents got killed. That's something that happened big time.

### Testimony 41

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Oketz **Location:** Menashe Regional Brigade

When I was – this is something I really didn't like and it was when I just started out in the Menashe regional brigade. Detainees were brought in by Golanchiks who had really abused them. Really. I don't know, it was... They were outside the war room. You see detainees, and soldiers standing guard over them, and all the guys came over to make fun of these detainees. Ordering them around, say this, say that, kicking them. They weren't too...

*How many detainees and how many Golanchiks?*



## TESTIMONIALS

There were two detainees, shackled, blindfolded, the works, surrounded by at least 15 guys who were harassing them, who came out to make fun of them. It seemed to me, I don't know, somehow there's this atmosphere of 'It's fine because they're Arabs so they're terrorists, they're shits and this and that'... A guy is shackled, blindfolded, and you come out and tell him to say this and say that, a guy who's terrified because he's detained. Okay, true, he's a terrorist and all but, really, put him in jail, why do you have to come along and behave like retarded children...

*Did you say anything?*

No, I didn't.

*Why not?*

Because I was young. You know, in the army, there's this thing that you're young and these were all guys from the older company and all. Why should they listen to some girl ops sergeant?...

### Testimony 45

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Sachlav **Location:** Hebron

I recall once we had this talk when we got back to our quarters and one girl said she had slapped an Arab. That was the first time I heard about a girl soldier who actually slapped an Arab.

*What did you say to her?*

It opened up quite a discussion in our company. The girls asking, like how did you dare? She was in a company with a guy who was not one of the more violent types there. He was rather one of the finer fellows in the company. And I remember her saying: "Yes, he was rude to me." Something like that. "He answered me rudely so I gave him a slap in the face." And I'm thinking about that Arab, a grown man, who is approached by a good-looking blond girl who slaps his face at the checking post. I don't know, the mere thought was just so shocking. And she said it so... Later we talked about this and girls said to her: How could you have dared, I could never do such a thing. We had this round going, who would and who wouldn't. Barely 10 seconds later two other girls already admitted having done this, one of them once told an Arab to get down on his knees, something like that, another said she occasionally cocked her weapon right in the face of an Arab, threatening him. He stood facing her and said: Okay, what do you want now? Something of that nature. So she aimed her rifle at his face and cocked it right there. I was shocked that these were my friends.

*Did you feel like an outsider?*

I remember coming home to my grandma and telling her: I've got to get out of there. Got to leave.

*So how does one get used to this, when you realise all those girls had slapped people?*

Slapped? There's this man and you're cocking your gun in his face. Although that in itself was pretty common, guys were doing that often, cocking their rifles while threatening children, grown-ups, everyone.

*Did you see weapons being cocked?*

Sure. It was procedure. Like: Where are you going? Click-click. Like: Where do you think you're going? Click-click. You do it to kids, to everyone.

### Testimony 46

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Gaza Strip



Once I took the soldiers to the theatre, on a 'culture Sunday', to see a play. It was thrilling. There were guys from different places, rural areas, it was their very first visit ever at "Habima" (Israeli national theatre). And it was really nice, I came out feeling really good and then we got back (to the Gaza Strip) through Kisufim Checkpoint in this open truck, open in the back I mean. We came back from Habima Theatre to Gaza and the minute we crossed the checkpoint it was like entering another world. As soon as we got through, they changed. There were Palestinians walking with their carts and wagons and donkeys on the roadside, some on foot. So the Border Patrolmen in the truck took these crates of leftover food they had there and began to throw stuff at the Palestinians. It was my most

shocking experience in the Occupied Territories.

*How did you see it?*

I was sitting with them in the back of that truck. An officer was sitting up front in the cabin and I don't recall whether there was another officer in back with me or not. I got hysterical, I yelled at them: What are you doing?! We're on our way back from such a civilised event, what is going on with you? They only laughed and forced me back into my seat, like. Sit down. I knocked on the cabin to get the officer's attention and demanded that the truck stop immediately, not to go on driving. The officer told me to be quiet, like 'don't interfere'. I yelled about what was happening, I yelled: They're throwing vegetables at Arabs, stop. They didn't stop the truck, they didn't mind it, they did nothing. The officer didn't get off, nothing happened. And the guys went on doing this the whole way. They were throwing cottage cheese, rotten vegetables. I got to the base extremely up-

## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

set. I don't remember if it was immediately afterwards but at some point I had a talk with the unit commander. I think he was a major or lieutenant colonel, I don't know. He didn't seem too perturbed: "Forget it." And I talked to other people there and no one... Everyone tried to hush it up somehow. I wrote a new weekly bulletin on the topic and no one agreed to pass it on. Not one commander wanted to have it. So I told this to my superior, and other officers from the Southern Command came and I told them too, and in no time I was off to officers' training... I felt I had been thrown out...

*What was so hard for you there?*

Their male chauvinism, the incessant humiliation, especially this power play that was on all the time, my feeling that I was the weakest, weirdest creature in the world and complaining all the time.

### Testimony 47

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Binyamin Regional Brigade  
**Location:** Binyamin Regional Brigade HQ

I finished a 14-hour shift. It was morning. We had trackers at the brigade HQ. We joined them, they were cool, always taking us along for tours of the area so we'd get our bearings a bit. Once, one of them said: Come along for a ride. So we started out on patrol, driving along a road that only Israeli cars are permitted to take. That too is an amazing thing I ignored during my whole time in the army. There were roads for Jews and roads for non-Jews. Just for Palestinians.

*Did you accept that?*

Yes, it seemed reasonable to me.

*When did you realise this was not reasonable?*

When I got out of the army, later, at the university. When I grew up. It's amazing how different a person you can become during your army service, when you're told and ordered what to do and you don't doubt anything even if you consider yourself an adult, a curious, politically aware person... Anyway, we were riding along this Jews-only road and a Palestinian truck passed by, loaded with fruit and vegetables. So the tracker... [says:] "I'm arresting this guy." I asked, why? "He's not allowed on this road." We stopped him. He says, come, get out of the jeep. I said, why? I'm not in this. And he says, come on out, it's okay. We're in a calm spot. We got out of the jeep and there were fruit and vegetables in that truck. We see that he (the driver) is the fruit vendor. We

reach the door, he opens it, a driver about the age of my father, a bit older even, an elderly man. He comes out, pale, holding out a bag of – I think it was grapes or oranges. Not saying anything, just 'take it, take it' in Hebrew. He hands it to us. I'm standing there, I'm not... He says: Please, just take it. He only wanted to bribe us, to calm us. I couldn't stand it. In the meantime, the tracker asked him for his ID. The man was shaking. Shaking. I ran back to the jeep. I told him: I'm not...

To this day, when I think about it, I feel sick. I mean, nothing happened there, the tracker let him go, he'd noticed my reaction, the tracker, so he calmed down and quickly let him go. He explained that he wasn't supposed to drive on this road. He realised that he... And the only thing I had in mind was that this person who could have been my father was afraid of me because I was wearing this uniform, because I was there in an army jeep, and he was willing to give up his livelihood

so that we wouldn't harm him. Like, what could we have done? But apparently he knew very well what we could have done to him so that's why he was so upset. It's followed me for all these years. And that's nothing. After all, we didn't hit him or anything... But it was extremely meaningful to me. It gave me a true slap in the face. Really.

*Where did it move you?*

It made me understand that I'm simply – that there's this deep dissonance between what I'm told, between

the justice that I'm being taught and what really takes place out there, on the ground. Everyone's monstrous, they're all terrorists, all suspects, they have to be checked, every last one of them, they must not be treated as our equals. It is not right. This person wanted to make a living. That's respectable. It's much more respectable than what many people are doing not only in our country but – in fact – in our government. Honestly...

*Did you talk about these things with people?*

In the army? No...

### Testimony 48

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

These children with their plastic bags (Palestinian boys trying to get into Israel around Umm al-Fahm with bags of toys and various accessories for sale), the soldiers were al-





## TESTIMONIALS

ways stealing their stuff out of the bags. "Go on, empty the bag." Now, we know exactly what's in those bags. Okay. You could say this is security procedure. They can smuggle arms in those bags. "Okay, empty the bags. Oh, cool, I need some batteries." And they take them. Whatever's there.

*What else did they take?*

Toys, batteries, anything they had there. Little things.

*Money? Cigarettes?*

Cigarettes, yes. Money, I'm sure, yes. But I don't remember specific cases. Also, they certainly didn't pay for the stuff. There was one case that TV Channel 2 happened to be around and filmed some crew doing this. So then the company commander had us stand in formation and scolded us, the whole company. He said: "How could you possibly think you wouldn't be seen?" Not, how you could possibly do such a thing, what were you thinking... "How could you possibly think you wouldn't be seen?"

...[T]he patrol that was caught was tried by the area commander and some of the guys were punished but not really...

*How's that?*

One was reassigned to a better unit, a "terrible punishment", of course... And another guy, professional army, was off the job for about a month. That was more or less the extent of their punishment and very soon everything was back to normal, meaning it was quite all right to slap, hit, humiliate and harass.

### Testimony 49

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Sachlav **Location:** Hebron

There's this toy pistol that shoots these tiny pellets, right? It shoots these plastic pellets that really hurt you? Soldiers would call a kid over, cock a weapon in his face and say: get me that kind of pistol. Not even ask, order him. The kids would get us these pistols. You'd give the kid 15 shekels and he'd be happy and get you such a gun. Bags of 100 pellets would cost us three shekels. We had plenty of these pistols in the company, lots. And it was pretty idiotic of the kids to buy them for us because many of the soldiers would then use them on the kids. You'd sit on guard duty and – pop – shoot a kid, pop – shoot a kid.

*With these pellets?*

Yes. They really hurt. They're bad-bad-bad. This went on until a rule was passed in the company to prohibit this. Whoever bought them would be prosecuted. We once had this case where someone jokingly shot a kid with several pellets like that. He called out to the kid and pointed this toy pistol at his head and these two soldiers got their picture taken...

### Testimony 51

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

I was in the battalion war room, the Erez Crossing Battalion, commanding seven companies, which is a lot of soldiers. So you get there at three o'clock and there are thousands of people waiting and a soldier yells in Arabic to open the door. It's a huge iron door. Think about it, it's nighttime and cold and stinking and everything there is made of concrete and metal. It's a horrid place. It looks like, I don't know how to describe it, horrible. So he yells to open.

*And what happens to the people?*

They all rush in, shoving each other and falling all over each other and running forward to the first checking post. When they run, there are soldiers standing above them with their rifles drawn. In the top position. I was there with my commander.

*What ages are these people?*

Mostly older guys. They don't get permits when they're younger. At that time they didn't get a permit if they were under 24 and without a family. There were these very strict regulations. But these are mostly older men, very poor, tattered clothes, poor. All I remember is that they looked really ragged and terribly poor, they always looked really miserable, holding these plastic bags with some food for the day. And that's it. They would all run together and like first come, first serve. Then they would start getting checked. Now, this checking took place at about three or four posts. At the first one was a soldier facing them with his rifle, telling them to pivot, check them. After that, there's the metal detector,

this kind of gate. So the guy has to go through. Then the soldier tells him to pivot and checks him, he goes through this other metal door to the next stop. There were the crossing inspectors, checking their permits, sitting in the booth and being shown the permits and magnetic cards...

...At Magen 12 the inspections really and truly include body searches. There was this thing with women, I don't remember where the women's inspection booth was. There were often complaints from the women soldiers having to inspect women.

*The women (Palestinians) never complained?*

They must have. But who ever heard them? No, there was a lot of criticism about that, you know, there were all these horror stories about women and some of it was part of the joking around. Women who are totally concealed and they're stripped for inspection. They'd take off their shoes and belts and it was a sort of humiliating situation. Yes, as in every checkpoint. We must say there were much fewer women who came there than men, of course. But say at Magen 12 there



## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

was a special chamber for inspecting women. Every woman who arrived would be sent right to that room. There they would be totally stripped. I know they were because the women soldiers told about this with real revulsion, like they really had to inspect them, under their clothes and all.

*To what extent were they stripped?*

I don't know if they even kept their underpants on. Well, definitely they took everything off under their dress and all. *And the woman soldier remained with the woman inside this room?* Yes, the soldier would check her inside. They had rubber gloves.

### Testimony 52

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Hebron Regional Brigade/Education Corps NCO **Location:** Hebron

A month and a half after I began my job as an officer at the Judah regional brigade, there was the event at the Prayers' Route where the brigade commander was killed. From that moment, a mad wave of terrorist attacks began and lasted about half a year, on and off, events that mostly ended with fatal and wounded casualties. At that time the normal conduct of the people at the regional brigade was a bit odd. For example: the intelligence guys used to photograph terrorists' bodies, after they were killed, for intelligence purposes. These photos would somehow find their way to all the computers on the base, through the army email, and would serve as screen savers in various computers in the adjutant's offices and so. Simply pictures of insurgents' bodies. In general, there was this thing where people would come to intelligence to watch bodies, the burnt body of an insurgent, the picture of a D-9 bulldozer demolishing a home. These were the engineering corps's screen saver. Everyone was doing this. There was this culture that started. I'm calling it a culture on purpose here, a highly cynical culture around these events...

### Testimony 53

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Gaza Division/Education Corps **Location:** Gaza Strip

A good friend of mine, an intelligence officer on our base, had a huge Palestinian flag. I don't recall whether there were

drops of blood on it or not, she had it hanging in her office. I once asked her why she had it up there and she said: "I don't know, looks cool to me." Once I took a ride with...

*Where was that flag from?*

A search in some house.

*The guys simply brought it?*

Yes. Once I caught a ride with some intelligence guys in a jeep, they gave me a ride to the base and there was this terrible stench so we asked them what it was and they said there was, they told me: See that black bag hanging outside the jeep by the hood?

I said, yes. So they said, it contains the clothes of an insurgent who was killed yesterday near Kisufim. So I said, why do you take it? And they said, what do you mean? We collect it for the office. But don't tell anyone you saw it. Like, they simply keep these things.

*Just the clothes?*

That's what they said. I don't know. It stank. I don't know what it contained. But I've seen this pretty mechanical behaviour, pretty bestial, like, not one of the people serving inside the brigade HQ, or on the division HQ base, had any daily contact with Palestinians or with combatants whom he could beat up at the checkpoint or something because he'd had enough or anything. But this was more like, "Hey, guys, want to watch the film of that peace activist getting killed in Rafah?

Rammed by that bulldozer?" (The interviewee is referring to the event on March 16, 2003, when American activist Rachel Corrie was killed.) Let's go see it! Like they're detached.

*Was that part of the morale?*

Yes, a part of it. Sometimes it seemed like the social thing to do. I mean, not on the level of pictures of bodies as screen savers but still, keeping the clothes of a dead insurgent in the office seems pretty sick to me.

*There's no difference here between officers and enlisted men?* No. None.

*...How do you explain people's behaviour, your own behaviour? All the guys sitting there watching the filming of someone's death?*

These are perfectly normal people, if there is such a thing at all. It's a defence mechanism, because I've seen myself fall into it all the time. You can't cope after that. That one time when I was there in the event of the tank, because I chose



## TESTIMONIALS

not to escape and not to use that defence mechanism that says let this slip, let's not see humans quite as humans, I really didn't manage to function afterwards. It means that if you want to function, you have to protect yourself somehow. You mustn't feel too much. You have to be quite mechanical, quite detached. So I don't think these are bad people or beasts or I don't know what. It's everyone, each to a different extent and in a different manner, but this kind of detachment was pretty common.

*...How did the soldiers react to this situation, what did you notice?*

...They're frustrated, exhausted, I don't know, I'll tell you in general – I don't understand how and why the army thinks it can do an effective job if it assigns soldiers to do guard duty in such a frustrating, exhausting and desperate way. And I realise the soldiers were extremely frustrated and took it out god knows how. I don't justify it for a second but I think I would go crazy under such circumstances. I can understand, I can imagine why a soldier might fall asleep on guard duty, do drugs on duty, beat people up, go home and beat up the whole world, drive a car like a maniac, because in a way they've lost it much more than we have... They're constantly in this state of tremendous anger that is directed at anything, and desperation and frustration...

### Testimony 54

Name: \*\*\*

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: Sachlav Location: Hebron

There was a soldier with us... there was this soldier of ours and some Arab boy came along and yelled at him: "Soldier, soldier, look, look!" He made this gesture showing him he was holding a grenade. Now, that must have been a dud grenade or something, I don't know where he picked it up, it was no good, that grenade wouldn't have done anything. So this kid goes, "Soldier, look, look, you're dead!" and threw it over to the outpost and our soldier leapt down from the post to the road below and broke his leg. I don't know who and I don't know how it happened but I do know that two of our guys got him into a Border Patrol jeep and hardly two weeks later this kid was moving around with his two arms and two legs in plaster casts, in a wheelchair.

*Who chased him?*

They didn't catch him right that moment. They just knew who he was. We already knew him, he was quite a trickster. He would always do stuff like that. He'd come, throw stones at our outpost. The story was that the Border Patrolmen got him into the jeep for us and I'm nearly certain that it was someone from our company who had done the 'final act'.

They spoke about it quite a lot in the company, how they sat him there and put his hand on the seat and simply broke it on the seat.

*How old was he?*

He was one of the older ones, about 14 years old or so, one of the relatively older kids who hung around us. And this was his punishment for making our soldier break his leg by jumping from the outpost.

*Why did this story shock you? Accounts being settled?*

Not quite that, I expected these people to settle accounts with whoever harmed any of us but to take someone and break their arms and legs? That's super-Mafia. Like, what? And this description was running through the whole company, how they placed his hand on the chair and broke it.

*Do the commanders hear about this? Is this supposed to be concealed from them or do they look away?*

I think it was kept from them but do you actually believe they wouldn't know, in such a small company?...

### Testimony 56

Name: \*\*\*

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: Golani Infantry Brigade

Location: Gaza Strip

This happened in the hot-houses of Kefar Darom (Israeli settlement). A company was positioned there, assigned to defend the hothouses of Kefar Darom. I'm talking a mass of soldiers here, some 30-40 men. The guard shift was changing, someone climbed up the watchtower,

someone else climbed down and just then a Palestinian Police officer got under the fence, shot the guy who came down from the tower, right between the eyes. The guy who came to replace him shot the officer and he fell to the ground. Before he hit the ground, he managed to shoot the second soldier. So the upshot was two dead soldiers, one died on the spot, the other died some three days later. And someone from the soldiers' encampment – the terrorist also held a grenade, and the third soldier killed him before he managed to throw it. So theoretically – this is not that far-fetched – theoretically, it could all have ended very differently. This was very close to the soldiers' encampment where they were all asleep. It was the middle of the night. There were about 20 soldiers in that encampment. And he killed those two soldiers and seriously wounded the third. And this event had serious impact on these soldiers and on me too, both personally and in my perception of them. This entailed a certain ideological crisis, at least for me. Because this was the first time at



least I, myself – I'm talking about myself now, not about the soldiers – it was the first time I realised the real meaning of all of this. Like it's easy for you to be asking these questions, as if it's all so casual. In your everyday you're in this kind of social game.

*So all of a sudden you realise this is no game?*

Exactly, yes. It suddenly hits you that all this bullshit you're into in your everyday life is, the whole point this exists, that we're here at all, is a reason we're not aware of, but suddenly, two soldiers are killed. And suddenly, you are conscious... Anyway, that was a real turning point for me. Suddenly, I started thinking about it all, where is our own humanity expressed in this whole thing, what's the point of everything we do here, but it was obvious for me that this isn't something I'd bring up with the soldiers. That's not my role. I didn't feel a need to do this. These are issues I have with myself. But I definitely wanted to make room for their conflict.

*Did they bring it up?*

Sure they brought it up. It wasn't easy, like: Guys, what does this do to you?

*And they actually said: we're here, guarding the...*

No. It was from a place of – I'm not talking here about the first days, where the emotional pain is just so great, it overpowers everything, when you lose a friend.

*Revenge?*

Revenge too. But at a later phase, I'm talking say about a good few weeks later, when the initial phase is over and you re-

alise things are not getting back to normal. You realise people are bewildered and tense and confused. And you try to talk with them and they don't show any emotion whatsoever. (...) It wasn't simple. I had to really pressure them into it. I said to them after this event: What are you, animals? Monsters? Don't you feel anything? You want to tell me you're totally indifferent to what happened here?

*They were obeying orders. (At another point in this interview, the interviewee talked about the Golani brigade commander who issued an order to his soldiers, forbidding them to cry in public.)*

No, not that. This was later, not seeing this again. But regardless of the crying bit, I'm saying I was trying to have them float what they were feeling beyond the actual pain of losing a friend: Look, you're animals. Don't you feel anything? Are you totally indifferent? You're like this and not saying anything? Slowly, things began to emerge, to be externalised. People began to talk and started bringing up all kinds of conflicts and personal feelings.

*Individually?*

No, I'm talking about a group. I'm sitting with a group of men and we're talking, openly. Not once and not twice I got a real talking-to about this from the officers and the company commander.

*What did he tell you?*

He said: "You're turning my men into cunts." I'll never forget this as long as I live. After about three hours of sitting with the guys, and they talked and talked and talked, and he realised what this talk was about. The mere fact that I come and talk with them about their feelings, that turns them into cunts, plain and simple. I was not your ideal welfare NCO, you know, the other NCO works by the book. She does welfare, she's very politically correct. She has her work cut out for her with the soldiers and she does her job with the commanding echelons. I wasn't like that. Again, I'm not judging here, good or bad – I just wasn't like that. It's a fact. Whether it's good or bad, I'm not getting into that at all. Often in this context, exactly



around these things, around the emotional-human aspects of their activity, this thing kept coming up, of my being the girl who screams and says: I'm not a rubber doll, no one's rubber stamp, not a robot. You want a male clerk who'll do the job. You cannot open my eyes to something and expect me not to respond. I experienced this mad emotional storm there, really

mad. Not necessarily in this context, in general. But it did happen at this point too. And yes, these are words I'll never forget, the company commander summoning me to him and telling me: "You turning my men into cunts. And if you don't hold back I'll not let you see them, you'll have to do everything through me"...

*How did you react?*

Like a true-blue Golanchik.

*Turn the table on him?*

Not physically. But I told him, no way, and with all due respect, there's not a chance in the world, it's not within his jurisdiction, it's not in his hands, I'm not his subordinate, I'm not under his command and he cannot prevent me from seeing the soldiers. It's a soldier's right to have a welfare NCO whom he can meet, and not limit her time, just as you cannot keep him from seeing a mental health officer. It's the law... Listen, today I can tell you I understand this. If the commanders were to give this free rein, obviously things would change. Obviously, if they were to give the soldiers legitimacy to think about their action and look for the mean-

## TESTIMONIALS

ing behind it, I assume many people would be against such actions. Not everyone. When he tells me "You're turning my men into cunts", his subtext is this: If you don't shut up, I'll lose control. I will no longer be able to command them. They would no longer be combatants. They will no longer be able to carry out missions. That's my own interpretation of his telling me...

### Testimony 58

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

*Who does the inspections, is it a special assignment?*

The Crossings Inspectors. I can tell you there's enormous frustration, enormous. It's really scary.

*I'd take it out on someone. My commander or a Palestinian or my boyfriend*  
\*\*\*

Often on my boyfriend \*\*\* and on my commander. Commanding these soldiers is not that simple. I know that the Border Patrolmen take out more of their own frustration on the Palestinians. They are armed, it's the easiest way out. The slave with the sceptre, kind of. I mean, you have the gun, the Palestinian doesn't. Usually, he's holding stuff because he's at the checkpoint since two in the morning and he hasn't seen his wife for three months already and he can't even remember his kids' names. The Border Patrolmen were much more... I must say now, they did have their frustrations but they took it out especially in making fun of the Palestinians behind their backs, calling them names. There were the things, I don't remember, somehow if I try to reconstruct, I see my soldiers in the Shimshon battalion harassing the Palestinians at the checkpoint, more than the Crossings Inspectors. Again, we're talking about humiliation. Big-time abuse? No. But this is not easier. I mean, if it means grabbing someone's falafel sandwich which he put in his bag, that's both harassment and humiliation. If he took along a falafel at five in the morning, that means he wanted to eat it at 10, right?

Or, by the way, although the Border Patrolmen secured the inspections, I recall times when I went down to the checkpoint and saw Border Patrolmen tearing bags with their hands so that the Palestinian could then no longer use that plastic bag for the clothes he took along. This might not sound too harassing, I don't know, I think it's horrible. I thought it was horrible then too.

### Testimony 59

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Field Intelligence **Location:** Etzyon Regional Brigade

*When children threw stones, were you questioned? Did you ever have to testify?*

Yes, once. Because we had no video. If there's video, that's enough. You watch the video and see the stone-throwing and that's enough. If there's no video, someone has to testify.

*What happened then? Is it like the movies?*

No. They (the children who were caught) sat outside and waited for whatever was to be done with them. And I went to talk to some Shabak guy or investigator or however you call it and that was that. He asked me to write down the whole event as it was and that was it. Then you have to sign on the dotted line, and finished.

*What did you write?*

What I had seen. But I wasn't sure of what I'd seen, but it did happen.

*What did you see?*

There are all kinds of stone-throwing. Picking up and throwing stones, like I told you, when they're on their way home and they throw a few stones. Then there was this case where they just threw a stone to make it jump outdoors, things like that, where you can hardly notice. So they were walking along home and played around throwing three stones. They didn't even run away. Then the patrol came. They didn't even run off at the sight of the patrol because it wasn't close so they didn't think they had been seen somehow.

*You wrote that you were uncertain?*

No. I said what I remembered happening and then asked him what happens if that wasn't what happened.

And he said that even if it hadn't been, they would confess.

*What did you think afterwards? What did you suppose would happen to these kids?*

First of all I saw them earlier as they were sitting there and it was cold, it was winter in Jerusalem. They were tied, these poor kids. And that was that. What had been done to them before that? I know they were beaten up. What happened to them afterwards? I no longer recall.

*What does that mean, 'they would confess'?*

I asked no more questions.

*Why not?*

First I asked him: What do you mean, they would confess? And he said: They will confess. So I chose not to know.

*He didn't want to say?*

No, I didn't want to hear. I think he was rather eager to talk about it.



## Testimony 60

Name: \*\*\*

Rank: Sergeant

Unit: Sachlav Location: Hebron

We were the least of all evils, do you understand? Compared to the Border Patrol, we were the good guys. Who's there in Hebron on a permanent basis? Sachlav and Border Patrol. They're the only ones – males – stationed in Hebron three years straight. So compared to them, we were like the good guys. They were the bad guys.

*What did you do?*

They would settle accounts in a big way. As for hitting – they were on jeeps the whole time, less on foot, so they would simply take people into their jeeps and beat them to a pulp. You'd see a jeep pass by and a person thrown out of it suddenly.

*You saw that?*

People thrown out of jeeps? Yes. Beaten to a pulp. A jeep drives by and a person is thrown out into the street.

*What did you think of the Border Patrolmen then?*

They didn't come close to me. They didn't dare get close to my post at all. They hated me, I tell you. Like I said, they enjoyed booing when I was cited for excellence by their own brigade commander.

*So how did you react when you saw someone thrown out of a jeep?*

Once a guy was thrown out of a jeep right next to me and I pretty much ran over to him and the soldier who was with me said: Don't touch him, don't touch him, they have all these skin diseases. That's what he yelled at me from a distance as I was running over to a man lying on the ground. Nothing, I poured some water on his face and left him my canteen, that's what I did. No more than that. I didn't summon anyone. I didn't call an ambulance. Nothing. And he got up and ran away. Took the water...

*How are the Border Police humiliations different from yours, if you were the good guys?*

Ours weren't that extreme. Ours were, say a guy would get fresh with us, we'd punish him. With us it was more like punitive action. They were about dominance. That was their thing. They come around to show who's in charge: first of all get down on your knees when you talk to me. Like, not everyone, but yes, it was like that. That's what I'm saying, we would be more punitive, they were all about taming, educating, I don't know, whatever you want to call it.



## Testimony 62

Name: \*\*\*

Rank: First Sergeant

Unit: Border Patrol Location: Seam Zone

In Charish, there was this famous story about Baq'a al-Gharbiyya, actually in the two Baq'as where soldiers trashed stands and stole cellphones.

*What that, trashing stands?*

Vegetable stands.

*That's a shop. Going into a shop and trashing it?*

Sometimes the stand is outdoors, like watermelons or something.

*In town?*

Yes, in town, sometimes on the main street. That happened.

*Why trash them?*

Because the owner employed an illegal (a Palestinian illegal working in Israel), to teach him a lesson. Or all kinds of goods when vehicles are inspected so the goods are trashed. There's a lot of goods and vegetables passed along so that's trashed. What would he do? Or just little humiliations, throwing his ID on the floor so he has to bend down and pick it up. There's the 'honour games' which could start little with throwing an ID on the ground and reach the point of

trashing a whole stand. What could he do? He employed an illegal, I'll trash his stand, he'll complain about me, he'll have to admit he employed an illegal.

*People didn't come back to the base with loot?*

Again, in our situations, especially out of those plastic bags. But still, it could be toys or batteries in packs of 20, not bad. So yes, it's looting, and for such a kid it's a lot of money. "What a cool toy, I'll bring it to my kid sister. Now, beat it!" At times generosity was at its peak: "Wow, what a toy, you give it to me, I let you in." You know this stuff, letting them into Israel in return for something you wanted from their stuff.

*Did they offer straightaway, those kids?*

Yes.

*How did guys react to this?*

They went for it. They would make fun of these kids. The kids who offered were those who didn't want the contents of their bag to be scattered on the ground. So 'Come see what I got in here instead of throwing it all on the ground.' Also,

## TESTIMONIALS

you throw everything on the ground and "Come on, you got three seconds to gather it all up again. Okay, out with it, once more."

*What happened if they wouldn't?*

What happened if they wouldn't? They'd get slapped around or have their stuff thrown out again and they'd be forced to run off without it.

*Leave their stuff and go?*

Yes. "What you manage to pick up, you take and now off with you."

### Testimony 63

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Mevo Dotan

I recall once, this was after we moved to Mevo Dotan, to the base there, some Palestinian was sitting on a chair and I passed by several times. Once I thought: Okay, why is he sitting here for an hour? I feel like spitting at him, at this Arab. And they tell me: Go on, spit at him. I don't recall whether anyone did this before I did but I remember spitting at him and feeling really, like at first I felt, wow, good for me, I just spat at some terrorist, that's how I'd call them. And then I recall that afterwards I felt something here was not right.

*Why?*

Not too human. I mean, it sounds cool and all but no, it's not right.

*You thought about later or during the act?*

Later. At the time you felt real cool.

*Even when everyone was watching, you felt real cool?*

Yes, and then sometimes you get to thinking, especially say on Holocaust Memorial Day, suddenly, you're thinking, hey, these things were done to us, it's a human being after all. Eventually, as things turned out, he was no terrorist anyway, it was a kid who'd hung around too long near the base so he was caught or something.

*A child?*

An adolescent.

*Slaps?*

Yes.

*Blindfolded and all?*

Yes. I think that at some point no one even stood watch over him.

### Testimony 64

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

There was another Border Patrolwoman with me. Again, we're talking about women so I think the women combat-

ants are more violent than the guys. There was this Patrolwoman with me, let's say we were managing an observation post, on some hill near this patch of trees. And the kids came along with their bags and she called out to them: "Come here!" So they came, they climbed the hill. She opened their bags and found this kind of fly-swat inside. So she goes: "Okay, up and down the hill in 10 seconds." Again, they're scared. You see those kids, what, they'll dare to refuse? So he ran, went down, came up. Now, he tried to do it with a smile. He tried, I don't know, to be like a kid and believe she was human. So she tells him: "Now do this with your fingers, squeeze them together." I don't know how to explain this, like signalling someone to wait a second, with the fingertips all together – boom! She hit him there with that fly-swat. The kid began to cry. She said: "What, you're crying? Off with you, run again, down, up, if you don't make it in time, you'll get beaten up." She hassled him about five times. Finally, she says to me: "Well?" I said, leave him alone, let him get away from here. Pretty soon I understood that talking to them – I got it? Again, what is it that I finally got? I was scared and I didn't feel that if I came and told them,

listen, this is out of line, it wouldn't interest anyone and wouldn't change a thing. It's not that I can come tomorrow and I'm not saying, maybe the regional commander, if I went to him, he'd take care of it. But later, I couldn't reach any one of the companies on the ground and I had no access to the regional commander.

*Why no access?*

Why? I had to go by the company commander first. I always tried their language: No, let

them go, leave it alone, I can't deal with this. All sorts of things, as if I'm not concerned with the people's condition, just that it's below me to even deal with them. Sometimes it worked, other times it didn't. There were guys with whom I felt more able to talk and reach some kind of understanding, and that they were acting this way to conform to their environment, because everyone else was like that, and with a little talking this could change. And there were the guys whom I told: Listen, why are you beating up this kid, tomorrow a Hamas member will catch him and tell him to come and take revenge on that soldier. Why shouldn't he? If you treat this kid well, I'm not telling you to let him in, he's not supposed to go in? Send him home. But treat him like a human being so he won't want to blow himself up on you tomorrow. There were guys who did listen, not everyone on the force are like all they do is beat up Arabs. But there was definitely that atmosphere and it was totally routine.

*Patrolwomen too?*

Also.

**Testimony 65**

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

They would ask the Palestinians for cigarettes or Coke in return for... Because they'd see the people, in those good old days they knew the people, they would see them time after time and again. They would be working eight-hour shifts: "You want to pass tomorrow? Bring me a pack of cigarettes."

*That was the norm?*

Cigarettes, food. That's what I know about. It was the norm. They weren't ashamed to talk about it, on the level of cigarettes and food. But my brother, when he was posted at the checkpoint as an inspecting soldier, securing there, he came there from Military Investigative Police and filed a complaint with the chief complaint officer of the army. When he got out of there after one month of security assignment, he complained. You can get a copy of the letter he wrote. It was much more serious because he was checking not at the normal checkpoint, it was where trucks were being inspected, a checkpoint that was already closed when I was in the army. It was serious, passing goods and trucks, inspecting these huge lorries. Not the people themselves. There was real bribery going on there, much more serious than where we were. That was already dealing with cargo.

*They did it next to commanders or officers?*

No, not next to commanders and officers.

*So where would they put the packs?*

No, first of all it took place on night shifts. Besides, it was fun. You go down to the checkpoint and your bulletproof vest has "Death to Arabs" written on it. Stuff like that. So you go down and you tell them, depending on the pressure at the checkpoint, that you haven't time for that bullshit because your commanders are near you so go on, get this through. You can't begin to negotiate with them now. But at slower times, or when they come back slowly, when things are quieter, we would be watching how many people were coming through, what the situation was like. In quieter times, the guys told me they would really have a laugh, pull practical jokes, pretending they were tearing up their permits but not really doing it, just hiding them. The whole gamut of things you can pull on someone to humiliate him. I don't

remember. But mainly I do recall how everyone would talk about the loot he'd bring back from the checkpoint. It was very much like that, with girl crossings inspectors too. Yes, most of them were girls. Anyway, about sweets they demanded. Anything you wanted. You could ask more or less anything you wanted and the next day he knew that if he wanted to be let through, he'd have to bring you. Someone asked for a pack, another would ask for a carton. It's not about money, I never heard anyone asking for money. That's it, and I can hardly reconstruct the jokes, I don't remember that much but there were a lot of those and everyone was laughing, smiling about them when they talked. Because it's boring there so you laugh it up at the checkpoint.

*No one would say, come on, that's not nice?*

The Arabs are the enemy. The more you make them suffer, the better.

*Why?*

Didn't I explain why? Because, first of all, if I'd say something, I'd be left with no friends, I think. Really, I'd have no friends. People on the base didn't like me too much as it was, they couldn't figure me out, I was too weird for them. They couldn't figure out this service year I did before my army time. They didn't know what that was. Anyway, I was a strange bird among them. But really, talk was very strong on how we're here... Look, for everyone, including the commanders, it was very obvious: we're here facing an enemy and we're in danger and that's why we have to do the job as best we can. Okay? That's the basic reasoning, right? Now, practically speaking, you don't have an enemy at Erez Crossing, these are only poor people passing through every day and you know them and you see how miserable they are. Their clothes are torn



and all they have in that bag are this flatbread and yoghurt and even that you order him one day to throw away because "we're on alert today". There were always special instructions: now you're not allowed to go in with oregano, now no flatbread, not this, not that.

*Who would issue these instructions?*

My commander.

*Not the government.*

That's right. But today I recall a meeting where I asked him: Why not let them in with oregano? They all have it, not just this guy. "Forbidden".

*So the soldiers just took out the oregano...*

Picked it out, put it on the side. Then bring it to the base. Not cool?



**Testimony 66**

**Name:** \*\*\*  
**Rank:** Sergeant  
**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Training Base

When I came to Nahal Battalion 50 as a young NCO, I arrived at \*\*\* and no one was on the base, the whole battalion was in Qalqiliya on some mission, and when they came back it was the first time I saw them all. I walked around among the various companies, all smiles and happy, and talked a bit with the soldiers and saw that almost all of them have these Arabs' prayer beads and little Korans. I asked them, where do you get these? They said, what do you mean? We were in Qalqiliya just now, we took souvenirs from houses. So I, young female soldier that I am, go in for an interview with the battalion commander the next day and he asked me: What is your first impression of our battalion? I said, okay, except that I saw soldiers with prayer beads and Korans from Qalqiliya which they took as souvenirs. He got annoyed, almost threw the table, picked up the phone and called the company commander in question that very moment. So the company commander said: I never saw this girl in my life, she's lying, making it all up. No way, my soldiers would never do something like that. He hands me the receiver, I tell him: Listen, this happened. He says: Who are you anyway? You little runt, you don't understand a thing. He was really yelling at me. And that was that, I came out from the battalion commander's office and from that moment on, that company ignored me, for four months I couldn't go near them...

**Testimony 67**

**Name:** \*\*\*  
**Rank:** Sergeant  
**Unit:** Sachlav **Location:** Hebron

There was this one single time I harassed an Arab brutally. I threw his car keys into a garbage truck that just happened to pass by. There was this thing, when I just got to the company there were guys who wouldn't share guard duty with me because I kept saying about everything: this should go to the army spokesperson. You go on like that, I'll call the army spokesperson, I don't care, you're not going to slap this person while you're next to me. Such stuff, like really extreme. They were, if I went to the bathroom for a second, someone would go with me and when I got back, there would be someone inside the armoured booth as if they're questioning him on something. So I'd open the door and make

some noise to make them leave him alone. There were lots of soldiers punishing Arabs. You were out walking during curfew. I'm going to punish you.

*For example?*

Making them stand facing the wall, such stuff. Like punishments in school. A guy forces a 50-year-old man to stand in the corner, as punishment. Stand there with his face to the wall, looking. It was very common to punish them for things they had done. A guy showed his ID, we'd check on radio, he's clean, nothing on him. Then we'd start harassing him. Tell him we didn't get an answer on him, start emptying your pockets, stuff like that, just because the guy pulled a face, rolled his eyes. Punishment. You didn't speak nicely, we'll punish you. Really... So this Arab came along and he was very, he was driving during curfew and tried to explain that his mother had needed this medicine and he was going to get it for her and this and that. So I said to him: Okay, but stop. He drove on. Stop! The soldier with me already cocked his gun and I said: What are you, crazy? Why are you cocking your gun at him? Then this man came out of his car, like: Nothing, nothing. The soldier said to him: Give her your keys. So he gave me the car keys and I don't know what happened then and we said he couldn't keep driving so he got really annoyed and came to grab the keys from my hand. I reacted instantly – a garbage truck was just passing by there – I simply went like that and threw the keys into the garbage truck and it drove away.

*Did he get angry?*

Angry? He stood there, looking at me like this. He didn't show anger. He just stood there. So I said, bye-bye. You can't drive like that anyway. And

only afterwards, when I got back to the company and the guys were taking turns on that car for days and nights on end.

*What do you mean?*

The soldier who was with me asked the soldiers at the outpost to stop the garbage truck and they got the keys out. That person walked away, he left the car, closed it, locked it like that and left. So we had the key and the soldiers would drive it at nights. All the soldiers there already knew that this is a car driven by soldiers even though it's a Palestinian car.

*Who knew?*

The soldiers at the posts knew we were driving that car around. We had a girl soldier without a licence and they tried to teach her to drive on that car. So you throw the key and the whole company takes turns driving. The whole time we were thinking that as soon as the guy would come back to get his keys, reach the post or something, someone would know it was he. But the guy never came back. Every night the soldiers rode around and then parked the car across from that same post and no one came to get it.

*How did it end?*

How did this end? We brought the car to the police.



### Testimony 68

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

From where I am I can say that I often found out, soldiers would annoy me because they wouldn't follow certain instructions we gave them. There were many cases where say we'd ask them to let someone go and they wouldn't. I was making those women wait anyway, at least for a while. My shift was eight hours long and I'd make them wait for eight hours.

*Eight hours just waiting?*

At least...

*People used to wait even longer?*

That's what I'm saying, when the shift changed, if I started at six in the morning and finished at two in the afternoon, an eight-hour shift – I'd tell the shift coming in to replace me: That one and this one, they've been waiting since we opened the checkpoint at five in the morning.



*And the next shift would let them go?*

They'd check what to do with them, let them in, keep them out, take them to the Shabak for questioning, what to do with them. There are all kinds of possibilities. It's like goods. You take it, you pass it along...

### Testimony 70

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Golani Infantry Brigade **Location:** General

*You spoke of passing around photos of bodies. In what format, cards?*

No, a photo album.

*Did you actually see this album?*

It wasn't secret or anything. It was lying around in the dorms.

*Did you take a look?*

Yes.

*What did you see?*

Dead terrorist bodies.

*Who took these pictures?*

The soldiers who were present at the event. You open an album, you see a terrorist's head, you see the body of a terrorist, you see him at the same incident from different angles, you see pictures of a soldier holding the body, the head.

*How do people refer to it? Get me "the album"?*

No. You're turning it into something much more grand that it really is.

### Testimony 73

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** General

I think a barrier went up. I can't say I didn't have the guts for this, I don't think it was guts, but I just wasn't able to hit people. I pretended it amused me, the hassling and all. But I constantly tried to find a way to avoid it. Laughing, saying, okay guys, now let them go. It's gross, come on, get them out of here. I didn't try to come out, I didn't dare show that I found it a terrible thing to do.

*What were you afraid of?*

Being 'dissed'.

*Was there a physical threat as well?*

There would be a physical threat had I told on them, sure. Once a guy came to me specifically and said: "Listen, if you rat on me, I'll take you down too."

*For what?*

I don't remember. He came up to me one day, very annoyed. At that point, already, whenever the slightest thing happened in the company, guys would come to me with "You ratted on us, you ratted on us." I wish I had had the guts to do so.

What frustrated me most there was that if I already had the reputation of a ratfink, at least I should have had the guts to do it. But I didn't. I had neither the guts nor did I believe this would change anything. (...)

*What had happened to suddenly tag you as a ratfink?*

There were a few guys in the company who disliked me. Again, even my being a kibbutznik played a role and they must have noticed I wouldn't cooperate, that I wasn't taking part in bashing Palestinians. I suppose they did worry that I'd open my mouth.

### Testimony 74

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Jenin

While I was in Jenin, I was on a patrol with three other guys and we knew that a demonstration protesting the 'Sepa-

ration Fence' was planned, organised and coordinated with the DCO. We were briefed that they were allowed to demonstrate, may not destroy the fence, that we must keep them away from the fence. We had a briefing with the regional brigade commander. Which is an army briefing, of course, this was an activity coordinated with the army, and he said explicitly not to use any crowd-dispersal means unless we get official confirmation. I was with the squadron commander who some months earlier had shot that kid, yes. Shot a kid on a bicycle riding near the fence. (Earlier in the interview, the interviewee told about an incident where soldiers of her unit shot to death a boy who ran away from them on the Palestinian side of the fence.) He remained squadron commander. In a while I'll explain how but there are things that – after certain things happen, you can't remain a squadron commander.

Anyway, we were on patrol and suddenly we heard that they're already reaching the fence and we have to get there, from within, from inside the Territories, reach the fence. We got there as fast as we could and I was loading rubber bullets and everything as we drove. Okay, we get there and the squadron commander, behaving like a good boy after all the trouble he had got into previously, asks for confirmation to use crowd-dispersal means. In the meantime, they get to the fence and begin to tear at it. The deputy brigade commander had just gone out for coffee or something. We're sitting in the jeep and on the other side of the fence were army guys, probably from the DCO, yelling at us: "Do something, do something!" Finally, it took a few minutes – three or five minutes – until we got our okay to use crowd-dispersal. From our company commander. The deputy brigade commander didn't respond. So we got out and he threw a concussion grenade towards the fence and it didn't go off. That happens. So just to get some attention, because they more or less ignored us, he shot one bullet in the air, really in the air, and then threw a tear gas canister. Then they really let go of the fence and went back a bit. Another patrol arrived by then, intervened and helped push them back. Then at some point we really got them back with tear gas, I didn't shoot any rubber bullets. He gave me an order, I jumped in. I would have shot rubber only if stones had been thrown at us. Only if there were any real danger would I have shot rubber, aiming at legs. Again, this really highlights the difference between the two companies. But yes, I was at standby. They were pushed back mainly by shooting in the air, 180 degrees in this case.

*Live ammo fired in the air?*

Live in the air, and tear gas. They moved back and then guys came to us and yelled at us for not using physical force

and not shooting rubber ammo. They did manage to get six of the demonstrators who got within a metre of the fence. We had them moving back and again, we were on standby and didn't shoot anything. But that squadron commander was downgraded because he didn't function properly.

*What do you mean?*

He didn't push off demonstrators fast enough.

*But you said it took three minutes.*

No, we got our go-ahead after three minutes but it took us some more minutes to push them away. But the fact that he waited, that he didn't act right away, never mind instructions. That was a reason to downgrade him, unlike the fact that he had killed a Palestinian boy.

### Testimony 75

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Hebron Regional Brigade/Medical Corps **Location:** South Hebron Hills



There was this confiscation of IDs. At Yatta Checkpoint or...

*Which you took part in?*

Re-enforcing roads was something every part of the brigade did, to show more presence. This was in the days of brigade commander Dror Weinberg. Basically, girls did not take part in this but since the medical corps staff there had no officer besides the doctor and he didn't do this kind of duty, it was beneath him, I got a special okay from the brigade commander to do it, myself and a few other medics and an ambulance crew. We stood at the Sheep Junction, Elias Junction. Four-six hours of roadblocking every time. By order of brigade operations. Sometimes orders were to prevent passage of any Palestinian vehicle or to check IDs, to pass along every suspect vehicle's number to operations, make sure the driver wasn't wanted. You do what you're told because you're

no expert, you say a number and you're told: get his ID, make him cut the engine and take his keys. And that's what you do. He stands there until your shift changes and you leave his stuff with your replacement. I don't know what and how but I remember that when I got out of the army I still had some two or three IDs in my gear that I hadn't even noticed... There were such checkpoints, especially at Sheep Junction, where people passed from Yatta to Hebron, to the market. With carts and the elderly and children and everyone, whole families. And there too we had to check every single ID, check their gear. And there too it wasn't standard procedure, at least not in my medical corps unit, but I recall at least one case where Muslims' prayer beads were taken.

## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

The soldiers asked for them. Or cigarettes, we're out of cigarettes, give us cigarettes. There were a case or two or three but... that I didn't even notice.

*Do you remember cases of violence towards Palestinians?*

I remember many stories by Border Patrolmen. Stories I heard from them. They would come in after a long workday, come into the infirmary, the battalion medic had some close friends among them, and they'd say: 'listen to what we did today' and told and boasted and raved.

*To what extent?*

They'd patrol the town, someone would annoy them so they'd bash the hood of his car with their rifle-butt and throw in a concussion grenade or catch someone, put him on the jeep, carry him around town, throw him out at the end and beat him up. Or boys who'd thrown stones, they'd take them to... wherever, to the base, tie their hands with plastic shackles, blindfold them, slap them around, dry them out in the sun.

*You hear this and do nothing?*

No. I wouldn't like to explain this now or make up excuses. I know myself: I didn't understand what was going on there, at all. Either that or I didn't want to understand. These children would be made to stand in front of the Border Patrol company post and some Border Patrolman would come along and smack him on the head. This would happen in broad daylight with everyone hanging around. It wasn't something that made me think: oh my, what are they doing, perhaps I should say something. Like... It was something I felt or thought to be the norm here. Either that or I wasn't aware enough to say: Okay, this is out of line and I'm going to change it. Or I only cared about my own little corner and my own cup of coffee.

### Testimony 76

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Hebron

In the Border Patrol that year, a lot of attention was dedicated to human dignity. They changed the topic but when I was there this was it – human dignity in the Border Patrol. Lots of lecture guidelines.

*Which you give?*

No, the commanders. That's the whole point. Supposedly, the education corps NCO works behind the scenes to support

the commander facing his soldiers. Then you go talk to the commanders and realise there's no point.

*Really? Why not? They're supposed to understand their responsibility, aren't they?*

They would realise it up to the point where they went out into the field. When they were out there, they didn't really understand at all in spite of being the older and stronger ones. So the company commander wasn't the one to trash the place and all and didn't shove the father when they came in but he was there. He saw it happening. (At another point in the interview, the interviewee described a house search she took part in.) He waved me out of the room when I tried to understand what had just occurred, and the situation where they kept going back to the same shop again and again. (At another point in the interview she talked about a shop in Hebron that the soldiers would loot on a regular basis.) He waved me out. He could sit with me for hours over



the men's psychotechnical ranking exams (threshold tests for commander training courses in the Border Patrol), that he wanted me to sit over this or that and this and that, he could answer my questions about that or the other mission, what they do and what they look for, but about this specific point, where he should set a personal example...

*And he would still give that class?*

He would, to get it over and done with. He talks, he says the things I noted down for him to say to them.

*What about setting a personal example?*

That's what I'm saying, there is no personal example.

*You also need to set a personal example. Couldn't you say something of the sort?*

I could. That's what I would say when I talked. The talks I had with the soldiers in the company, if I heard certain things, when certain problems arose inside the company, with a certain soldier at home, I'd go straightaway and speak with the junior officers, the platoon commanders. With the company commanders I spoke less, but still. I can tell you that the commander of the Border Patrol in Hebron at the time cared about human dignity, that it's really important. But when it comes to facts on the ground, it's all bullshit. People behaved as they pleased.

*Being out in the field is not just conducting weapon-searches.*

No, it's also standing guard duty at the Tomb of the Patriarchs where you meet civilian population every single day.

*How is it shown?*

## TESTIMONIALS

Disregarding people, shoving them, cursing them. I told you, I saw this picture – now when we were in Hebron – a guy has a shop there or something, he says soldiers picked up stuff, trying to talk to the Border Patrolman, and the guy waves him off. It's exactly the same. Six years have gone by and it's just the same situations I'd see, when the Palestinians came to talk to them and no matter what rank the commander was – yes, yes, nod with their heads and shoo them off. Just like that. You can tell them anything, you can talk about human dignity until you're blue in the face, but in actual fact they only pretend to care, they couldn't care less. Border Patrolmen commanders as well. I think anyone stationed in Hebron longer than... I can't even say how long, but you feel you're going crazy.

### Testimony 77

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

*How many detainees would reach the base every week?*

There was something every day. Any time there was an arrest, and there were lots of those in Hebron. Every day. At any time of day. Any day. That's why it turned...

*Turned to what?*

It's like in the beginning – I say it as I look back now, recalling the changes I went through – at first you're afraid and then you pass by them as if they're: Yuck! They brought some more in? This never ends? What, them, again? It gets to be like peanuts.

*Peanuts?*

Something like that, you know.

*Comes and goes?*

Yes.

*How long does it take to get used to it?*

Not long. I think it's because it would happen every day, I have these flash memories of all those events. I remember they once brought in a young woman.

*Shackled?*

No, like that. Brought in by two women soldiers, to their quarters at Harsina, and our rooms were the first ones there, where I was. We had these four rooms and toilets and showers. So they brought her in, I don't know what her story was. Something, I think someone beat her up at home. She ran away from her father and she had a knife in her bag. But I do remember that afterwards they told us she ran away from home for some reason, that her father beat her up, it was – well, Palestinians. She was taken to the bathroom and I was

asked to go in with her because I was armed. At first it stressed me out and I said... no, at first. Straightaway the first thing I said was: Ugh, I'm not going in there with this Arab. No way. After that, I also felt a bit, I was a bit scared of her. Like I'm going in there alone with her, to the bathroom, and she came with a knife and I don't know if the knife was taken away from her or not, it wasn't. And so we're standing there arguing who's going to escort her to the bathroom.

*Who's arguing, the girls?*

Yes. And she stands there waiting, watching us with this strange look, she was really miserable.

*How old?*

I think she was twenty-something. I remember it always started with "Yuck, these Arabs, Ugh, these terrorists."

*Does that change at some point?*

No, that's the way it always was, there.

### Testimony 78

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

*How many girls were you?*

First there were four of us.

*In a company of how many?*

Sixty. This whole thing with girls, the Border Patrol is terribly proud of having female combatants and all. There are many guys and there's a special problem with, there are a lot of Druze and Bedouin guys in the Border Patrol and they have a mentality problem with the fact that suddenly there are girls who are their equals. In general, some of the girls are squadron commanders and these guys' superiors. Again, there are guys that have adjusted and have no problem with that. But often it spells trouble, in many situations. So not all of them brutalise people, not all of them are full of hate, but the atmosphere legitimises such things. And the girls, there was another one with me who wouldn't take part in the fun so they would pester her no end.

*Why didn't she?*

She too didn't believe in this. She was sort of a lefty and I guess it was against her principles. There was some story that took place there before my time but they used to make fun of her because of it, that one day they caught a group of illegals and one of them asked for some water because he had a headache so she offered him an aspirin. And that became a running joke for at least half a year after I got there. And this incident had taken place before I arrived. Like, what are you doing giving an illegal an aspirin? Next you're going to be taking care of him. That was like the worst disgrace. Such was the general attitude.



*The officers were a part of this?*

They were really, like it had nothing to do with them. "We don't know that." Like see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing, but it was obvious. Once every few months the company commander would give this lame speech that he won't tolerate this and that. But they hardly dealt with this, it wasn't a topic of discussion at all and not for lack of incidents. I mean, if it was the children, or... When it suddenly came up for all sorts of reasons, say like that video (at another point in the interview this interviewee described a case in which soldiers were filmed brutalising children), how much did they deal with it? Talked about it for two days and that was that, okay, let's carry on.

## Testimony 79

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing

**Location:** Gaza Strip

People's motivation had to be constantly pumped up, this was critical. We had serious motivation problems at the checkpoint, at Erez Crossing. Insane. The number of AWOLs we had there or, I don't know what they're called, when the soldiers ditch the base and go home? A guy runs away, home. And jail, every second person would go to jail for refusing an order. There was a real motivation problem.

*What orders did they refuse?*

They got sick of working like a dog. There were times they were working four hours and resting four hours. They were slaving away for three years. The soldiers, some of them did three years at Erez Crossing. These are sit-down jobs without the combat glamour. They go home with nothing, not even some badge to be proud of, just their regional brigade insignia. So that, and slaving away, and being on short leash, and having to clean up for inspection a month before their discharge. No scheduled promotions, no platoon sergeant, like a company of slaves, really. So one had to pump up motivation. How do you pump up motivation? The soldiers would be allowed, the way the commanders put it – I sat in on commander briefings about a year into my time there. Every day the commanders would sit together. And there was this expression: Okay, let the soldiers let off some steam. Let them release a little. Let them take the jeep, say, without a commander, no mission, just go to some industrial zone and harass the Palestinians.

*What was the jeep's mission?*

Nothing. The commanders would take it just to make the rounds and often take the girls from operations along – I often rode out with them, or soldiers, whoever he felt like having along.

*So they would let a soldier work off some steam away from the checkpoint? Take him along on a mission?*

No, he'd take the jeep and he could then drive up to Ashqelon to eat out. Once he'd go for shawarma in Ashqelon, another time he'd go – for example, there was this slight mission to pick up some illegal at Erez and throw him off in Gaza. That's right, illegals would reach us at the checkpoint, they'd come walking. Then he'd have to pass them over a few kilometres over to the other side, to Gaza. Cross that whole huge checkpoint compound. Not inside the crossing. One can also drive around it. So say they let the soldiers take some illegal and drive him over to the other side. Let's say they did it often.

*What other activities for letting off steam?*

Driving around, making the rounds in the Erez Industrial Zone, just for kicks. Look around. Going visiting, like visiting other outposts, it's all the same level, you know.

*Get away from the checkpoint for a while.*

Yes, but say this was the command jeep. Now, the soldiers, what I meant to say about the



soldiers at the checkpoint, what happens is that the officer can't stand it any longer either so he goes up – everyone always wants to leave the checkpoint and go up to the base. So he leaves someone in charge at the checkpoint, say a sergeant, to be the commander of this huge checkpoint. And then also there's this point that soldiers should also be allowed to exercise their own judgement because there are officers and commanders there all the time, a whole base right on top of the checkpoint. It's not this godforsaken couple of concrete blocks at some roadside, it's state regulations on this checkpoint of ours. Extremely controlled. So sometimes they step back and say: Okay, let them handle it for a while. Once I spoke to one of the commanders. I asked him why his soldiers were detaining some woman for I don't know how long, many hours. It was night-time and she had been waiting there since morning. So he said: "My soldiers know what they're doing. Just let them handle it. They know. Let them be." That's what he said. (...) The soldiers were usually clinically depressed, really. They were in terrible con-

## TESTIMONIALS

dition. They hated their job, they hated being at the checkpoint, they would get drunk at night just to forget they were there and did everything they could to get away every night, to Ashqelon, over the fence, just to get away and not be there for a while.

### Testimony 80

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

As an education corps NCO of the battalion, I did lots of kitchen duty and on one Friday night dinner, the auxiliary company came back with spoils, I think it was two terrorist bodies, and I recall coming out the dining hall door on my way to my tent and I saw them holding it, holding the body and getting their picture taken with it as if it were hugging them, they were striking poses for the camera and laughing. There was simply a dead body lying there near the dining hall where people wash their hands before they eat.

### Testimony 81

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Golani Infantry Brigade

**Location:** Gaza Strip

*How was the checkpoint run?*

Forcefully, with a forceful feeling. Drunk on power, control... What is hierarchy at the checkpoint? You always have the more veteran soldier who sits there and doesn't do too much. And there's the soldier who does the actual physical job, usually two of them, at the pedestrian checks. So I wasn't witness myself to brutal or inhuman treatment of people beyond the actual orders, which I don't know how humane they are, come to think of it. But on the level of obeying orders – it's control. It's a sense of 'it's my word that counts now and if I say fuck you then fuck you and if you're not polite to me or if I don't like the way you're looking at me, I'll fuck you. And if I want to hang you out to dry here, I will. And let's say someone complains it's too hot in here or asks what's happening – they make him wait. Like, who are you to talk? You're nothing. It can be just dragging things out or enjoying actually doing things very slowly and fuck around and pick up IDs and laugh at them or stuff like that.

*Did they play games at the checkpoint?*

Plenty. What are games? They had games like stretching time. That was really strong. They're sitting there and you have this huge waiting line and the weather is scorching

hot. Kisufim Checkpoint is right next to the army post, I'd walk there. So I was walking and I would want to spend some quality time with my soldiers. So through that I'd actually experience what they would be doing. Wasting time. You're not concrete, not professional, it's not like you have some... You've been at the social security bureau, haven't you? There's a very correct way of talking, you can't play around with anything that's irrelevant. At the checkpoint it's not like that. You do what you please. You talk any way you want, you do whatever you want, you exercise your judgement any way you want. Unless there's something extraordinary and then, of course, you get on the radio but in general you're your own boss. And that's a pretty intoxicating feeling for an 18-year-old kid who may have had his head bashed in the bathroom, I don't know. It definitely shows.

### Testimony 82

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Oketz **Location:** Nablus

*Did you run into instances of exploiting power positions at the checkpoint – what was that smile, now you'll wait here for four hours?*

Not quite like that, but he did something out of line: today you don't get through the checkpoint, you stay on that side.

*What does that mean, out of line?*

He didn't listen to the soldiers, he tried to pass although they told him to wait in line, stuff like that which I think is reasonable. Like, I mean, he made trouble – he won't pass. If everyone started to make trouble like that we'd have a problem because still we're much fewer than they are. So that's okay. Something that is just arbitrary, I don't

think I've seen. I haven't witnessed such use of force... Confiscating car keys, I have seen that. Also, the Border Patrolmen. But it was for, say, 20 minutes or something like that.

We were at a checkpoint once, also near Nablus but from another direction, I don't remember what it was called, I was only there once. The guys there were real fanatics. This was Duchifat or Haruv (units constantly in the Territories), I'm not sure which. I forgot their unit name now. I saw the same soldier on the same day saying to various Arabs: Give me a cigarette. Not: Hey, got a cigarette? He'd say: Give me a cigarette. Also, making people wait endlessly. There was a case of a guy who would make someone stand and wait. I was there for four hours that day, no, five hours. The first two hours there was someone he made stand aside, like on the vehicle checking lane, he made him pull over and wouldn't let him pass. I don't know why, he was there already before I got there.



*Did you ask why?*

"He was out of line so he's standing here." The soldier was playing this big he-man and running the checkpoint.

*What rank?*

Nothing, maybe a sergeant. A 19-year-old with some authority so he got excited.

### Testimony 83

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Hebron

I remember coming out of Hebron feeling suffocated.

*Why?*

You suffocate because you can't take it any longer. On the one hand, you've got these, the Jews because of whom you're there, protecting them. I remember the first time I saw Tel Rumeida, and it's nothing when you come to think of it. The Jews live there in such conditions, completely surrounded with Palestinians, and we're there to do it, to watch over them. So on the one hand, these are the people who throw eggs and tomatoes at you, curse you and your mother and all, and on the other hand, you've got that population and you're supposedly destined to be their enemy. You're supposed to hate them and you're somehow expected to navigate between the two. The commanders too, no one in Hebron Border Patrol really wanted to be there. No matter whom you talked to. The company commanders only sought chances for promotion and getting reassigned elsewhere, they didn't want to be there. No one wanted to be there. So how could you ask some company commander or platoon commander to discuss this with his soldiers?

*But he's there, what can he do?*

Nothing. Pass the time until...

*How do they pass the time?*

Nothing, look the other way. Say, okay, do it your way.

### Testimony 84

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

I recall once I thought it was a trifle but I remembered it while watching the film *To See If I'm Smiling*. I sat with guys

from the auxiliary company, I don't know if they were just back from some mission or something but we were sitting together, I also liked to sit and listen to their combat stories and be let in on things they did. It fascinated me. If I can't do it myself, at least let me hear about it from the source. So we sat there and they played around with these prayer beads and then someone came in and said: "Hey, look at my loot", something like that. He either said that or I asked where it was from. I remember asking, and knew that these were prayer beads. So they said: "From the Arabs." So I say: What do you mean, from the Arabs? What, you bought them? "No, we took them." But it's theirs, I said. "Okay, what do you mean theirs?" As if it was all right. And I thought, no, that's not all right. It's theirs, after all. Did they do anything to you, that you took them? "No, we just took them, we always do." I didn't know there was such a phenomenon. After seeing that film, I suddenly realised, this was a phenomenon indeed. And then suddenly, it hooked up, and it's most weird when I link it to things that happened in the Holocaust, when skullcaps were taken off men's heads. Come on, this is important, have some respect. But these are the things that make you think it's okay. When these combatants say it's okay, and they suffer more than I do, they're out in the Territories all the time and staying out weekends and all so what they do is all right.



### Testimony 85

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

*Were people creative?*

Again, hassling Palestinians was the creative part of heating up the ground, let's say.

*What's that?*

It's done a lot in squadron commander training in the Border Patrol. You stand and have to run in place, mustn't stop.

*How do you say it in Arabic?*

They're addressed in Hebrew. They're forced to understand Hebrew. You don't understand me? I'll hit you.

*Finally, they understand?*

Look, many of them know Hebrew, at least partially, and some of the Patrolmen speak Arabic because there are a lot of Druze and Bedouins on the force so sometimes they spoke Arabic. But there were quite a few Patrolmen who wouldn't speak Arabic even if they did know the simple words for 'hand over your ID' which we all knew. "No, I won't speak Arabic. He's entering my country, let him speak Hebrew." Even



## TESTIMONIALS

the simplest things. And really, it was routine. I mean, the specific events I remember were the one with that kid and also detaining older people for a long time.

*How long?*

Sometimes for an hour. Sit here for an hour. Stay.

*What do they do while they wait?*

Nothing. Sit.

*Can they let them go?*

They can. But they're passing the time. They don't want to let them go. Lunch is here, wait, we're sitting down to have lunch. You sit here, wait.

### Testimony 86

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

When the checkpoint was closed, demonstrations started. We had a new chief, a deputy battalion commander. He didn't know the open-fire regulations so he shot someone in the chest instead of in the legs. He didn't know that our open-fire regulations were specifically to aim at the legs.

*A deputy battalion commander doesn't know the open-fire regulations?*

They would change every day. They were hard to follow. What are open-fire regulations? We get a call from brigade HQ and we're told: today the open-fire instructions are to shoot anything that moves, or today it's at the feet, or whatever... This was a heated time in the region, not necessarily at the Erez Crossing itself, but it affected us a great deal, everything that went on around us. The checkpoint was a relatively quiet place until the October Intifada began, we didn't feel it yet. And then tens of thousands of Palestinians were barred from entering Israel and people still showed up wanting to get in, to work, so they had to be kept away somehow. And this turned into crowding and stone-throwing. Or let's say first of all someone threw stones, okay, but it started happening on a daily basis so snipers were called in. I don't know how far they stood but they stood there, placed themselves to watch the checkpoint area below, the people. And they kept getting different instructions. Say once there was some confusion even in the snipers' orders. I don't know, yes, it was like this, open-fire instructions, first of all they're not that interesting because if you keep changing them every other day, no one really pays them any attention. That distance doesn't look so big. So okay, I can hit and say I was shooting in the air. Understand? It's not that relevant. It's not something that was really right.

*Did you note down the open-fire instructions?*

We would write them down, in our logs. Too bad I don't have those logs, operations logs. I'd get you piles of them. No, we threw them out. You know, just like, at the war room. Why waste time? Let's go to the war room, get out some of those operations logs, it's all written down there, really: this woman waited for so-and-so hours, a kid was killed, the sniper hit him accidentally, it's all there.

*A kid hit accidentally, that's how it's written in the log? That goes straight to Military Police investigations.*

Well, no, the record is not that carefully detailed. What they do take trouble about is, say, beeper messages. My own commander at the time, in Border Patrol, I once sent in a message when I was still pretty new there: At the demonstration this morning, our forces, I don't know if they returned fire, anyway, they must have done something. Shot somehow because a child was killed, a child was taken down. I don't know if he was killed, he fell. So I wrote down 'a child fell' on that beeper. I sent the message. My commander was furious. He really yelled at me never again to write down 'child'. I said: He was eight years old, that's what the Palestinians said, shouldn't I write 'child'? Of course, I didn't use these words with him. But I was supposed to say youth, never 'child'. Since that time, for two years I never wrote down 'child' even though children were still getting killed.

### Testimony 87

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Lieutenant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Hebron

As an NCO in Hebron, I'd make the rounds. I'd go in with the patrols to the kasbah area, teeming with life, with all its fruit and vegetable stalls, a real market, with heads of oxen and camels and all that stuff. A year later, coming there as an officer, I saw none of that any longer. The kasbah was deserted, not one stall open. All those Palestinians' shops, there were no longer Palestinians' shops, everything was shut down. One of the things I most clearly remember from Hebron is graffiti. Everywhere you look there's graffiti, extreme text of one kind or another.

### Testimony 88

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Hebron

I tried to reach them from another place, not the self-righteous one. I tried to make them trust me by showing them that I wasn't that. I would listen, I simply don't recall



## ■ ■ ■ BREAKING THE SILENCE

now but I would listen a lot to their frustrations, their problems, what a downer it was to be stationed in Hebron. To do eight-hour/eight-hour shifts running. I thought, and do so now too, that if I had to do it all over again, I think that's how I would choose to act. I was constantly trying to calm them down...

*Even though it didn't work?*

Yes. I think that had I stayed there longer, I don't believe I would have managed to change much but perhaps I'd change a little. I told you, every time I see those films, the only thing I want is to be education corps NCO in Hebron once more and reach these people again and somehow try to reach them. Again, from a place of, like I say, as soon as I realised how problematic their situation was, I also realised I couldn't change the world, I can't revolutionise anything, you know, on the spot. I could try to reach people in a way that will perhaps make them do things a little bit differently, perhaps they will start thinking. I remember I told the welfare NCO: as far as I'm concerned, it's good enough if they give a thought to what I told them, later. Like, just hear me out, get through this barrier of: you're a girl, you're army, you don't know from nothing. That's why every week I went down to the Cave of the Fathers, so they wouldn't say: 'You have no idea what it means to be there, you don't understand, you don't see things with your own eyes.' But in moments when we weren't picked up to return to our base, or had no other way of travelling and had to stay down there for two-three hours, I'd go crazy. I realised I don't

understand a thing. You can think you understand, and you still don't understand, but that's why I think this should be handled very... On the one hand, they're placed inside a highly problematic system and, again, I think they're in contact with the population which is a problem in itself, it enables them to take out their tensions, they even kept fighting between themselves. Plenty. I keep remembering those you see starting up in jest, as it were, but the conduct itself is brutal. Somehow I think man's brutality comes out in the toughest situations. And I think the Border Patrolmen I lived with for half a year were people whose very language is violence. They also communicated violently with each other. Verbal aggression, plenty of dirty talk and all those slaps and claps on the back, no wonder they always get there and that's what they do. Go down to the post and that's how they behave, for as far as they're concerned, it was just an extension of their natural behaviour, just taken further. Whether it's the Palestinians or each other. Never in their lives would they beat up Jews.



*Was there something extreme they said that crossed the line?*

There was no line. No line. There was no line. I'm telling you, if I were able to remember why I say this with such certainty then it was even more so. But I can't recall. I'm telling you there were no limits. If there was a line, it was individual. Not something dictated.

*Are there rules?*

The rules are just for appearances. There are no rules. There are would-be rules. I don't remember, I tell you, I remember that situation where he waved me off because I remember him sitting on the edge of the table and I came to talk to him, I approached, I spoke to him and then: Go on, let it go, like leave me alone with that stuff. And he could talk to me for hours on end, this company commander, for hours, and all the while I was trying to reach them, having them appreciate me and not regard me just as a girl who came to talk with them. To reach them. In a million other things they could be totally open with me. Talk with them about sex, about their wives, about this or that – no problem. But

when it came to raising this subject... I mean, it was very important for them that the soldiers be looked after as far as their welfare status was concerned. But about what happens on the ground...

*And about the way Palestinians are treated? No talk?*

As I told you, even if Hebron Border Patrol was an assignment no one wanted, as far as they were concerned, they were doing everything be-

cause they must. I don't remember any incident investigations that ended up with any conclusions. I recall some investigations that were... I remember reading them in retrospect. I remember I was terribly shocked at how this would happen all the time. How constant these little incidents were. But it's not something that was regarded very...

*Did this shock wear off at some point?*

Yes. I think that now, in retrospect, I can really think about it. About leaving there feeling suffocated. Think about it, I wasn't there for long, just half a year, it's not a long time. Not for someone who does not do this Sisyphean job day in, day out, okay? When you're living this eight-hour/eight-hour shift plan, half a year is a long time. But the fact that you somehow adjust to the stress, to the fear, you get used to it all being so sensitive, to things happening without...

*So in what shape do you get out of there?*

Mainly want to get away. I just wanted not to be there. I told you, suffocated. When I went back now, if when you're a soldier it feels like home, there's this sense of there being

## TESTIMONIALS

something terribly special for me about the Cave of the Fathers, and I'm not into religion in any way. I mean it energetically, there's something energetically very strong about Hebron. When I came back, I recalled how I got out of there feeling only the urgent need to get away because I'm not... because you're put in a position where you just can't do anything.

### Testimony 89

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Nahal **Location:** Reihan

And then Shaked army base, that's where Reihan is. That checkpoint, there.

*You were assigned to checkpoints?*

Yes. That's where I also got a real sense of pride because you see them (the Palestinians) standing there, waiting, while we get to pass through like nothing, walking around among them, see how they're strung out there while we're free to go.

*What's there to be proud of then?*

That my lot is better than theirs, something of the sort. I recall that towards the end of my army service, what really made me think twice about this feeling, all this enthusiasm, was that apparently even \*\*\* was the person I asked this question. But there was some operation and they came back and often I'd come to the war room to hear what was up. Just to hang out with the guys in the war room, I loved to be in on things. Really. To know what's what, who goes where. Also, because the guys from our own group were in one of the companies there, I was always interested to know who was where. So I knew they'd just come back from a mission. I came around and heard they had killed and got really excited. Even when we were in Beit Lid, still the missions were around Jenin. So I came up to one of the guys and said, asked him: "Did you kill? How many?" And he looked at me sort of startled and says: "You don't ask such things. What are you thinking when you say this?" Suddenly, it dawned on me, I began to think about it and realised that all this joking around, the way I see it, all this joking about the Arabs and this and that, is perhaps a way to cope. Because suddenly, I'm talking with a person who I know with certainty has just killed someone today and he doesn't answer me and only says: what's with you, to be asking such things? I recall saying to him, at first: "Why, what's the problem? Everyone's into this, no? They joke about it and it's cool so why not tell me how many you killed? Why

not take pride in it?" That's what I was thinking, why aren't you proud of this, why aren't you telling us? And he looks at me: "You don't talk about it, you don't ask such questions." Suddenly, I realised they don't want to be like this, that this is their way of coping.

*Did you think about yourself, as well?*

I felt really bad, I felt I was out of line asking such a question and that this is human lives we're talking about here, all of a sudden, human lives. Not simply Arab, human beings. I remember, not sure if this was before or after, they would catch some kid hanging around outside the base, I recall this was in Dotan. I remember they caught him and brought him in and eventually he turned out to be just a kid who hung around too much so they suspected him. So suddenly, I began to think, hey, wait a minute, not every Palestinian is a terrorist and not everyone has really done something wrong. And after I found out that girl had simply run away from home because something really bad happened to her (earlier in the interview the interviewee told about a detained Palestinian woman whom she refused to escort to

the bathroom) all of a sudden I felt really embarrassed, why didn't I help her go to the bathroom, I didn't go with her. Slowly you catch on...

*Did anything else happen, after this process, which you saw differently?*

I don't remember. I recall that after I asked the guy how many he'd killed and how, I remember I started feeling really bad about the whole situation.

*What did you want to know, a number? More than that?*

Yes, if he had done it. It seemed cool to be talking to

a guy who'd just killed someone.

*You wanted to know how it felt?*

Yes. I kept asking them questions. They would go out on arrest missions and I'd ask them for details.

*What details?*

Where did you sleep? I remember they told me, for example, we got into a house, "And what, you spent the whole night there?" Yes, we had to stay there through the night. No, not asleep. So I go, "And where was the family?" And they'd tell me: We had them in another room. They sat in another room. "So where, I mean, you sat on..." No. Say they told me: The battalion commander didn't let us sit on the sofas so we sat on the floor or something like that. So I remember saying: "What? Why not? I mean, you deserve it, why not sit on their sofas?" This was during those arrest missions, that they had killed those guys.

*In Hebron?*

No. This was already in Jenin. Then suddenly, I realised they were calmer than I was. I suddenly felt uneasy. Here it's



the prayer beads they picked up and there they tell me it's all right to spit at a shackled Palestinian. Suddenly, I realise that I'm too extreme and they're okay, like.

### Testimony 94

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Unit:** Erez Crossing **Location:** Gaza Strip

The high-rise buildings in Beit Hanoun, every time there was shooting out of the orchards, there are these very tall, very white high-rises in Beit Hanoun. They're called the Officers' Quarters. Sometimes there would be shooting from there too. And we'd shoot into those houses. Later, some year or two ago, I saw a television report on Channel 2 about a girl who was hit by this shooting and lost her two legs. Shooting into the Officers' Quarters was routine, standard. We didn't think about the fact that people lived there. That Officers' Quarters means there are families there.

*You shot in warning?*

Yes, it's shooting that... No, warning shots are when you spray the orchards... listen, this gunfire stuff is very much up to the commander. Very much so. Really, one of the things I realised was that both the shooting and the definition of the zone, that was the most amazing thing, I found. Because the new commander who arrived, he's really a person you should interview, lieutenant colonel \*\*\* ...When he came, he was a nutcase, in short. He was the most psycho, violently aggressive. His predecessor had been very gentle-handed to everyone, even to soldiers who brutalise Palestinians, who beat them up. (...) What I mean to say is that the army commander who replaced him, first of all re-routed the road. Which is amazing, re-routing the road. I think it was set in the Oslo Accords that this is the delineation road between the state of Israel and Gaza. So he took it, I mean, it was this no man's land or grey area, into which they were not supposed to enter, true, if anyone entered it, we would shoot. There was someone who got in and was shot. It was an insane night. We were on radio with our commander who was following him. We heard him until he could reach the guy and shoot. We were certain we had caught a terrorist who was about to enter the settlement but he had nothing on him. And what did they say? Well? A tracker/guide. I believed it. Everyone believed it. That he's a tracker, that terrorists sent him ahead to learn the route and tell them where they should enter when they come to attack the settlement.



What I mean to say is that the army commander who replaced him, first of all re-routed the road. Which is amazing, re-routing the road. I think it was set in the Oslo Accords that this is the delineation road between the state of Israel and Gaza. So he took it, I mean, it was this no man's land or grey area, into which they were not supposed to enter, true, if anyone entered it, we would shoot. There was someone who got in and was shot. It was an insane night. We were on radio with our commander who was following him. We heard him until he could reach the guy and shoot. We were certain we had caught a terrorist who was about to enter the settlement but he had nothing on him. And what did they say? Well? A tracker/guide. I believed it. Everyone believed it. That he's a tracker, that terrorists sent him ahead to learn the route and tell them where they should enter when they come to attack the settlement.

*What did they find on him?*

Nothing. He had nothing on him. We said, if he's a guide, there must be a map on him, something. No. Weapons? A knife? Nothing at all. He had absolutely nothing. It was really, that whole night we were like really, because the commander kept reporting constantly: I'm 10 metres away from him. I'm two metres away from him. It was cool. Then he re-routed the road. He changed it – the base was angry at this commander for having changed fundamental orders. So a part of this meant keeping a really tough hand over the Palestinians. Then he changed the open-fire instructions. He decided. He came to the brigade HQ with a lot of force and said: I am commander not only of Erez Crossing, give me Dugit and Eley Sinai (Israeli settlements). So our zone was expanded. When he arrived, he decided that every single evening, without any special reason, we'd fire at the orchards. As soon as it got dark.

*Are these orchards tended?*

That's it, that's the interesting part. I never thought about whether anyone worked there. It's crazy. For me these were orchards. Orchards. What are orchards? Enemy ground. An

area we have to fear. I didn't think that perhaps people worked there. I remember coming on shift and being informed that open-fire instructions for now were to shoot at the orchards every night just in order to – I don't know – scare them. Warn them. I don't know why but to us this sounded surreal and terribly amusing.

*How do you know you didn't shoot homes?*

I don't know, we must

have shot homes too.

*What were the zone limits of this shooting procedure?*

There weren't any. You shoot, listen, you shoot straight. You're up there in your high position, facing the orchards. Yes, it's a huge area. I passed on the instruction to shoot warning shots at the orchards and the ridiculous part of what I'm saying here is that this was warning fire at nothing. Nothing happened. The time simply came and you'd shoot, that's what's so ridiculous. But when I passed on the order to shoot at the orchards, everyone knew what it meant.

### Testimony 95

**Name:** \*\*\*

**Rank:** First Sergeant

**Unit:** Border Patrol **Location:** Seam Zone

Most of the time I saw violence around Katzir, before the fence was constructed, then it was simply routine – emptying the children's plastic bags and playing with their toys. You know, grabbing the stuff and throwing the toys among us like balls.

## TESTIMONIALS

*The children cried?*

Constantly. They cried and were terrified. I mean, you couldn't miss it.

*Adults cried too?*

Sure. To humiliate them. One of our goals was this: I made him cry in front of his child,

I made him shit in his pants.

*You saw cases of people soiling their pants?*

Yes.

*Why?*

Especially at beatings, beating them to a pulp and threats and yelling, where the guy is terrified, especially in front of the kids. They would yell and threaten and terrify so you're afraid for your kids too. There was this once, again, an adult detained with his child, a tiny kid, about four years old. The child was not hit but the Patrolman was annoyed that the adult was taking the kid with him so he'd be shown consideration and told him: You're

taking the kid along so as to be pitied, let's show you what's what. And he beat him to a pulp, yelled at him, said: "Why, I could kill you right in front of your kid, maybe you'd feel more..." That's horrifying. And again, there are lots of 'respect' stories.

*And he wet his pants for sheer fright?*

Yes.

*In front of his child?*

Yes. There are lots of honour stories like, I made him shit in his pants, I made him do that, such talk was routine, not anything special...

*Where would this be told, in the dining hall, in the presence of the officers? Openly in public?*



"Arabs to the Gas Chambers": Graffiti, Hebron

Openly in public. I think that if an officer says he didn't know, he's lying. At least the senior officers knew. Again, the platoon commanders dealt with this less but the company commander, the deputy company commander, the operations officer – they encouraged this even in a big way. Again, not directly, they didn't actually come out and say, go on, beat them up, but

there was this legitimacy otherwise it wouldn't have happened. Again, the fact is that in Jenin there were less cases of this kind and not just because there was less work with the population, I think.

[www.breakingthesilence.org.il](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il) Phone: +972-50-845-4725

Donations by cheque can be made out to Shovrim Shtika and sent to: P.O. Box 68150, 91681 Jerusalem, Israel;

Or money transfers to: Shovrim Shtika Account number 455949 Branch 748 at Hapoalim Bank,

SWIFT code: POALILIT, Talpiot Jerusalem;

Please inform us if you have made a donation by bank transfer with the donor details:

[webmaster@shovrimshatika.org](mailto:webmaster@shovrimshatika.org)