

Breaking the Silence

Testimonial booklet #2

Over the last year **Breaking the Silence** has collected testimonies given by hundreds of IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) soldiers who served in the territories during the last conflict. These testimonies reveal the impossible reality those soldiers have to face, and the terrible moral price this reality demands. Selected collections from those testimonies have been published in testimonial collections produced by **Breaking the Silence**.

The present collection is not just one more testimonial-collection, revealing the brutal routine of the territories' reality, or the constant moral degradation and erosion of soldiers' values. The collection focuses on IDF orders, rules of engagement and operational procedures. It presents a grave picture of evidently illegal orders given frequently, and in different times and places: firing at civilians who pose no risk, revenge operations, intentionally shooting at rescue-forces, and more. This collection reveals the depth of the military administration's moral corruption, and the dimness of moral sense, which has spread to the highest ranks. The testimonies in this collection concerns various units that were operative in the territories in different times and at different places, and is thus an evidence for the magnitude of the moral decay, and for the depths to which flawed norms have diffused. It is also apparent that the IDF's self-inspection system has failed to fulfill its duty. This also applies to the civilian and parliamentary inspection mechanisms, which, during the last confrontations, have consistently refrained from criticizing the army's mode of conduct in general, and its rules of engagement in particular. This brings out sharply an urgent need to create a platform on which the information we have gathered here can be presented, in order to examine what this information teaches, as well as the IDF's mode of conduct during the last confrontations. A civilized and decent society cannot survive without a continuous inspection and criticism of the most powerful organization operating within it. **Breaking the Silence is therefore calling for the establishment of an independent public inspection committee, which will enable a responsible disclosure and examination of the facts.**

Listening and taking responsibility is the very least that is required of society and its representatives in a civilized and decent society founded on basic moral values.

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The witness: 'Yael' Reconnaissance Troup

The Location: A Palestinian check point in the West Bank

Date: February 2002, one night after the attack at Ein Arik

There was an attack on 6 people here at '443' (designation of our position, or our-held hilltop), 6 soldiers from the Corps of Engineers. Some terrorist arrived at a (our) checkpoint and killed 6. That evening we were rushed off to a room. Suddenly our squad commander came from some two-minute long briefing saying 'Listen....we are doing...our action is a revenge. We are going to kill 6 Palestinian policemen somewhere, revenging our six they took down'. There were about 4 positions beyond our '443' under the control of Palestinian policemen, and we were sent to each of these positions to 'liquidate' the Palestinian policemen there.

Our briefing was also about 2 minutes long, defining our action as a revenge, while I was still deliberating, asking 'what had they done?' 'who are they?'. The answer was: Palestinian policemen. On my question 'what did they do?' the answer was 'there was a suspicion that the terrorist who killed our 6 came through that (Palestinian) checkpoint. Suspicion, but no concrete evidence. But I was told: it doesn't matter; they took six of ours, and we are going to take six of theirs.

That's the expression used?

That's the expression: 'revenge'. Also a day later the press reported a 'revenge action'. It was not hidden (from the public). The announcement clearly read 'revenge action'. It was a crazy 'blood revenge' rush. We had a long hike ahead of us to get there and we arrived on foot at around 4AM. There was no one there during the night and the check point was locked for the night. There was some sort of building where they slept, coming down during the day to the checkpoint and staying there.

And you hid in an ambush?

We waited for them in an ambush. The idea was simply to kill them all. Whenever they arrived, we would kill them, regardless whether (they were) armed or not. If they were Palestinian policemen, they were to be shot. The order was given and our six opened fire. The first firing was ineffective and missed. They (our, other shooters) were also supposed to hit the street lighting, but missed that too. We got up and fired, hitting two of theirs (the Palestinian policemen), killing the two. But they weren't killed after all. Pardon me, they were injured: I think we hit one in the shoulder and one in the leg, or something like it, and they escaped. So we continued (shooting). I should add: I shot one in the head as he was running while another one

was crawling behind. We got up and started chasing them. It was... really... I really enjoyed it. It was the first time (in my experience) that we were in an 'advance....storm....' situation, like in our training exercises. And we acted flawlessly. We performed superbly. And then he (one of the policemen?) ran and we continued to advance. He entered one of the corrugated sheet metal sheds and the four of us sprayed the shed with bullets. A gas cylinder there exploded and everything around caught fire..fire..fire....

Meanwhile we had a killed policeman, another one in this burning inferno, and a third one, escaping. We ran after him into a graveyard, or something like a graveyard, stood on the surrounding wall and shot at him. We killed him too

Were they armed?

Wait a minute. Meanwhile they didn't shoot at us. Didn't return fire.

Except when it all started?

No! The initial were ours.

Uh! OK.

We didn't run into them and they never fired at us during any phase of the operation. Initially we opened fire from a distance, hitting nothing. Then we got up to storm the position, hitting one of theirs and he escaped. I hit him with another bullet. The second ran into the shed (that caught fire) while we chased the third to the graveyard. The fourth one escaped.

The guy in the cemetery was killed?

No (above he was quoted as saying yes, he was killed!). We stood on the wall, shot, and he fell. That was the end. Now the first one who fell lay on the ground and we saw only the lower part of his body. Some boulder hid him. There were three or four (of our guys) who kept shooting at the body, punching holes into it.

To 'confirm kill'?

No. From the excitement of the battle they punched holes, punching him completely. At the retreat from the cemetery I went to check, to 'confirm kill' and also to take his rifle away. I reached him and he was smashed.... a completely smashed body. I turned the body around. It was a guy in his mid-fiftieths or sixtieths, very old. No arms. Later we understood, that, including the one at the cemetery, no one of them was armed.

Were they uniformed?

They wore the uniforms of Palestinian policemen but were unarmed. And we went and threw another grenade into this thing that was burning...

The witness: Soldier from a Paratroop Reconnaissance Unit (SayeretTzanchanim)

The Location: Palestinian check point in the Nablus area

Date: February 2002, one night after the attack at Eyn Arik (IDF checkpoint)

We heard about the (Palestinian) attack at Eyn Arik from our radio news reports. The following night....we received the Operation Order. For the same night. The Order called to approach three Palestinian checkpoints, manned by Palestinian Police in the Nablus area, from what I remember: approach three positions, and shoot at the Palestinian Police.

Who gave the order? The commanding officer of the Unit?

The commanding officer. The Brigade Commander was also present.

Who is the Brigade Commander?

Brigadier Cochavi. I remember him as he hung around there. I don't remember whether he himself gave us the Order. It was a very rapidly drawn up Battle Plan.

What exactly were you told in that Order?

Again, I don't remember an orderly drawn-up Order. We didn't sit through any briefing, maybe only officers did, I don't remember. But I do remember we were told to shoot at the Palestinian policemen.

Was 'revenge' mentioned?

We used it, indeed. That was at our level and at the level of the unit commander. Again, I don't remember if the Brigade Commander used that term... but that was what we were told. Even if it wasn't spelled out, it was clearly implied. It was definitely there—just so you'll understand the situation, these were Palestinian policemen that we advised about our operations.

You mean before IDF soldiers begin the operation?

Yes, a day before (an operation) that would be done at the level of liaison officers, not at our level, so I don't know exactly, but yes, these were policemen we advised about our operations, we know exactly where they are, where they are sitting, it's not that we've never run into them, we don't go through the checkpoints, but I know that if there is an operation planned, then we tell them ahead of time, and then they pretend, as if—I don't know more details as this isn't exactly in our domain. But this is what happened. We came to kill Palestinian policemen. I was part of the commander's unit squad. There was another squad with two officers and another squad with one officer.

Each of the two squads went to a different checkpoint?

Each squad was designated for a different checkpoint, but our activities were

synchronized. I'll give an account of the other units. The unit commander took the more active checkpoint where we were assigned. There was no one at one of the other checkpoints, and, in my opinion, there was one policeman at the (third) other checkpoint who was shot. Also a car approached (the checkpoint) and they (our guys) shot at it. I remember that that shooting was questioned as we weren't supposed to shoot at vehicles. I am telling you about the two checkpoints where I wasn't present.

And you know what happened there from the questioning?

From the questioning, one checkpoint was deserted, while at the other checkpoint there was one single policeman.

Was he armed?

I don't know, and it's irrelevant in any case.

And that was never (mentioned) in the questioning?

It was not investigated, as also the issued firing order were not at all depending on whether (the others) were armed or not.

Regardless of whether armed or unarmed, shoot?

Yes, at Palestinian policemen.

I understand. You were told to identify Palestinian policemen by their uniforms? or anybody at the checkpoint?

We didn't raise the issue of how to identify Palestinian policemen. Anybody present at the checkpoint. We didn't raise any questions at this point. I remember that the only issue raised during (the subsequent) questioning, other than the deposition by the second unit, was the issue of why did they fire at the approaching car.

(The witness described the event after he reached the target area). At first, we had no intention of 'improving' the position (e.g. the Palestinian checkpoint), and we began shooting propelled grenades on the position, aimed by whoever was aiming... The idea being to keep them (the Palestinians) tied down, to tie the position down...

Shooting propelled grenades at a checkpoint?

At a checkpoint without knowing what happens there. We only shot at the checkpoint if someone directs us to it.

Indirect fire?

Indirect fire as we didn't see the target. The guys who saw the target were with the commander.

Did the Palestinians respond (firing)?

It's like this. One of the policemen was killed. I don't remember if he was killed by us or by the other team who approached the checkpoint by advancing

from cover to cover, or from grenades we fired. In any case they reached one side of the checkpoint where the dead policeman was. Maybe they killed him as they were entering the checkpoint and they 'confirmed a kill' several times (by shooting at the lying down victim at close range).

And he responds by firing?

Yes. A battle actually evolved. Don't remember how it finished. They (our squad) could have reached the position from two sides of a separating wall, but they didn't use that opportunity because he (the Palestinian) continued shooting. How is it then that they nevertheless succeeded... I don't remember. ..

Yes, at some stage they finished their grenades....I think that's because they also came from the other side, they reached him from the back. From the front they couldn't hit him because of a wall, but the same happened from the back: there too was a wall and they had to make an opening in it. At the end, some sort of battle erupted, with other soldiers participating. The reason for repeated 'confirmed kill' was that they were all the time close to the body of the first (Palestinian) policeman who was inside the.... They, four of them, were all the time inside the position...

Everyone performed a 'confirmed kill'?

Correct. On the same...they were all the time in the heat of battle...., as they described later...., in the heat of the battle.

He was in back of them?

No.

The unit commander came , performed... how did it happen?

They are inside the position, they are 'opening' the position and then, it seems, everyone (of the four) passed near him (the policeman) and it seems more than single bullet was used in the 'confirm kill'.

One bullet 'opened' the position, a 'boom' followed, what next?

Yes, something like it. As if they were all the time near him...but, again, I don't really remember.

And the second guy, after they reached him?

They killed him.

Killed him and performed a 'confirm kill', from what range?

Ranges were very close. I don't know if he had....the range was very close. That's it. And then they started understanding what happened. One was slightly injured by a bullet in his shoulder. A very slight injury. And we started... We met again after our return. Everything that happened had been recorded.

Everything seen from the observation point?

They recorded it from the observation point. The (recording tape) cassette turned into a hysteric hit.

In the unit?

Not only. The first thing is of course our playing the tape, today with these small instruments... There are small instruments that connect to other means (night vision equipment) where you can see it really well and enlarged, as if everyone identified the game he was playing there. The unit commander has been taking it everywhere.

The witnesses: **Two First Sergeants** from 'Maglan' (name of unit)

The Location: **Refugee Camp, Tul Karem**

Date: **Chanukah, 2003**

There was a mission...It was our unit's wildest mission ever. We, that is our squad, was given the honor.... I'll describe it, it went like this, inside Tul Karem's refugee camp, every time the IDF entered the camp, shots were being fired at it. Our unmanned surveillance aircraft and our intelligence reported that that in every corner of this square camp there were beggars, like in Harlem, New York, surrounding a campfire, and as it was winter and quite cold, these people were trying to warm themselves. There were about 10-15 people at these campfires. As soon as the IDF entered the Camp, these characters climbed roof tops and started shooting. They also alerted 'wanted persons' (e.g. people wanted by the Shabbak [Gen. Security Service] for interrogation) to get away which made it quite difficult to perform arrests at that time. Actually it was quite impossible to catch anybody under these circumstances and hence it was decided to have the whole squad sneak into the camp on foot.

On foot?

Yes on foot. The four lit campfires we spotted were quite near each other, and near the only two or three vehicle access routes into the camp. We were told to also post sharpshooters...Our firing orders were that each squatter around the campfires should be shot just like during a liquidation operation.

Without pretense? Without arms?

Yes, even unarmed people were to be shot.

Everyone around the campfire?

Yes, everyone present at the campfire during our entry at 2AM or 3AM was to be shot to death. Regardless whether...

Regardless whether or not he was armed?

Even if he was unarmed. That wasn't considered of any consequence. Intelligence reported that there were about 10-15 people hanging around, regardless of age, regardless of anything, everyone that....

Boom?

Boom. The idea was... we were discussing that at least two of our guys would be firing at the target (e.g. at the squatters) and then we would throw a grenade or something like it, and get out. This was quite a different mission from the ambushes we had done in the past, more in the order of a mission by the Gen. Staff's Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal-the IDF's most elite unit). Two days earlier 'SHALDAG' (another special unit) did it in a different part of the refugee camp but was discovered during the approach and failed. In the shooting that followed no one was injured.

They simply walked away?

Yes, they simply walked away but, of course, lost the element of surprise. We tried it once before, approaching the refugee camp, but were not given clearance to enter. That time we had an unmanned surveillance aircraft, with radio contact, but there were too many people on the rooftops and therefore it was decided not to let us enter the Camp. We were deliberating... particularly due to shooting orders... anyone... armed or unarmed....

Did you discuss it only among yourselves?

We discussed it within our squad. In the defense of our squad I should mention that the whole mission appeared to us to be totally crazy endangering the squad (unjustifiably). We were not a squad of blindly obeying morons saying that 'if we were the best squad we would have 'gotten' that operation...' On the contrary we were resisting being sent to die (for no good reason at all) and quite willing to let someone else do the (crazy) job. The 'job' was not resisted by some other guys on moral grounds but simply because of fear, while we were mainly concerned about the moral aspect, so as to think less about the fear from the mission itself.

Because no one really knew who is over there (at the campfire)?

Correct. These are people who assist 'wanted people' to run away. Of course there is no comparison. It also happened during.... Today I am not sure that a projectile wouldn't have been fired then at the squatters. During that period there were many less 'targeted executions', as there are nowadays. At that

time a projectile would have been fired every second, and quite likely that a projectile would have been fired at the squatters. But then...Clearly this mission was not described as an 'execution'. If it were one, a projectile would have been fired (at the squatters). Rather, it is described a 'Confrontational, or violent patrol'. (e.g.a patrol aiming to draw fire, or, in this case, to shoot) Let's say everything went as planned, how would they explain it tomorrow to the press? 'The IDF encountered a group of armed people, (as probably there were some armed people there), and someone got wounded', and that's the whole story. Did you understand? And that's the end. No mention that we came to execute.

What were you told in the briefing?

It was not described as an execution mission. Absolutely not.

How then was it described?

Like I said. Firing orders for this particular mission: Entrance (into the camp) at 2:30AM. Anyone present in the alley at that time was to be shot. There are no innocent people there. That's the mission. No one described it as an execution mission.

Finally, we entered the Camp, encountered one of our guys injured and withdrew. The whole thing was like a competition with SHALDAG (another unit): they didn't succeed but we were supposed to...!

The witness: **An officer in an elite unit**

The Location: **Refugee Camp, Tul Karem**

Date: **Chanukah, 2003**

Tul Karem's refugee camp, the time, if I remember correctly, Chanukah 2003, it was to execute there about 9 people. Sorry, I don't remember the pretense we were given for the mission. I do remember, though, that the unmanned surveillance aircraft was to identify the group (of 9). As they said, that was the condition for the mission.

What's the background, what's the objective?

The background? I don't remember exactly what these guys were up to, but I think they were shooting at various vehicles, and other similar objects... There's a location in the Camp, or two, where they spend the night. That's a pretty dirty deal. The objective is to get to them and to fire. And all this,

based on the mentioned above pretense. The unit didn't have to come up with any pretense. This means the unit didn't have to actually see any weapons or something like it.

The order was to start shooting automatic the moment you entered the alley.

Regardless whether you saw any weapons or didn't. No waiting..?

Automatic firing.

I understood. Grenades and long bursts...?

Yes. We practiced shooting automatic fire (continuous bursts). Relatively, in a long battle plan, I think a week long, which is a long battle plan. We practiced shooting automatic fire, in brief, a lot of shooting was going to happen.

I understood. Where did the order originate?

What do you mean? That's the brigade commander (an officer of the rank of general), Efraim, isn't it? Something like it.

In short, the Brigade Commander?

At least.

Who signed off on the order?

It was either the Brigade Commander or the Deputy Brigade Commander who signed the order.

Were you present when the order was signed?

Yes.

Was it called an execution mission?

No. It was called a shooting mission or something like it, if I remember correctly. It was executed.

What happened?

One of the soldiers fouled up. That is they... even before the entrance into the refugee camp, in one of the streets there, they (our guys) patrolled and some of the locals came out of one of the alleys and surprised our team who then shot at the locals but missed. That happened once. After that they pretended as if

What do you mean surprised them? was he armed?

Yes. And after we pretended as if we 'pulled one of their guys out'. The unit commander decided to withdraw, despite the fact that the mission was discovered.... I can even draw a picture as I remember vividly how it happened. They (the guys on the patrol) imagined as if and so they rushed off, and again, that is a distance of half a minute from there. The same soldier noticed another patrol, and received a message that two armed (Palestinians) were approaching, opened fire too early again, missed, and decided to get out of there,

The witness: **Captain (Reserve) , Navy.**

The Location: **Gaza Strip**

Date: **First two weeks of operation 'Defense Shield'**

I served in the (Israel) Navy as a commander of an armed high-speed reconnaissance boat ('Devorah'). I had some operated cannon on board, one of whose functions was to bombard the shoreline. There was a plan to be put into action, if necessitated by circumstances, of bombarding specific targets on the shoreline of Gaza. And such circumstances arose. The Plan was not put into action earlier, but as operation 'Defense Shield' evolved, the battle plan was carried out.

Before that, I would like to state that the following is my recollection, in other words, I am telling it from my vantage point. All facts mentioned represent my point of view that is the vantage point of the captain of the boat.

(Before the operation began) the Deputy Naval Commander and representatives of the other forces taking part in the ('Defensive Shield') operations planned for each day, gathered for the briefing. Such meetings took place every evening during the following week or two, and included representatives of the Navy, of the Air Force, of Helicopter units, and of various participating combat units, myself, representing the boat as well as people from units on the shore, Intelligence, etc.. The gist of the meetings was to stress the fact that all of us were now partners in combat. I had the feeling that a green light was given for an operation with a wide participation of IDF's combat units.

'He' said 'I want two dead every night', presumably from the shoreline under attack. 'I want at least two 'terrorists' every night'

Who said that?

The Deputy Naval Commander at the time.

Did he say terrorists? Did he say dead?

I don't remember exactly his choice of words. I had a feeling that this (command) shouldn't have been given that way. In other words, there is an objective. If it's achieved, fine. If not, than so be it. You can't specify you want so many victims every night as this gives you a feeling of revenge, of a revenge mission, to return, say, with 4 (dead) Palestinians . That's it. And then plan the operation... Intelligence provided every time new targets, featuring (the renowned Palestinian) 'Force 17'. Here was a target... there was a (Palestinian) position..., all sorts of positions and targets on the Gaza shore. All these were of course targets designated as 'hostile sabotage activities'. Everything contained in these targets was of that category. Every

person within the target area, if armed, (and every person in the target area was assumed to be of course armed), was a legitimate target. All together, we shot about 2 or 3 times on these targets. We couldn't see any people the first time and hence we did not have a legitimate target. We did see one guard, two guards, but you need a concentration of people at the target site for shooting to be effective.

The bombardment was not accurate?

It was not sufficiently accurate. To shoot at a single person is obviously ineffective as you most likely will miss. Even if you hit, it's only a single person. In brief, there was some sort of a (Palestinian) patrol on (the Gaza) shore and we waited for the duration of the night for a 'better constellation' (an opportunity to shoot).

There are usually units of Naval Task Force 13 (a Naval commando unit) closer to the targets who then report whether or not there are armed (Palestinian) people around and provide data by means of night-vision instruments. The Ashdod base commander, Col. *** was aboard that night, and being the highest ranking officer aboard, he had to give clearance before we could start firing. One of the days the Chief of Naval Operations, Gen *** was aboard.

On your boat?

Yes. Briefly, that evening we spotted a patrol on the shore that went down to the beach outside our target area, on the beach itself. About 3-4 people sat there at the beach and lit some fire and we noted some action between the (Patrol) group and the fire. This meant that someone armed came to the beach, exchanged weapons and sat down by the fire. We got the impression that the bonfire was lit by people who were part of the patrol and that there was movement with weapons from the position on the shore. This implied that if the people in the position were engaged in 'hostile sabotage activities' then those sitting around the fire were of the same kind. We had no other identification of these people, no idea who they were, whether they were armed or not, we just didn't know.

Naval Task Force 13 signaled that they saw weapons at the site. Under these circumstances, I as the boat's commander, ordered to shoot as the target appeared legitimate. I wanted to shoot, wanted to carry out the shooting from a boat that hadn't engaged in combat for a long time or killed a saboteur, and this represented a real opportunity. All of us (on the boat) felt very excited. Night after night boats returned from nightly duty without firing a single shot, and now we had such an opportunity. Our feeling was imbued by the

aura of 'Defensive Shield', the (suicide) attacks preceding it and the tension. No wonder I wanted to shoot. I said 'legitimate target' and on that had the occurrence of all other ranks up to the rank of the one giving the order. And we started firing. Now, in retrospect, I have doubts whether my order was justified as we really didn't have a clue at whom we were shooting. We saw people getting hit, others- pulling wounded away, seeking cover behind sand dunes while we continued shooting aiming at hitting as many as possible, even those carrying the wounded. The problematic issue was that we didn't really know who sat around the fire. It could have been the kid brother of someone who sat there, it could have been... we don't know. They were figures to us, black figures in a

And that was based on Task Force 13's report that they were armed?

Yes, supported by our spotting of an armed person within the target area. We saw a connection between the two groups (one at the target area and one at the bonfire) which gave rise to the decision: it's OK. Let's go it's alright! We were all aching for a bombardment at that time. After all we wanted to provide 2 bodies every night. That's all.

Look, every day and night we faced the same problem: is he armed or isn't he. Was that a jeep? Did you spot anyone entering? Armed or not? What's he doing? And they (Task Force 13) provided the most reliable info. We asked them time and time again (for verification). The guy who was on my boat asked them: 'Wait a minute- could you see them accurately? What's here, what's there? What exactly do you see? Where did the jeep stop? What was it doing? Every time to suspect and to decide whether the target was legitimate or not.

The story continued on. We bombarded again, in cooperation with attack choppers. This time the target was to shoot at escapees. And again, without any positive identification of the figures we were shooting at. And lately, there's been no distinction between armed and unarmed people. You don't know who is there. People from surrounding areas have started to come, helping the injured, while we continue shooting at the same area. We don't aim at anyone specifically, but we shoot at running figures with an objective of hitting as many as possible, like in a Video game. Click, click, click! That's it. And we had permission for what we did. I repeat; as a commander of my boat I wanted to shoot under the circumstances. In my eyes that was legitimate. Otherwise I would have refused, saying that it was not legitimate and would not have given the order to shoot. It passed all ranks, and in their eyes it was legitimate. Now I see the whole issue as problematic. Very

problematic.

In this particular instance (when you fired) was there a higher ranking officer on board?

Yes, I recall it was the Chief of Naval Operations.

Did he give the order to fire? Was he in contact with Task Force 13?

There was a ranking officer on board, who also had contact with the Kirya (General Staff Headquarters). The actual ordering authority could have been mine, approved, I think by the Chief of Naval Operations, or the Deputy Chief, as the case may be. The highest ranking officer could possible be sitting in the Kirya, but there is someone who directs operation at sea. And that goes up through all ranks, till the I think it's the chief of Naval Operations who authorizes the shooting.

The witness: 1st Sergeant, Paratroops

The Location: Jenin

Date: February-May 2003

We took up positions of 'Straw Widow' (a disguised ambush). We were told that this 'Straw Widow' was against armed people and against people climbing on our armed vehicles. Our APCs (armed personnel carriers) were cruising 24 hours a day close to buildings (in Jenin), waiting for kids to climb on them, trying to dislodge the top -mounted MG (machine gun) and to shoot them. We had fixed positions inside Jenin's casbah, the APCs were on the streets, below us. They were moving continuously. We were expressly told that we were just waiting for someone to climb on an APC, and ordered to shoot to kill. We quickly understood that we weren't expected to deal with armed people as no armed Palestinian would roam the streets with so many APCs around. They (our authorities) were looking for children or plain people daring to climb on an APC or on any other armored vehicle. We understood that from the talks with our officers.

After a day or two, a 12-year old kid climbed on one of the APCs. There were lots of guesses about his age. First they said he was 8, later, that he was 12. I don't know. In any case he climbed on an APC and one of our sharpshooters killed him. I already mentioned, we were looking for kids. The neighboring company also had an incident with a kid or teenager, climbing an APC, who

was also killed. Some of us said that this whole operation was unnecessary as its purpose was to kill kids, while others said that it was very good.

Was it known that he was unarmed?

He was surely unarmed and he climbed on this.... No one asked you why you had two Xs (a mark on the rifle signaling a killed target), and if they were armed, they were legit targets.

The witness: **An officer of an elite unit.**

The Location: **A Palestinian checkpoint north of Halamish (a West Bank settlement)**

Date: **2001- End of summer**

I remember one evening something ‘from the movies’ showed up (Something unbelievably fantastic, as if from the movies, IEN): to go to the check point north of Halamish, I don’t remember exactly the name of the checkpoint, and kill a few Palestinian policemen there.

About when was that?

Sometime in the summer of 2001.

The end of summer 2001?

Yes, something like it.

End of summer?

End or middle.

As if ‘what the fuck’ as it’s called, what was the story? I don’t remember if there was any attack or something like it.

You were just given an order?

In a briefing, I actually wasn’t in the squad that was to do it, there was something about sharpshooters and other garbage. I don’t remember why I wasn’t part of the squad at that time.

But you were there, with it, when you were given the task?

Yes, but I don’t remember the order, and I don’t want just to blabber. But I clearly remember that was one of the first things I said to myself and I remember that I also said it to my platoon comander later (not there) that the thing appeared to me totally unreal.

The idea was to get to the checkpoint, to kill all the Palestinian policemen at the site?

To kill the Policemen and then have a tank destroy the checkpoint.

Was it carried out?

No. To charge them with something, I don't know what. Finally, it wasn't carried out. In short, I don't know much about it. We were sent one night to an observation point (or ambush) (to catch) some infiltrators. That was my first experience where, for me, two things happened: I understood that, without judging, something (we were supposed to do) didn't quite make sense to me, and for the first time I also spoke up.

What were you told when you spoke up?

The usual replies, in this case our platoon commander wasn't really someone you'd expect to...

What do you mean by 'usual replies'? Something in the style of tasks?

Yes. We do whatever we are told to do. We don't select our tasks, it's war here and there.

The witness: **An officer of an elite unit.**

The Location: **Rafah . Operation 'Rainbow'**

date: **may 2004**

The most striking thing I remember from operation 'Rainbow', before going into details, was the feeling of lack of restraint. I don't have a milder description for it: an indiscriminate use of force.

Not only of your unit, also of other units?

Of the State of Israel, for that purpose. You may remember the story of the APC of the 11 killed and of another two killed? ...at Zeytun? And as a result the operation 'Rainbow' was carried out. That was the story. What wasn't told the public was that the soldiers, who came from the same place (as the killed ones in the APC) were very blood thirsty.

Were you told 'to give it to them for what they did', or was that only implied?

In my opinion, it was embedded in the orders and in the way things were being carried out. But, without any doubts, I had that feeling, and not only I, of really using....I think that that was also felt by the public that generally doesn't get much of that stuff...

What happened there?

Ok let's start from when we reached....the (Battle Plan) briefing. The

briefing was attended by the commander of the southern brigade, and the Division Commander.

Battle Plan Group 2, the brigade commander introduced the mission and the idea behind in two words: (The) 'Golani' (brigade) entered Tel Sultan (the name of a suburb of Gaza). And he continues, we want to get the 'Golani' brigade out of there and put it into Rafah. In order not to lose the effect of our intrusion into Tel Sultan, we were to take the seam line between Tel Sultan and Rafah. That area is built up and also has greenhouses.

To do what?

Look, this was very vague. It was mentioned at the start of the briefing that (a) we were to prevent passage and escape to the north of people from Rafah to Tel Sultan; and (b) as explained at the end of the briefing, to kill as many armed people as possible.

That's the way the brigade commander expressed himself? Kill as many armed people as you could?

Yes. He said the two things. He said it in these words. Do you know him?

Generally.

He gave a blow to the podium: Briefly, the mission is to kill the maximum number of people. There were also those saying –and I heard it from a second and third source- that he picked up a phone to *** (the head of the Southern Command, a major general) telling him 'what in name..., what's my mission here altogether?' Meaning that even he himself didn't.

Did you hear that from someone who..?

I heard it from someone who heard it from someone else.

In brief: you enter Tel Sultan. (The) 'Golani' (brigade) moves to Rafah. (You guys) taking over some houses?

We were composed of two teams. Each team takes over a house. But before that, the whole idea of the operation was a bit ridiculous (as what I heard) at the meeting with the Brigade Commander I transmitted to the soldiers. One of my soldiers commented, I just saw on the Internet, on the phone, people saying that 'Golani' entered. (The soldier to me) 'What stories are you telling me? 'And standing in front of my soldiers, what am I to tell them? That the Brigade Commander is an imbecile? I don't know what to say. Have no idea whatever. And everything with a feeling of terrible fear. Our first time in the Gaza strip. The first time I ever entered anywhere without a platoon commander or someone like him.

Was this your first mission as team leader?

As a team leader, left for himself, in the area. In our unit we generally like

to enhance our missions by a participation of officers. But then there was a feeling of chaos. We were to enter the area during the first night but there were no drivers as 'Golani' was moving and they were the only ones who knewIn short I don't know what went on there. We finally entered the next day and took 'Straw widows' (Palestinian houses occupied for as long as needed as observation/command posts with their inhabitants locked into one or two rooms).

What's the procedure taking over 'Straw widows'? How did you 'take' 'Straw widows'?

First- it's with a D-9 (bulldozer) and apc. You don't enter without (a D-9). The D-9 arrives, surrounds the building 360 degrees to check if there are no explosive charges, after that you punch out a hole in the wall.

Digging a ditch around the building?

Digging a small AT (anti-tank) ditch, if I remember correctly, 80cm (deep) or something like it. After that you don't enter through the door as there have been cases where doors have been booby trapped, or something like it.

Without announcing (warning the people)?

Nothing. Without any announcement.

First the D-9 digs and then?

The Palestinians inside hear the terrible noise of the D-9, and then the punching of the wall.

Does it (the D-9) punch the hole in the wall with its dozer (shovel)?

Makes a hole in the wall. We call that 'knock on the door'. I do remember that we had asked if the 'Widows' should be secret, as they were marked on a (mission) panel. The answer was: 'Don't worry about it. That's the way it's being done to all the 'Widows'. For each 'Widow' we do the same procedure to 5 more houses ...

All around?

All around. Calculate and you'll see that this ends up in quite a few houses, as we ourselves occupy about 6-7 houses.

How does this practice (of taking a 'Widow') work in your zone, aside of entering the building?

In this respect, something that very much bothered me was that every one did as he liked. Decisions were being made at the level of

Zone (or site) commander?

Platoon leader, at best Company Commander. Beyond him, no one knew which houses I destroyed, which I didn't destroy, and why I destroyed them. No one ever asked any question. The same applied to firing.

According to the zone (site) commander, which were the criteria you used to order a D-9 operator to destroy a building?

Whatever (I) wanted.

The building was orange, and you didn't like its color. Destroy the building?

Yes.

Really like that?

Yes. No one would ever ask me how we decided to destroy a building. We came equipped with Gaza's aerial photographs, sat with the Company Commander and shone our (the jeeps) lights on some sort of an anti-tank cube. That's the way it went. And he (the Company Commander) said 'you didn't like this?' 'Why not?' 'Don't leave it'. 'This one I'll take down for you'. 'These greenhouses...?' 'OK' 'Take them down'. All within two minutes.

A computer game?

Yes, in two minutes.

You, as squad commander, took down half a neighborhood?

In my case a little older, but generally it's a 21 year old one boy, at best... Now you'll understand that before the operation we weren't used to use such APC's. We were told, it doesn't matter if the operation is delayed, you have to exercise using APC's. To see how to bring in a stretcher, how here, how there... Why can't you spend five minutes deciding which houses to take down. That's exactly five minutes. But you don't have....this isn't....

Was a Brigade Commander present?

The Brigade Commander was around at all times.

Was he aware of what went on? Of all the destruction?

Yes. I assume that the Brigade Commander knew. There was an unmanned surveillance aircraft in the air all the time. There was also tremendous pressure from the command post, which comprises actually the Brigade Commander and whoever is with him, to act and not to wait. Not to be derailed in decision making by all sort of nonsense... I told you how decisions were arrived at concerning super-sensitive issues. Aside of killing people, which is also decision we don't take... Without balances, without breaks, without anything (that would have caused a loss of time), I also have an interesting story to tell.

All that part of 'Rainbow'?

All of it part of 'Rainbow in the Clouds'. We destroyed there... I didn't destroy as much, but still destroyed quite a few buildings.

Do you remember approximately how many you destroyed there?

Buildings? I assume a few, four or five buildings...

Destroyed?

Destroyed completely.

And in how many buildings did you dig a ditch around?

Again, from what we were told earlier, I know there were 4 or 5 buildings.

Automatically? The D-9 operator does it automatically?

Yes, before (we) enter.

And after the operator does it, what happens next?

Usual procedure, parking (the vehicles), entering, calling inhabitants to come down.

A family comes down by itself?

No. We enter the building. No one is supposed to be outside even for a second. That also results in destruction as, I remember that once during our exit he (one of the soldiers) told something to the APC driver, he kept him about 50m (over 150 ft) away, and was showered with screams...

What does that mean he 'kept the APC'?

He said something to the APC, don't remember what and why, to stop 50m from the entrance.

So that the soldiers could enter the building (safely) 50m away from the 'APC' ?

That's what I recall. A soldier was killed when he left the building with the old woman. That's when we were told not to go one meter outside the building.

That also happened during operation 'Rainbow'?

It happened during operation 'Rainbow'.

A 'Givati' (brigade) soldier was shot by a sharpshooter standing outside a building?

Exactly, in brief (we) were very afraid of booby traps. The guys up there, I remember he was screamed at for that (for being careless in entering a building or for staying outside). Then the APC enters the house till the optimum, that is till the ramp is also inside the house. No one is allowed outside. No one!

This means the family stays in the house and then the unit enters?

It enters, searches for others in the house, and then settles down with sharpshooters.

And the family remains in the house?

Yes.

And once inside what do you do in appropriating the building for ‘Straw Widow’? What’s the mission, what’s the orders?

I told you that there are differences of opinion on the ‘mission’. Meaning that the mission wasn’t clear. For example, if I don’t see any armed people, OK, there are no armed people passing through. I fulfilled my mission. That’s why I am there. But if my mission was to kill armed people, I didn’t fulfill my mission because I didn’t kill anyone. And pressure was all the time, four times a day, ‘why don’t you shoot?’ ‘what happened?’

Why don’t you shoot?

Why don’t you shoot. We don’t shoot because we don’t see any armed people to shoot at. This means the mission was clear. But ‘Straw Widow’ serves to place sharpshooters. It also requires to open additional access routes and that requires destroying more buildings, or especially greenhouses. During this whole episode the family is locked up in a room with a guard. Again, I assume that we do it more....we let them come down and cook.

How long were you in a building continuously?

48 hours.

Forty-eight hours inside the building? and what were your firing orders?

To kill anyone armed, or anyone doing anything suspicious, like bending down or something, that could be for laying a booby trap...

Wait a second...what does that mean ‘suspicion of laying a booby trap? On whose decision?

According to your (my) decision. Observers—those on roof tops. Preferably with binoculars. If without, doesn’t matter. Fire to kill (them).

Who designates the ‘observers’ ? or is this again one of these murky issues?

Someone who looks as if he’s observing (our) tanks, stands and looks at any of our tanks, that could be from a window, from a roof top or from something like it. Fire to kill.

That’s the order you got before entering?

Yes.

Who gives the order? The Brigade Commander?

I don’t remember if in Battle Plan 2 group we received firing orders. In any case this order was given on his behalf. In other words, a widely open field, with lots left to the Platoon Leader’s discretion.

During this time was there a curfew imposed on the village?

No.

Were they (the villagers) allowed to move around? That means they could move around freely on the street?

Yes.

Were there different instructions for people moving around during the day or those --during the night?

No. As far as I can remember, after a tank fired at demonstrators, some of whom got killed...we became very careful with this issue...We were told what to do. At demonstrations—to look for the inciters, and I don't know...

And inciters were shot in the knees?

I think so, but I am not so sure. I don't remember. In other words a very wide latitude, with lots of holes...And again, the CP (Command Post), contrary to what I'd expect from it, instead of restraining someone who sees it from 1.80m (the soldier's height), at best with the experience of a 21, 22, 23, 24 or 25 -year old boy. So, to the contrary, instead of restraining the CP wants 'heads'.

Was this their expression?

No. It was mine.

How does it (the CP) signal that? 'How many did you take down'?

As told you, every- so- often they get to you on the radio.

Why haven't you been shooting?

We weren't shooting there. We actually shot only once, and I'll tell you about it. Other than that we haven't been shooting. That is two days.....

I take it there was a lot of shooting all around?

Tanks were shooting, MGs (machine guns) were shooting, all sorts of stories...

On what?

On 'protective walls' (protecting from direct hits by gunfire or artillery shells), not on people. Sometimes this happened when I requested (permission to fire), as people were approaching the building (we were in) and we wanted to keep them away. From a military view this was quite difficult for me and don't know how smart it was, as people knew quickly that we were in the building... but that's a different issue.

What actually happened to you there?

We had two experiences, worthwhile telling about. Let's start from the one less favorable, for me. We identified something, someone, looking through binoculars from a rooftop.

During the day or at night?

During the day. We transmitted that to the CP which, of course, authorized us

to fire. Actually I didn't have to get that OK. I deliberated, deliberated again, and ordered to fire and the guy was killed.

How did you know he was killed? Did you get a report?

No. Our snipers... I think they fired at least with two rifles if not three, the target was visible for quite a long time, not something... but static. Say 150 or 200 (m)

For snipers that's nothing.

In short, we saw the guy... And everything is also documented. Documented in our unit. We've got our observations on tape and there isn't any doubt that he... it can be seen clearly. There was some protective wall and one bullet hit low, hitting the wall, but the other two, there were three shots fired, surely hit the guy, who apparently fell dead. That was one case.

In this case you applied to your CP that gave you authorization?

Yes. Again, saying 'binoculars' and that's OK. So what do you want from us?

You identified the binoculars without any doubt? I assume it happened during the day.

Yes.

Did he look in your direction?

No. There were tanks, and like them, down below. That's the way it appeared to us. Look, Gaza was considered a playground for sharpshooters. For example, before we entered, we saw some guys from (the) 'Golani' (brigade) (saying) they killed 10, killed without reason, we killed there, and talks like that. Guys have been talking freely about having killed, without any reason, just people....

The second episode happened at night when we saw.... all these greenhouses across from actually in front of our nose, exposed all day long. At night we saw someone, a bit older, couldn't tell exactly, played with something on the ground.

In a greenhouse, in an area that was once a greenhouse?

Yes. Among mounds of broken things and sand. Teddy Stadium (Jerusalem's Soccer field) could have been built there.... We laughed about having prepared for them the ground for.....

Soccer field?

Yes, or for a shopping mall, whatever they want. This guy plays with something on the ground. We touched base with the CP and that authorized us to shoot. At the end I decided not to shoot. Later, the next morning we saw that they (Palestinian workers at the greenhouse) came back to pick up

whatever was left of the tomato greenhouse: pipes and whatever else they found there.

How did you identify that that's what they were actually doing?

We saw it. It was nothing-just 100m from us. There were kids there picking up pipes and anything else that could be used, and also tomatoes.

Did something happen? Were you told something on your decision not to shoot?

I was not reprimanded. We left there after a very short debriefing at the Brigade CP. In other words, there as a short debriefing of about 15 minutes, plus another 2 minutes of pep talk and then we left there as if, no...as if they couldn't have debriefed me over the telephone..

What did he (the Brigade Commander) say after you told him you decided not to fire, or didn't you talk about it?

No. I think that even during real time I told them I wouldn't

And what was their response?

OK. I also spoke with one of the platoon leaders who was with the Brigade Commander at the CP. The Brigade Commander sat opposite him. OK, it's your decision. No shooting? Don't shoot.

What did the Operations Officer say at the end of the debriefing?

Two things: (a) we showed them that also the IDF can be brutal when necessary, and (b) we didn't let these left-wingers screw up our operation. Don't remember exactly if he said 'left-leaning media' or 'left-wingers'.

The Brigade Operations Officer or of the Command?

Of the Brigade.

The witness: 1st Sergeant

The Location: Nablus

Date: End of 2003

Let's start with the things you want to tell, the things lying heavy on your heart. I ask you to tell everything, what happened, how you felt, what do you think now...

What disturbs me most, and what bothers me most is the lack of value of human life in the OT (occupied territories).Of course not that of Israelis. When my friend was killed, I caught myself suddenly saying 'Wallah'

(exclamation of surprise) here's a man gone, in the middle of his life. A person who's life has stopped. All the aspects of a human being: his aspirations, what he was, what he said, the happy moments of his life, his friends. A man's life has lots of aspects, and all of a sudden, everything stopped. And then it dawned on me that this was the death of a human being and that you start thinking 'Wallah' what about all these people we killed? And my team killed....innocent people, or at least apparently innocent people. Some were killed by mistake, really by mistake. But what's a mistake? Really—say 'we are sorry'. We killed your husband, your daughter, your child or your grandfather or whoever else. And there were those executed on orders that, in my opinion, were illegal. As I told you, the most disturbing thing to me is that there is an absolutely Wild West in the OT. Brigade Commanders, Regiment Commanders and Company Commanders do whatever comes to their mind. No one checks them, and no one stops them. We got in- for many nights in the (Nablus) casbah - and our firing orders were: between 2 to 4(AM) anybody spotted in the casbah, is doomed to die. These were the words: 'doomed to die'.

Who spoke these words?

Words we heard from the CC (Company Commander) in the briefing. The CC gave us a briefing before every mission. Sometimes he said between 2 and 4 whoever wanders around the casbah is doomed to die, or sometimes between 1 and 3: doomed to die.

Our team entered (the casbah) and took over a building. From this building we advanced in a worm-like fashion, you know, blowing up a wall, going from house to house, blowing up another wall and entering another building. Like a worm, in the casbah and at Balata (refugee camp), that are highly crowded areas, avoiding crossing the alleys that were a 'killing zone'. Whenever you crossed one of these alleys your chances of coming out alive were not good. Therefore we developed a tactic of avoiding the alleys altogether and passing through walls of buildings. As buildings are very close to each other, and have mutual walls. So you take a dynamite brick, attach it to a wall, explode it, and climb through the hole in the wall. This is a very slow advance. When you reach a strategic building, commanding its surroundings, you set up a post there to observe the surrounding alleys and roof tops.

What do you do with the family in the 'strategic' building?

I know all the stories, and heard from here to eternity about the non-human treatment of these families, and all sorts of plunder. I want to state here for the protocol that in my unit there wasn't anything like it. We were always...

we blew a hole in a wall, we entered homes, we gathered the entire family, not by shouting, but quietly. We tried to calm them down. Placed them in a room, we locked them up and placed a guard. Every time they had to use the toilet, they asked us, and they did with someone accompanying them. We moved furniture aside, sat on the floor, took up positions, built MG and sharpshooter positions in the highest windows or rooftops.

This means that destruction of a house entered by our forces only meant destruction of only a wall?

Yes, in the operation 'Defensive Shield', only destruction of a wall. After that things changed. During 'Defensive Shield' we cleaned up houses. The houses we left were cleaned. We made sure to clean it. That was the way with my team.

[....]

I don't remember how long it took to conquer the entire casbah, maybe a week, maybe two. It happened during the battle of the casbah. We entered, continued advancing in the 'worm fashion', took over a strategic building, set up positions there, and one of the sharpshooters identified a man on the roof. The man was on a roof about two roofs away from us. I think he was between 50 to 70 m from the sharpshooter. Unarmed, I looked at the man with a night vision binocular. He was unarmed. It was 2AM: an unarmed man on a rooftop, turning around. We reported it to the PC (Platoon Commander) who ordered 'Take him down'. He (the sharpshooter) shot and took him down. The PC, in a radioed message, actually sealed the man's fate to die. An unarmed man!

Did you see that he was unarmed?

I saw with my own eyes that the man was unarmed. He (the sharpshooter) also reported... the report said: 'an unarmed man on the roof'. The PC interpreted it that the man was an observer. He interpreted that the man was an observer, meaning the man was not directly threatening us, and he ordered us to shoot the man and we did it...I myself didn't shoot, a fellow soldier shot and killed him. And you start thinking that in the US death sentences are imposed, and on every sentence there are thousands of appeals, as they take it very seriously, judges, academically trained people, and there are demonstrations, and so on. Actually a 26-year-old man, my PC, imposed a death sentence on an unarmed man. Who was he? What's that 'an observer?' So what? Is that enough of a reason to kill him? And how did he know he was an observer? He obviously didn't know. All he knew was that there was an unarmed man on top of the roof, and he ordered to kill him, which, in my

opinion was an illegitimate order, and we carried the order out, and killed a human being. The man died. In my opinion that was outright murder. And that wasn't the only case.

An operation was in progress, we entered the casbah, for a 'Straw Widow', and set up posts there. We set up an MG position in the main street of the casbah. Firing orders were: Anybody walking around the casbah at night was to be shot and killed. The order was given us in a briefing by the squad commander. From what he told us, the order originated with the 'Shomron' Brigade Commander.

Are we talking about 'Defensive Shield'?

No. That happened much later, approximately during December 2003 – January 2004. In short- that's the order. And that's not an order that appeared suddenly. The same order was given many times. Often the firing order said that anybody walking around....How did he know? And the answer was always: the info comes from the Shabak (the secret General Security Service). Info of the Shabak? How did the Shabak know that Ahmed the baker or Salim the carpenter didn't have to get up at 3 AM, or at any other hour- I don't know- for work? How did they know who walks around in the street? And these were the instructions. These were the exact words of our briefings. Whoever walks around in the casbah between that and that hour was to die. These were the exact words. And we entered a 'Straw Widow', the 'Straw widow' you enter at night secretly. You enter a building, gather the family in one of the rooms, set up sharpshooter positions in the windows, without the area's knowledge. Without the knowledge of the surrounding population. And in the morning you place a bait. Jeeps are deployed as bait to draw fire from 'the armed'. And the armed respond and fire on the jeeps. And then, as we spot the 'armed' we take them down. That's the idea. The main activity from 'Straw Widows' is in the morning hours, when the confusion starts. But this night, the house was very.... with a very good position, we had used several times before, as it dominates over the whole casbah. Actually not the whole casbah, but a good part of it. It happened at 4AM, don't remember... we entered at 2AM and at 4AM the sharpshooter's position, of which I was part, identified a man carrying a bag. I, too, saw the man this time. The man walks on Jama Al Kabir (name of street) carrying a bag in his hand, between 3AM and 4AM. Don't remember. Important though, was the fact that the man was spotted carrying a bag in his hand. When this was reported to the squad commander and to the PC, the order was given to 'take him down'. He was shot and taken down. Killed. A man fell. Something in order of 70

m from the house. Then the jeep of the PC's CP (Command Post) came and 'confirmed kill'. A really brutal 'confirm kill': throwing two grenades on the body that smashed it completely. Then they opened the bag to see what's in it and found: pitot (pitah breads). Pitot.

I ask you again on 'confirm kill'. The Army spokesman denies that there is such thing as 'confirm kill' in our army.

'Confirm kill ' is that when you kill a person from a distance and he falls, you come to confirm that you finished the work. In short the PC's CP jeep came, threw on it some grenades, shot him (again), opened the bag, and found pitot in the bag. After that, I remember, our Regiment Commander summed the operation up. Again, this thing (the killing) was never investigated. It was simply passed on, as if nothing had happened. The regular debriefing is held, after every operation there is a debriefing, summary and conclusions are printed, or something like it, no guilty ones were ever identified. Life is totally cheap, people die... In short, the man died, after that the Regiment Commander in his operational summary cheers us up: 'Listen, guys, don't be demoralized, this man wasn't just walking around there innocently'. Of course he (the Regiment commander), didn't have any substantive information – evidence, 'be assured that anyone walking around in the casbah at that hour is no 'big friend of Zion'. He probably had a terrorist agenda and you performed a good job. With all respect we never heard anymore about it. I guess, and my instinct tells me, this man was innocent. Of course it's always possible that the Regiment Commander knew things we didn't. In any case, we never heard anything else about this case.

Witness: **Staff sergeant, Paratroops**

Place of incident: **Nablus**

Date: **end of 2003**

There was an operation where we were supposed to enter the city. We called it "Yossi Bachar's Horror Show". Aviv Kohavi was replaced by Yossi Bachar. You know, every new brigade commander wants to leave an impression, wants to make a big entrance. He got us into this completely useless operation... and in the end of this operation there was this part when we put 'New-Jerseys' roadblocks, those plastic roadblocks. So we

were putting these New-Jersey's roadblocks, and the battalion commander gave an order... because we put these New Jerseys to block the traffic... in Nablus... Getting to the point, we put these New Jerseys and the kids there, those who throw stones all the time, would come and move them away. There was a mess. We couldn't... In the beginning we would put the New Jerseys and the local residents would move them away, so we put it again, and then there were riots and stown throwing and it became a complete mess. Then the battalion commander gave the order: "Whoever touches the roadblock, the New Jerseys, must be shot in the legs." Live ammunition. Shoot his legs. We were, I was, supposed to do it. In my Army vehicle there was talk, and we asked whether he was out of his mind; a person touches the roadblock – are we to shoot him in the legs? [We thought] he was just making noise. Apparently this specific battalion commander. thought very highly of setting personal example. In a roadblock he came to – I was not personally there, but the guys from the commanding crew [soldiers who join the commander on operations]... And actually this was a known case: the man drove his jeep next to some New Jersey, and saw this kid touching it – apparently at some distance – and aimed at the kid's leg. But, you know, instead of hitting the kid in the legs he hit him in the chest, and killed him. For touching a New Jersey. If you'll excuse me, I do not think of touching a New Jersey as a reason for death.

How do you know the kid is dead?

Hear say. But the kid is dead. This is a well-known story. We got back to base from this operation, we talked, and then the guys who were with the commanding crew say: "Hey guys, *** killed a kid, a kid murderer, kid murderer, he killed a kid." They told us the story. People who saw it happen. I'm pretty sure. I cannot think that someone went and checked his pulse, but not many kids survive a bullet in the chest.

Witness: **Staff sergeant, Paratroops.**

Place of incident: **Nablus**

During Ramadan of 2003, or 2002. We were on an arrest operation. There were normal open-fire orders – of arresting a suspect and so on: meaning "stop, stop or I'll shoot, shot in the air, bla bla bla*. On operation we never use all this. The actual procedure is a quick suspect-arrest procedure, which

is: “Wakef” (“Stop”), boom. If the person does not stop the second you tell him to, puts up his hands and all that – you shoot to kill.

No shooting towards legs, in the air?

Stop, boom. On many occasions the “Stop” is just for the record...

Boom, stop.

Something like that. To make things short, we went into this arrest operation. It was during Ramadan. There was some confusion – one of the squads was placed in the wrong position. We learnt about that later, in investigating the operation. One of the squads identified a man in an alley there, a man carrying an object. They shouted “Wakef”. The man started running away; they started shooting at him, chasing him. The man ran into an alley, where the squad that placed itself wrongly was, and thus there was a collateral situation, in which one squad was chasing a person and shot at him, and doing that they were shooting in the direction of the other squad. Now, this latter squad, who was not on a chase, thought they were being shot at. They saw this person running and shot him. They shot him.

Where were you at the time?

I was in a different position.

And do you know about all this from investigation, and by being told by members of your crew and the talk afterwards?

Yes. And I was only a few meters away. I didn’t actually see that with my own eyes – I was watching a corner of a house. But this incident took place when I was there.

So they shot him by mistake, thinking he was shooting at them...

They also saw this object he was carrying, and feared it was a bomb. Shot him, and verified his kill – threw a grenade at him, and then shot him once more in the head. The guy had a drum in his hand. What became clearer later was that there is this custom during Ramadan – at 04:00 am people come out to awaken everybody for the breakfast before the fast of that day. We didn’t know that. If we had known about it, had someone told us... It is not just that we, simple soldiers, didn’t know. No one in the brigade knew about it. No one in the IDF bothered to tell us that on such and such hours people are walking around with objects in their hands, carrying drums. And perhaps the open-fire orders should be relaxed; maybe we should take more care. No one bothered telling us, and for that the guy died. Because of our ignorance.

* Open fire procedure: Call a person to stop. If he doesn’t, threaten to shoot him. If he still doesn’t, shoot in the air. If he still doesn’t, shoot towards the legs.

Witness: Staff sergeant

Place of Incident: Nablus

There were operations titled 'Looking For Troubles'. What does 'Looking For Troubles' mean? It means going on a patrol, touring the Kasba, hope someone will shoot at us, and that we get into combat.

“Looking For Troubles” is the name the guys gave it. What were the orders?

Night patrol in the Kasba in Nablus. Usually the reason for those patrols was to try to get into some combat, and to show our presence. On this specific patrol we had to search a house It was suspected that there was a hidden bomb-belt there – this was the intelligence. We began patrolling. In the middle of this patrol, in one of the streets of the Kasba we were being shot at. Now, when one says that 'fire was exchanged', it does not mean... people do not understand that 'exchange of fire' [usually] means that the Palestinians shot a bullet, one or two bullets from a Kalashnikov or a gun or I don't know what, and that this is usually followed by the soldiers shooting back, spraying, quite freely on all... So fire exchange is not really fire exchange. It is one initial shot of theirs, and spraying in all directions of ours. Almost never is there an identification of the source of the fire. This concept of fire sources is something nonexistent, you know. Sources of fire are not identified. Rarely does one identify a source of fire... Sources of fire – this is very relevant to this story – sources of fire means 360 degrees of shooting. This is what 'sources of fire' means. You don't know from where you are being shot at... It must be on us, because we are the only force in the Kasba... So we were being shot at; for sure. The reaction to this shooting was... Usually when one shoots, the procedure is to get inside a house as quickly as possible, to get out of the alleys, to enter as quickly as possible into a house, and shoot. Look for fire sources. Now, while searching these sources of fire, the open-fire orders are nonexistent. I wanted to say they were “free”, but actually they do not exist, because everyone is saying: “I identify” – and how can you tell if that person identified something or only imagined it, or I don't know – and shoots. On this incident the *** identified someone in a window of some bridge-house – there are houses over the allies in the Kasba. He identified an image in a window. We shot at it. His squad shot at it; there was a mess. In this type of cases, whenever there is fire, it becomes a complete mess. You don't know what's right and what's left. Everyone is shooting... It goes a bit like this: [someone shouts] “Identify” – Boom Boom Boom. “Asking permission to open fire”. Something like

that. It is a complete mess. People shoot at water tanks, identify 20 different images in the vicinity, and shoot with out too much... I was the commander [of that operation]. Someone tells me "I identify an image". – What am I supposed to tell him? "Put an eye on it"? I've got nothing to say to him. What should I tell him? "Shoot it down"? – It's an image – how can I tell what he identifies? I tell him "Put an eye on it". The soldier, maybe because he was under pressure, or perhaps... I think... Listen – all this business about people saying, "I was under pressure, I was scared", I think it is all bullshit. Because I don't remember... There is adrenaline, on action there is adrenaline, there is tension, but I don't remember ever being scared, or others being scared. To be sure, it is a fact we were very cynical about this fear business and all. I think – and I can only speak here for myself – most of the shots I've taken, and I believe most of the shots of most IDF soldiers, and most of the things they identify, and all this pressure – you shoot not because you're scared, and not because you're a coward. It is because they want to mark that X on their rifles. One wants to go back and say – 'Hey, I put an X. I killed this, I killed that.' – 'Hey you came out a man, you killed a person.' So the finger is very easy on the trigger. In short: exchange of fire, end of the night, an eighty-year-old person, a bullet in the stomach.

Where? Who found him?

The Red Cross. We didn't... we saw the Red Cross people taking his body out. We never came in contact with bodies. The Red Cross would always come. The family probably calls, alerts the Red Cross; that is it. Another fire exchange casualty.

Weren't there talk, later, about why this old person died?

No. None. First of all, not every one feels... I told you, my opinion is that this was a stupid shooting that resulted in someone's death ... some people think: "Look, what is he expecting? There are fire exchanges. Why is he at the window anyway? What does he expect would happen? – If in your Kibbutz there were fire exchanges, would you stand at the window?" Some people couldn't care less about killing a person.

Witness: Soldier from Paratroop brigade commanding squad

Place of incident: Nablus

Date: 2003

An operation in Nablus. *** *** – the big boss (Brigade commander).

The man goes out to the field, thinks he is in Vietnam, you know... And [there takes place] the usual stone and brick throwing game – there was a brick-madness there.

Give us an example of the usual game, one incident, so we can understand what went on there.

The usual game went all over the army. All of those who haven't been to the army... The usual game is when you travel around in a jeep for... – What are we travelling around in a jeep for? I don't know – roaming around the city, with no much reason. Kids throwing stones at us, and we chase them. Each stone that hits us.... The man [the brigade commander] is only looking for legs to shoot at. He would let a jeep go in front [of his vehicle], so it can sustain all the stone-hits. Looking for 18 year old – even if they look a bit younger than that – and shooting them. And I was really aiming for him with the jeep, even through my shooting hole, and he is shooting over my head [from the driver's windshield]. Like bullet shells inside [the car] and all.

I don't understand. Shoots where? Shoots whom?

There is nothing to understand really. Look – he is trying to get the kneecaps of kids who throw stones. That is all there is to it. After this incident, I was, you know, close to running away – even while the whole thing took place.

Do you know whether there were any casualties in those two weeks?

There were probably a million, you know, million incidents and all. From everywhere we got reports of casualties – and you couldn't tell where it was coming from.

What was he shooting at from the jeep?

Certainly not at people who threw more than one stone; surely not at people who threw Molotovs.

I want to you to be more specific – do you have a specific memory of an incident in which you were in the jeep and your life was not in danger?

Our lives were never in any danger. You are hit by regular-size stones, you see, a normal territories activity. Did you not get any stones in Hebron? In Rammalla? They have the same stones in Nablus.

Again, they throw stones at the brigade commander's jeep. What does the Brigade commander – * – do?**

He pulls out his rifle, and tries to hit someone in the knee. You know, tries to find someone over 18 with a stone. He would arrange for the battalion commander to drive with him [in a vehicle in front of his] – so that the battalion commander would sustain the stone-hits.

Why, what was the purpose of the battalion commander getting the stones?

It was all about getting knees. Just the way that sounds. Just like this. It was like this.

Witness: staff Sergeant from 'Maglan' (elite unit)

Place of incident: Husan bypass road

Date: Jan-Feb 2004

Stakeouts, what kind of stakeouts?

Mainly watching roads.

In what area?

We were in Neve-Tzoof in the beginning – close to Neve-Yair – then in Ofra – road no. 60, at the British police junction.

What were your missions there? What was the purpose of your being there?

Mainly to watch out for kids throwing Molotovs.

Which means...

Every few days there was an incident where kids came to throw [Molotovs]. The open-fire orders were a bit changed. In the beginning, if I'm not mistaken, we were allowed to shoot before the kid threw the bottle in order to prevent it – or however else you want to call it.

What do you mean?

To prevent him from throwing the Molotov... You know the drill... There is no such thing, really, as shooting at legs in the army. It means: shoot the legs, and if you kill the person nothing happens – this is the message, I believe. Shoot the legs, and if he bends a bit – nothing terrible has happened.

All this is valid until he actually throws the bottle?

After the bottle is thrown we were not allowed to shoot. This is how it was in the beginning; later it changed: I'm not completely certain about that, but I think there were times we were told we were allowed to shoot the kid even after he throws the Molotov.

So you got to Husan. What was your mission there?

In the beginning of 2004, at the Husan bypass road, they were throwing stones – usually not Molotovs, I don't think they ever threw a Molotov there;

I'm not sure. Anyway, the open-fire orders there were that if a stone is being picked up with two hands, we were to shoot in order to kill. I think.

And what if it was a regular stone?

Then not. The general idea was shooting... preventive shooting, perhaps. I mean, shooting close to the person, or something like that, I'm not sure. The truth is I don't really remember now.

Were these orders valid all the time you were there? How long have you stayed there?

We didn't stay there. We were at the unit headquarters and occasionally a crew would go out there for a stakeout.

And what is the story there?

It was decided that this stone throwing should be prevented. One time they took some kid's eye out, or something like that. They justified it, saying these stones were dangerous. So it was decided that if the stone is big enough to be picked with two hands, then it is a sign it is dangerous, and one could... I think there was one case they actually shot there – some sniper...

Witness: Lieutenant, paratroops elite unit

Place of incident: Nablus

Date: 2002

There has been a situation where a few people got killed – like, bodies that were in our range.

On the street?

On our street, right under our noses... and every now and then someone would come to pull the bodies outside. He apparently managed to pull one body out. The unit commander – who joined the force I was then with – he said that if it happened once more [a body pulled out] then we are to shoot the guy; even though he is not armed. It was evident he wasn't armed. His job was to extract the bodies; that is all he does. And this was a direct command from ***.

And did the guy get back?

The guy... no. We changed shifts in command. First the unit commander, and then me, and then the shift changes. Suddenly I hear some... I don't remember if it was a crowd-noise or shooting... shooting or something

similar... I get there and I discover, I realize that... I asked what they shot at.

At the body extractor.

Yes, I don't think they hit him, and I tell them (the unit commander is not there at that moment) and I tell them explicitly.

You cancel the [unit's commander's] order

Yes, I...

You tell your soldiers not to carry such an order out?

Yes, I explicitly tell them "Don't shoot. If he is unarmed, don't shoot."

And he [unit commander] doesn't know that you actually...

No, he doesn't.

Witness: Staff sergeant in Golani elite unit.

Place: Mukata'a (Arafat's headquarters), Ramalla.

Date: 'Protective Shield' operation – April, 2000

It was at the very beginning of 'Defense Shield' operation. They decided to break into the Mukata'a. They called us from home. They briefed us and explained our route, and where we were supposed to enter – to which building. It was all very quick; I don't remember the open-fire orders we got.

We had a walking route. We went really slowly. It was hailing down on us, and we didn't have any warm cloths, because we got there from home, rather than from the unit. There was an Egoz platoon [another elite unit] that went before us, and got into some combat there. We stopped and waited for them to get the upper hand. Then we got the order to enter. It was already first light, so we were fast along our route. We ran fast and got to the Mukata'a's wall, which was next to the building that we were supposed to enter. It was light. The D9 [big armored bulldozer] made a hole in the wall for us to enter through. I was in the rear – not in the front of the force – and then I heard the people in the front shouting that there is an old man walking down the street towards them. And I think they shouted at him to stop. I didn't see where he was exactly, and then three guys shot at him directly in order to kill him. Later we learnt he was deaf or something. Some say he was retarded. Again, I do not remember the exact orders. I am sure we were to shoot armed people

without any suspect-arrest procedure. But more than the orders, I remember the feeling, and the feeling was we were entering war, and everyone is a suspect, so we don't take any risks.

Was the incident investigated later on?

I don't remember any investigation. I really don't think there was one.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Nahal.

Place: Not specific

Date: Not specific

From November 2001 on I took part in arrest operations. It is important to emphasize that when you are on an arrest mission the supreme authority is the unit's commander, a company commander – which was a Captain or a Major. The character and form of action changed from one company commander to the other. I had two company commanders, who had completely different characters. The first was working more by the book. A day after the Supreme Court decided the neighbor procedure (human shields) was illegal, we stopped using that procedure. With the other company commander the arrest were much more aggressive.

We would get information from the Shabak (the secret General Security Service) and from the intelligence units as to the whereabouts of suspects, the weapon they had, and the level of risk. We would plan an operation. In the beginning the level of planning was higher – we would sit for a week, practicing on models, got permissions from Generals, and so on. As the time passed the permission, including the open-fire orders, were given by lower and lower ranks, until they were decided within the unit.

With the second company commander the method was different. It was all more aggressive. We sometimes would first shoot one Lau missile at the house wall to make things calmer – in order to let people know not to mess with us. We would also shoot a bit. We were not allowed to shoot at windows, to prevent us from hitting the soldiers on the other side of the house. We also were not allowed to shoot walls that looked too slim. But it was never really clear how to judge that by the walls' appearance.

Most of our breakings into houses at that time were “wet” [using live ammunition]. “Wet entry” means that you go into the room and spray around

to make sure no one shoots you back from the inside.

There was this one incident of wet entry, where a mother left a child – a three year old – inside the room. It was in a building. We took everyone out of the building and started searching it. We went through the whole building, and entered every room in it shooting. After this wet searching, we searched the house for weapons. Then we found a 3 year old under a bed. He was lucky he didn't get killed, because people shot in that room, and also at the bed. This case shook us a bit. After this incident we would shoot beds differently: one soldier would pick the bed up, and a second soldier would shoot.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Paratroops.

Place: Hebron

Date: October 2000

They threw stones and we were shooting rubber bullets. I heard live shots from the lookout position above. The DCO officer from the DCO post – right next to our hut – came out and asked: - “Say, are you firing live ammunition here?”

- “No, why would you think that. How come?”

- “Say, what is going on up there?”

- “I don't know.” I immediately said, “I don't know; don't know them, don't ask me.” I did only what I had to.

- “Because their officer (the Palestinian officer) reported that they were being shot at, that one of theirs got a bullet.”

- “I don't know. Don't know a thing.”

It took a minute and everyone was there. The company commander and his vice came and then again: - “Are you shooting live ammunition here?”

- “No. How come? Are you crazy? We don't even shoot rubber any more here.”

He asks: - “What is going on up there?” I said: - “I don't know.” He goes:

- “who is up there?” I immediately faced down, because we knew the man [up there] was crazy. Everyone knows the man that was up there was out of his mind.

I told them the name of the guy who was up there. The company commander went up immediately, and starts shouting at him: - “Did you shoot live

ammunition here?!” – “No. Does it seem like it to you?”

I hear the shouting above me: - “No way!” I didn’t shoot nothing here. Nothing.”

Suddenly we hear on the radio the outlook post calling us: - “It seems you should come over here for a second.” The company commander goes up. You see a live video recording of someone loading a live-bullets magazine, cocking, and shooting towards the square - towards someone who was just unloading some stuff from his vehicle. A twenty-something year old, relatively young. The man is being hit in the back. He [the soldier] took several shots – about three bullets – and missed. His last bullet hit. The man fell, and a day later we were told he died.

In our company there is a known procedure – we keep our dirty laundry inside, so the company commander decided to silence this event – make the cassette recording vanish. Not publicly, but this is what he ultimately did. He made the cassette vanish and the [shooting] soldier had to do 35 days of chores for the company’s Sergeant first class – after which he came back to the company like normal.

Do you want to tell me that the battalion commander hadn’t heard of it?

I believe it did reach the battalion commander, but the battalion decided to silence the event – to keep the demon inside, so that no one knows about it. The media did not hear of that. No one knows that a person was just killed. The whole company knew of it, and also, when the soldier came back he bragged about what he did.

Witnesses: **Two staff sergeants from Maglan (elite unit)**

Place: **Bethlehem**

Date: **2004**

Witness 1: I would like to tell one more story before I tell you about the neighbor procedure. In Al-Aidde, in Bethlehem. It was around Passover, I think it was around Passover 2004. In February two suicide bombings took place in Jerusalem, and both came out from Bethlehem. They decided to enter the city with great forces. There was a Duvdevan (elite unit) operation there a week earlier, if you can remember it. Someone was hiding in a ditch

in Al-Aidde, and a soldier there, ***, he was also paralyzed – shot in the chest. He was paralyzed from the waist down. In short, a week later we entered to make an arrest in house next door.

In the house next door we arrested the terrorist’s cousin – the terrorist who hit [and paralyzed one of the soldiers] and who was killed by Duvdevan. We were after his cousin. I wasn’t involved in the actual arrest. I stayed in the vehicle, but the force stood right under the house and the lookout post told them there was someone on the roof. So the platoon commander suddenly reported an OK shooting [to let the other forces know not to take action] – he shot once, and they just kept knocking on the door, and got no response.

OK shooting what?

Witness 1: Wait. We were waiting, waiting, waiting. Five minutes later the platoon commander gets on the radio and says: “I might have hit someone.” So the battalion commander gets on the radio and says: “what do you mean? Did you see anyone armed?” So he [platoon commander] says: “No, I only saw a head peeking on the roof. I took a shot in its direction. I don’t know if I hit him or not.” So he [battalion commander] says: “What do you mean you don’t know? What does that mean? Did you see anyone armed?” So he [platoon commander] calls the outlook post, because they reported having seen someone on the roof: “You said he was armed, didn’t you?” so they tell him: “No. We didn’t see anything armed.” He [platoon commander] goes: “Well, I don’t know if I hit him or not.” Meanwhile there is no response from the house. We had some dog-handlers with us. They got a dog in. The dog worked on that person for some 20 minutes.

What does that mean?

Witness 1: When he identifies a person he...

Witness 2: He eats him.

Witness 1: He eats him. After 20 minutes...

What, does that mean that this is the dog’s job?

Witness 1: We hear him barking inside for some 20 minutes.

Witness 2: An assault dog. It eats people.

Witness 1: 20 minutes later they decide that the force will go inside. They see the person...

Because the dog did not come back?

Witness 1: Yes. They take the dog out. The force enters. The dog dragged the person from the roof one floor down – the person was all eaten and all. They called a doctor to make sure the guy was dead, only that the minute the doctor touched him the man jumped – he was still alive. He was in a hospital

for a week and then died.

Where did he take the bullet?

Witness 1: in the head

And that did not kill him?

Witness 1: Neither the 20 minutes the dog was eating him.

And did the doctor manage to take any care of him?

Witness 1: he was evacuated to Haddasah Ein-Karem hospital, where he was hospitalized for a week, and then died.

Witness 2: I think he got respiration aid.

On the spot?

Witness 2: Yes.

And he wasn't armed?

Witness 1: An hour later, we searched for weapons in the house, like, 'You got to find a weapon here' (the platoon commander said) but we didn't find any. He wasn't armed.

Witness 2: You see, 'You have to find a weapon here.'

Witness 1: No, what do you mean 'have to'... He wanted to search the place.

Witness 2: had we found a weapon it would mean the man had been armed.

Witness 1: It is not as if he would put a weapon next to the body to cover up his ass. This is not the point. He wanted that for his conscience. The minute he shot him... He didn't even know whether this was the person we came to arrest. Later, we learnt it was he. It calmed his conscience. I think... At least this was indeed the man we came to arrest. Also, it wasn't really clear how much of a terrorist he was, if at all. He was a cousin of a terrorist. I don't know, he might have been a terrorist, and he might not. I don't know.

What happened in debriefing?

Witness 2: Also, when the guy died he [the platoon commander] said, "I made it. I killed him."

Witness 1: the debriefing did not find that anyone operated wrongfully.

Did it end there?

Witness 1: Yes. There was a debriefing – like after any operation in which something unusual happens. I can also understand him, as a platoon commander standing at a house with fifteen guys and sees someone watching him. I would have at least fired a warning shot in the air. He was the only one with the guts to take the responsibility and shoot. Especially since he was a platoon commander and all, and this is a place where shots are fired. One has to do something to stop him from spraying the force. One can shoot in the

air, one can do many things, but one does not have to shoot him in the head. He also claimed he couldn't tell whether he hit him or not. At least that is what he claimed initially. What he reported on the radio was just that there has been an OK shooting.

Has no one asked whether he put a person in his rifle sights?

Witness 1: I didn't hear the investigation. The battalion commander might have asked him. It didn't reach us. The battalion commander sounded angry on the radio.

And what was the talk in the company later?

Witness 1: No one was really sorry about it.

Wasn't there any talk about it?

Witness 1: In our team we talked about it. There wasn't much...

Witness 2: We were already expecting things like that from him.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Paratroops

Place: Beit-Furik

Date: end of 2003

Can any fighter shoot?

Yes. From one's personal weapon. If the commander in the patrol is a wise company commander, he can authorize such a thing. And if I accidentally hit someone in the back, or kill him – and things like that have happened to us... It happened two or three times only in our last deployment.

Kids were killed?

Kids were killed accidentally. One aims at the legs – shoot them in the back and kill them.

How do you find out later whether they were killed?

[We get] reports, later on, from the coordination and liaison office, the Palestinians report. There is cooperation in this regard. So kids get killed. For a soldier it means nothing. An officer can get a 100 or 200 Shekel fine for such a thing.

100, 200 Shekel for a kid?

Yes.

Prison?

No, no.

Trial? Is such a thing seriously investigated?

No. I am sure it does not get beyond the battalion commander. I don't know [of any case] in which people were investigated. I cannot tell you for certain that it didn't happen... but I haven't seen them being taken for investigation, and I know nothing was done about that later on.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Armored troops

Place: Gaza strip

Date: not specific

The main area I was involved in during my service was Gaza. Generally, what would happen there... You have two options... Or sometimes we were... An operational battalion. There were times when the army was initiating many operations. The main purpose of those operations was either to demolish terrorists' houses or to demolish places where they manufacture mortars, and other such stuff, or... You would come in and ruin everything you see. Also, the open-fire orders would constantly change. Meaning: there were times when – ‘Every person you see on the street, kill him.’ And we would do it. We wouldn't think. We would just do it. I am talking about certain periods, not all the time. The first time we were deployed in Gaza there was a time when, say, at 1 am, we would have to go on an operation – to demolish some Palestinian police building. And the open-fire orders were: “Every person that is on the street – shoot to kill. Don't mind whether he has or has no gun on him.” There were such cases. And at other times, [we were supposed to shoot] only if the person had a gun, or... It would change from place to place. There were places like the fence, times when they [Palestinians] would infiltrate... There were times when every person spotted in the general area of the fence, even if it was relatively distant [from the fence]... ‘See him in the vicinity of the fence: shoot to kill’; not thinking twice about it. And I tell you we would do it. I wouldn't begin in such a case to try to scare him off, or anything like it. In the end it got a lot calmer, for there were agreements and all. But at the beginning, at the early period of my basic training, each day, someone would have killed someone, or shoot an innocent person...

Did your commanders instruct you in briefing before operation that the open-fire orders were “Shoot in order to...”?

Yes. Commanders meaning: battalion commander and up.

On a routine operation, when fire is being shot, will there be an investigation?

It depends. Depends on the commander... first of all, there were these commanders who wouldn't report nothing, anything; they 'rounded the corners' when it came to such things. There were commanders who did give reports... put it on a piece of paper. Between you and me: this piece of paper – it might accidentally happen that the vice platoon commander or the battalion commander have a look at it, but let me say it clearly: there would not be an investigation resembling the investigation there would be if now, as a civilian, I would pull out my weapon and start shooting in the middle of Jerusalem, shoot a bullet – this would cause an investigation, and questions in the newspapers: why, why, why. All sorts of questions. It would never get to this level of investigation... In our company, which was involved in many well-known incidents that got the media's attention all over the world – these were the few cases in which there was a serious investigation. And why? I think it is because of the press. And then there were... For example, I've been questioned, the tank-commander was questioned, the division-commander was questioned, the company commander. And then they went up and sorted things out, I guess; made it look the way they wanted it to. I am sure about that.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Armored troops

Place: Dir-Al-Balah

I was in Dir-Al-Balah. We were to enter Dir-Al-Balah...

Why get inside?

It was after some mortars had been shot, and the order was: every person you see on the street, shoot to kill. It was relatively early night.

Who gave the order? What was his rank?

Either a platoon commander or a reserve unit battalion commander. We got inside, and saw this man. My commander who was new and very enthusiastic... he said "shoot". We shot. And when we saw the man fall the commander verified his kill with tens of heavy-gun bullets.

When you say, "We shot", were you using the tank's guns, or did you

shoot a shell?

No, just the guns.

Fire from tank-guns. And then the commander verifies the kill... At what distance?

70 meters.

When the kill verification was over... did the commander take the heavy gun and shoot some more, or what?

He shot another heavy-gun bullet case. The guy was certainly hit by bullets by then. He first falls, and then the commander empties a bullet case on him.

Now, I would like to go back to the open fire orders.

It was a time when the procedure would constantly change. Generally, in the big operations we were involved... Every person that was on the street was not supposed to be there. So every person that is on the street – armed or unarmed – boom, we shoot.

And this was the order after mortars were shot?

Yes.

Do you know of your having killed somebody?

Yes. For sure. I would open a newspaper every day and see how many were killed. I wouldn't understand.

And how was this treated?

Sort of like a meat market.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Giv'ati

Place: Philadelphi route, Gaza

Date: Middle of 2004

I would go around talking to the guys. I would sit a lot with all of them and talk to them. Surely, we have been to houses we took over for observation missions, we went to all the houses, and in each we talked, sat with the snipers. Sit and talk inside the houses. That's the way they were.

Once we went to *** outpost, on the Philadelphi route. Our aid-company was placed there. I go up – in *** there are cameras on top of the outpost, which record; there is video there. He plays a film for me, and says: "Look. Look what he did today." There is a film there of... They discovered a tunnel. Ok.

They dug the tunnel, bulldozers – they [Palestinians] wanted to dig a tunnel that leads to the outpost. We marked all the ‘extermination-zones’ to which they [Palestinians] are not allowed to come close. We decided that every one who comes close we shoot a warning shot, and if he doesn’t run away, shoot towards the legs. For, after all, this is a residential area.

Whoever comes close to the route?

To the tunnel. Because the tunnel was closer to their area. If they got close to the route they would have been killed. But the tunnel was close to their houses, so it was decided that no one is to come close to the tunnel. Perhaps there is ammunition there; they didn’t want them to come close to the tunnel. So one man came close to the tunnel. You could see him. An older person – about 30 or 40 years old.

Unarmed?

No. He wasn’t armed. Just walking about – I don’t want to say he was innocent, I don’t want to make any assumptions. He was walking in the general area of the tunnel. They shot him. He got a bullet here, and fell down.

In the chest.

Yes. He fell down, then stood up, made a few steps, and then dropped dead. I tell them “Why?!” He goes: “No reason, he just got close, they killed him.” I say, “Why didn’t you shoot his legs? Why the chest? Chest is good, and legs are no good?” – It wasn’t from a great distance, and this was a sniper shooting. – “No reason. You know...” I ask, “No one knows about it, right?” – “Obviously not.”

How come no one knows?

A sniper is at his post. Also in 'Rainbow' operation, when a sniper shoots, they report shooting.

Does he report what he sees?

He reports shooting. First of all, 'Rainbow' operation was a jungle. There were shootings all the time. One does not have to report shooting. In 'Rainbow' operation there was shooting all the time.

Whose? Both sides?

Yes.

They would shoot at you and you would return fire?

They shot less. We shot more. You know

Witness: Staff sergeant, Paratroops

Place: Hebron

Date: October 2000

We were crazily exchanging fire every night. The aid-company arrived with the platoon commander, and he decided that this shooting in his section had to be stopped. Aid company coming to show who is boss. We put on outposts. Meaning: we manned all the outposts on the rooftops – our whole aid force, heavy gun, grenade gun, machine guns, in every corner. A force that was as heavy as possible. Every bullet, even if it was a blank – no matter what. We heard something in the section, and immediately returned a fire strike towards the neighborhoods.

Just like that?

Just like that.

Did anyone know what was going on?

Mostly we would not identify the fire sources. In the beginning we would shoot towards pre-marked locations. (If we did identify a fire source, we would shoot towards it.) At some point the platoon commander decided it wasn't enough. So every fire strike involved everyone shooting. Each was assigned with some sector to shoot at – mostly unpopulated areas.

Which neighborhood were you shooting at?

Abu-Sneina. All the guys in their posts say: "Wow, everyone is shooting. No one can tell if I'm shooting as well." Everyone was shooting! There was no one who didn't. Once, a friend calls me on the radio and asks: "Meet me in the junction for a sec." I was in one position, and he was in another. I come down to meet him. "Man, you have to get me a magazine, and pick me up. I'm out of bullets." And he didn't have anything to shoot at. He was just watching some area. Just that.

We shot water tanks; we shot windows. For no reason, you know. Sharpshooting. Just for fun.

Was it all in October?

This was in the beginning; in the very beginning, the first weeks, you know. Just shoot for fun, you know. Everyone is shooting, so no one can tell that I'm shooting too. Everyone is shooting!

Wasn't there any control over who fired, and when?

There was control, but there is not a commander in every post. In most posts there wasn't a commander. So, wherever there is no commander, one does as one pleases. You see?

And where there were commanders...?

They would inspect, as it were, but it was very random. I manned the heavy gun. The section battalion commander was with me. Sometimes the border-police battalion commander – who was a complete lunatic. He was insane. He would tell me: “shoot here, shoot here, shoot here.” And I shoot in all directions, without regard to anything. I would shoot so many bullets in one evening – but I would shoot them on houses, not on empty areas. I haven’t got a clue as to what I made happen with those bullets. I might have killed people even. I still don’t know, ‘cause no one told me. No one. And it is known that these shooting had casualties. It is well known.

Would you open fire only when shot at?

Once or twice we would shoot before they shot at us – you know, to start the evening, as it were. To show them we started the evening today. But mostly it was in response to their shooting. Although sometimes it wasn’t shooting at all, it was just some explosion. We would hear “Pak”, and start shooting. Here, there is identification [of someone shooting] from a building, bla bla bla. Well, the shooting began, so we shoot.

Do you know whether you caused any damage? Hurt someone?

We blew a car up. I was about to tell you that on that night a friend of mine shot, so we shot at a lamppost. We had to put out that lamppost, so he shot at this lamppost, but didn’t hit it exactly. Suddenly we see fire behind the lamppost – like a little explosion and then a fire. It was at a big distance – more than a kilometer away. And then the lookout guys started laughing hard. They tell us, “Come look at that.” They had recording equipment, and they rewinded the tape, and showed us a car behind the lamppost, and then us shooting at the lamppost. Suddenly – Boom! The car explodes. Like, it was a parking car, not a moving one. And the officer in charge got into it, he was screwed up: “Wow, I want to blow a car up.” Every car he sees he says “Blow it up for me.”

What does that mean? Parking cars? Just like that?

In the beginning it was parking cars, and then there was a car that we had intelligence on. We were not sure it was the right car, but we had intelligence on it, and we had to blow it up too.

Was it moving?

It was escaping from us. We shot at it while chasing it.

Was there a man inside?

Surely. But the claim was that he was hiding terrorists at that very moment. We don’t really know what was going on. We do as we are told. But the claim

was that at that very moment there are terrorists inside escaping.

Did you shoot it with a heavy gun?

With a heavy gun and a grenade gun. The grenade gun was insanely off the mark, so we just used the heavy gun. The thing is we couldn't reproduce this car-explosion thing. It just happened by accident, but didn't work again.

Did you hit cars?

I cannot say.

[Did you hit] that escaping car?

I have no idea. He kept on escaping. He got away, ultimately. We might have hit him, but he escaped. We don't know, because you cannot tell exactly whether you hit it. Unless you see something happening, you don't know. You can tell if the light switches off, or if the car stops, or something similar.

Now, there were many theories. The commanders started joking: "No. one has to shoot two bullets, and then another in order to make the gas-tank explode." – All sorts of theories about how to make a car explode. No one could reproduce that. But no one succeeded. We gave it up.

Were these incidents investigated?

I don't know. I have no idea. There was massive shooting. One night, there was this very tall building. They said they were shooting from it every night. I couldn't tell where they were shooting from, because, you know, I would hear the "Paks". I would not know where the shots came from. They told me "Take this building apart – shoot as much at it as you can." I shot. I shot. I shot. The building started burning.

Were people living in this building?

I guess at some point or another people lived in it. But after we began shooting at it, I don't think people lived in it anymore – because we would shoot the building itself, inside the building. I must have hit one of the curtains, or something with a *** [a type of ammunition that causes ignition]. The window started burning, and then the whole building. We called the fire squad. They told us to cease fire, and they put out the mess. There was an ambulance and we got reports of it enabling terrorists to escape. We did nothing about it that evening. Later we were told the ambulance enables terrorists escape all the time. This ambulance would essentially bring in the people who shot at us, and later on bring them out. So this ambulance came with one of the Arabs, and we had permission to shoot at it. So we shot the ambulance. This was from a great distance. I cannot say whether I hit it or not. But I fired the ambulance with a heavy gun. You see? This was what I've been told to do.

Witness: Officer, Paratroops

Place: Church of the Nativity

Date: One month after defensive shield operation

They transferred us to Bethlehem, to the church of Nativity.

What were your orders – the open fire orders?

We were supposed to shoot whoever came out – doesn't matter if he's armed or not.

Whoever exits the church of Nativity – Boom?

Yes, at the back gate... We were at the back of the church. There was this gate.

At the gate in front of you, everyone leaving the church – doesn't matter whether or not he is armed – if he tries to escape, your orders were to shoot in order to kill him, or did you have to shoot him in the legs?

Shoot to kill. This is it. We'll get to the situation [I want to tell about] in a moment. The orders were very clear. There are wanted people inside. People who are not wanted would go through the main gate, so everyone who leaves through the back gate really has to be a wanted person. We sat there for a long time. A month. We have a house [we got hold of], and know the place really well. We have outlooks to another force, a reserve force sitting in front of us. We find all the help we need. In short, we sit there and it becomes a routine.

[Does the routine include] vacations?

Vacations, yes. You already know. Like, bring supplies by armored troop carriers, and we are being rewarded, and all sort of such things. At this house...– Oh! It was also in Nablus... – there is a family, so we close them up in one room and... In the house in Nablus they had a whole floor for themselves; we were large... Like, it was a big house, and they had a floor. When there was a day to release the curfew to let people get supplies – because it took a long while – they went out and got back. In Bethlehem this was a really luxury house, like watching the church of Nativity. They had several floors in the house. So [we let them use] one tiny room. A very... beautiful house. And this went on for the whole....

Did you play with the computer inside the house?

No. No. All the while we were there, and during the entire time of our activity – also when we were in Askar and Ballata, and did all sorts of search operations, and suchlike, we had this procedure in our unit: every place you get to in which you are required to stay, you fold the furniture aside, all the chairs and carpets...

Mattresses on the floor?

There weren't mattresses all the time. But we were allowed to keep the carpets so we wouldn't have to sleep on the floor. So such things [like playing with computers] did not happen... we also did not take any showers there. It was forbidden. Use the bathroom, yes. But... in his house. I should also mention that this house... cleaning... we were very good about it. Anyway, one time a person escaped through the back gate.

From your direction?

Yes, from our direction... The outlook spotted him. It was daylight and all. He was covered from all directions. Captured him. In another incident there was... At times people [Palestinians] would throw food inside [the church]. They somehow managed to get from our side, and people would throw food inside.

And what were the orders about those people?

To capture them. Suspect arrest procedure. The situation I was part of... At all times there was a force of ours there. We were inside the house and there was this open place, which was constantly occupied by a force of ours. So there was a movement outside [from the church], and the outlook spotted it. They advanced, sat there for a while, and then they got back in, or something like that. Then they are spotted again [by the outlook]. My force comes out – there were four of us. We sneak up and get there. We have an outlook, so we know exactly where they are. We are positioned right above them. Me and another soldier, and another couple, on two terraces. Four of us. We are one terrace above them. We spot them crawling out on the floor. We can't say whether or not they are armed. – It wouldn't have mattered if they weren't. To make things short, we open fire at them. Me and another soldier. It was also the suspension... All sorts of reasons. The fire was not successful, operationally speaking.

Did you hit them?

We hit them, but didn't kill them. Because, it's true. It was a situation where almost... you are positioned above, and they are crawling. In short, there was the first bullet, and then automatic fire... It doesn't matter. We wounded them both. They just evacuated them outside.

Our forces?

No. They took them outside, and then we took over. They were transferred to a hospital, I guess an Israeli one. I'm sure it was Israeli.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Orev – elite unit – Nahal

Place: Ezion section (Bethlehem area)

Date: Summer of 2003

The last straw was the brigade commander who stood in front of us briefing us, telling us we're in a Hudna [Arabic: cease-fire], and that it was a sensitive situation. He talks about all that and a minute later he says, still in briefing: "Every kid you see with a stone, you may shoot him." Like, kill him. A stone! It was either the brigade or the battalion commander, I don't remember. This was the briefing. "Now, the situation here is fragile, and a stone is a murder weapon, you know what it is. I saw a woman who was hit by a stone." I think it was the battalion commander... He saw that the brigade commander was there. It was the Ezion brigade commander, ***.

So the brigade commander * gave an order that you may shoot a kid throwing a stone?**

Yes, because it is a murder weapon, because they throw stones on the road. It was during the Hudna...

Did no one say anything?

No. I, I told you – I was almost out [of the army], for me, my thinking... And what annoyed me the most was that the guys in my crew got to the state where all they were interested in was that they had to put on their shoes for this conversation with the brigade commander – army boots. And they argued about it for hours, and one of them went and quarreled about it with the company commander. They were shouting at each other for a half hour after the briefing. And me – obviously I wanted to raise a question, but I was so frustrated with all these impervious people, and I knew that all these questions of mine would raise an opposition against me – those few people who would say "Oh, not again, not these questions again and again. We want to play soccer", or "Oh, shut up – you and your dumb questions." That attitude was always around me. I have always had an opposing group, so I knew I am not going to get an answer; as usual. As far as I was concerned, it was 'over the limit', it was really exaggerated. People said, the warriors said, let's shoot someone to finish off this stinking Hudna, so that we may quit doing all these stakeouts, and do some arrests. And here comes someone, who is also apparently fed up, from the highest command, and he wants something to happen.

Witness: **Officer in an elite unit**

Place: **Anabta**

One of our stakeouts really did kill two people that shot towards a car, but hurt no one.

They found them shooting the road, and so...?

Yes. And then they shot, killed two out of four. Two got away. So, we came there after this incident, and then the brigade commander arrived. It was Anabta, I think. Exactly west of Chomesh [Jewish settlement]. Yes; it could be the area. So ***, the brigade commander comes.

This was after...?

After the incident. In our unit we take our time. We don't rush things. We throw grenades, and until we are certain they are really dead... It is not that we run straight ahead and storm them.

What do you mean?

It means that we run the whole business safely, not hastily. I mention that because it took a really long time from the time of the event 'till the Brigade commander came, and gave the order – "Come, go into the nearby houses."

Wait, since you've already mentioned it – was it part of the procedure to verify killing?

Yes.

Meaning...

This whole fuss about kill-verification, I don't know why it became such a big deal. The chief of staff came out really bad of this whole business.

Why?

Because it was something we all learned on the first day in the army – we verify killing. I remember the picture. I also remember that the guy who preformed it was the platoon commander. I was telling myself it must be disgusting. He just went there, looked at the terrorist's head, and gave a few bullets.

Approached the terrorist and boom, boom, boom?

Exactly.

The company commander?

The company commander.

So the combat ends, and ***, the brigade commander, comes and essentially wants to look for the two who got away. No, we didn't ask him what it was all about. "We need to show them we are here." Now. The houses were pretty far away. In short, it was...

Like, show your presence in the nearby village?

Yes, they certainly ran away in that direction. The guys saw that, but it doesn't matter, because it was a really long time after the whole business... It went very slowly, this whole event. It wasn't like – 'Are they dead? Go verify the killing. Now, what's next?' and army spokesman people were brought in.

Who deal with body documentation, and such stuff? A film unit from the IDF spokesman?

I don't know. In short, they came to take pictures of the terrorists with the weapons. They had M-16s and all. I mean, it was really... I can't say if it was an hour, or longer, when half of the world was there, and it was like everyone wanted their picture to be taken.

To have a picture with the bodies?

No, no, no. I only mean that they came to see what was going on. One knows something good is happening – that there is a success – so everyone wants to take the credit. On that day our unit's commander, ***, came, and I also remember that he came with another guy that was part of his crew – a guy who was an officer in our headquarters. Then they assembled us in a U shape formation. It was sunset. Both of them stand (the unit commander, and his friend who was 1.90 meters tall). They tell them what happened, and all, and then they turn towards the sunset and begin: "Do you remember how we once shot that guy with a gun?" and all sorts of stories. It was funny – really funny. Surreal. Like, you know, talk among themselves for us youngsters to hear their war-legacy.

So, it took a lot of time, you came with the brigade commander *, and essentially what does he say? That you should enter the village and...?**

That we should enter the village, get into a couple of houses and go out. Show our presence. No doubt. I remember we asked him what it was all about? "It's an hour and a half after the incident. Do you think they're in the first house? What are they – morons?" – "No. We should show our presence, if Israelis don't sleep well they (Palestinians) won't sleep well". The usual story... It is not something new.

So did you get in alone, or was there another force with you?

No. In the end we didn't get in. We told him that we talked to our commanders and they somehow convinced him, and he gave up on it – understood it was bullshit.

Witness: Staff sergeant, Nahal.

Place: Hebron

Date: end of 2003

Tell me the series of events there.

If I remember correctly, the incident began when two terrorists went out of one of the Kasba's gates, and shot towards the Tomb of the Fathers; they shot inside. Of course, we were called immediately – all the forces in the section were summoned. We closed the Kasba down, and began searching the place. In the beginning we really did not find anything. It took about seven hours of searching. In the end we were a few crews there: one observing a building outside the Kasba, and another four or three crews searching. Now, at some point the crew I was in and another crew heard shots that were fired very close to us. We immediately took cover. We heard the combat through the radio. We heard someone was hurt, and that they [another crew] were fired at. We went out and got directions from the outlook.

Who was the force inside the house?

It was a Nahal force. They were inside the house and were fired at on the stairs. We went out and the outlook was telling us how to get to them. We made our way on the rooftops.

The force that identified them was from the engineering unit of Golani?
Yes.

And they shot the terrorists?

They shot the terrorists and hit them at some point. Sniper's shots. At the distance they were, it must have been at least a sniper. The two crews that came from the roofs got directions from the outlook, and advanced towards the terrorists. I am talking about a few minutes of direction giving. The first crew got to the balcony over the place where the terrorists were. It was three or four meters distant. The commander shot a few bullets at the terrorist to verify the killing. Then the Nahal force that got fire in the stairs went up, when it was safe for it to come up.

Was it the battalion commander who gave the authorization on the radio? What did the battalion commander tell him on the radio?

“You go up, take no grenades with you, so you don't hit the force that is already inside. Meaning, you go up, and you don't have authorization to throw grenades. It does too much damage and may endanger the other fore.”

Was it reported that the terrorists were dead?

I don't remember exactly at what point, but it was reported. By the time

the first force got there, I am pretty certain they were dead. But it wasn't checked. They just verified it, by shooting them.

Did you move the bodies?

No, no, no.

Did the Nahal elite unit come up?

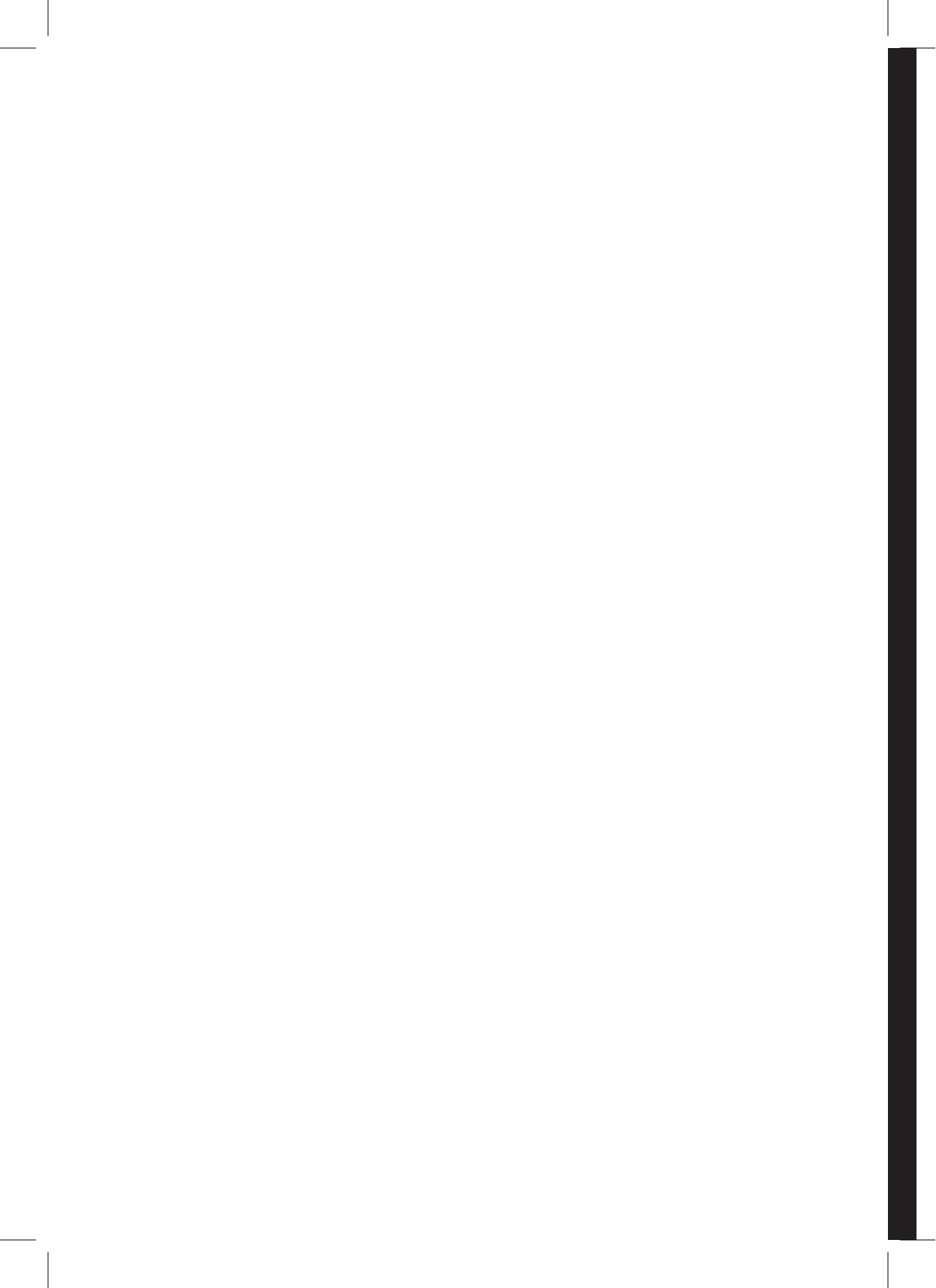
The first person there was the force commander. He really got to the bodies. He shot two bullets on both, and actually made sure they were dead, and don't have any bomb-belts or anything. He took their weapons – unloaded them.

Did the commanders there talked about it? Gave it any notice? Was there any conversation about what he did?

About what? The kill verification?

His. Yes.

No. It's the normal procedure.







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