

Tuesday, June 11, 1991, 22:45

I'm stationed somewhere west of Ramallah at a small outpost more or less in the middle of an Arab village. We've been here a bit over 24 hours, we being the command of our plugah. The rest arrive tomorrow afternoon when we accept full responsibility for the territory where we're stationed, and the miluimnikim whom we're replacing will be released. Today I had close to nothing to do and I allowed myself the luxury of reading a book from start to finish. Since I slept well last night and caught a nap this afternoon I'm hardly tired, so having now finished the book I feel like starting to write, but on the other hand, even without being particularly tired, I'm probably ready to sleep.

About fifteen of us from our plugah (of about 60 altogether) enlisted early, basically to learn the territory before the others arrive. Our plugah is separated from the rest of our g'dud which is stationed around Hebron. We'll be functioning as an "independent" plugah, meaning that we'll have limited contact with the different g'dud that's stationed in this area which has more or less formal responsibility for us.

Wednesday, June 12, 13:00

I wasted this morning waiting with one of the jeeps of our plugah while it had it's weekly check-up and repairs. I went along with the driver — at least two people have to be in each military vehicle when it's on the road. And now it's the lunch break and there's still a good deal of work to be done on the jeep. In other words, this is a rather boring way to waste a day. We're at the central headquarters of the area command in Ramallah where there's a large garage responsible for all military vehicles in the area, and this being the lunch break we ate in one of the dining halls here and then found a spot of grass to relax on before the mechanics return to work.

We were here two days ago for a briefing from the area commander and then from various other officers who gave us an overview on the area and the nature of our job. While he spoke he stood in front of a large map of the area on which the Jewish settlements were boldly emphasized, with their names clearly written. Only when you stand very close to the map can you make out the Arab villages (and towns) and their names. In the entire area there are about 250,000 Arabs and 25,000 Jews, though you wouldn't know that from looking at the map. The area commander gave us an overview of activities in the area which was somewhat problematic. On the one hand he has an interest in the area being quiet, but if he describes it as too quiet then there really isn't much challenge in being commander of the area. So he's caught in a bit of a bind.

On the other hand, a good deal depends on how you look at things. Occasional incidents of stone throwing by teenagers, even if occasional means every other day, don't define the area as hot, but two incidents in one month of gunfire directed at the army or at Jewish settlers perhaps do. This area commander probably also knows from experience that though many of the soldiers who serve in his area are interested only in things staying quiet, numerous others are frustrated by not being able to perform as soldiers. He thus seeks out new forms of "action" which will allow his soldiers to feel like soldiers.

One of those actions is a novel method of trying to catch stone throwers. The basic idea is an ambush in which one jeep pretends to get lost near a village, and when kids come out to throw stones, a second jeep, stationed at a distance, can shoot a live bullet from a rifle with a telescopic lens at the leg of an identified stone-thrower. The injured kid won't be able to run away, and when the other kids scatter the first jeep will be able to take the kid prisoner. After the briefing Yossi R., our leftist sergeant, and I looked at each other in disbelief — this is the sort of intelligent response to kids throwing stones that the army has been able to come up with since we were last in the territories. We've since learned that this tactic has been tried a number of times, though special permission and training is required before taking action. I don't doubt that it succeeded in catching a few stone-throwers, though I'm definitely dubious about whether it brought about a decline in stone throwing.

As we were on our way from the briefing to our outpost we passed Yad Yair — a new military outpost established after Yair Mendlesohn, a settler in one of the settlements of the area, was killed at that spot in an ambush about half a year ago. One of our plugah members cynically remarked that in another half year it will be a civilian settlement that we'll have to guard — an interesting comment, considering that the person making it lives in the territories himself (though of course for the "quality

of life" they offer) and can't be accused of having any left leanings.

Thursday, June 13, 16:15

I've had a slight change of venue, but it seems to me that in order to best describe where I am now I should first give a better description of where I've been until now.

Last October we were stationed at the Tulkarem refugee camp which was adjacent to the town of Tulkarem. Tulkarem is perhaps two kilometers to the east of the green line, meaning that we were hardly outside of Israel proper. (Then again, Israel itself, and the west bank just next to it, are sufficiently small to make even the areas farthest from the green line quite close.) But the Tulkarem refugee camp felt as though it was light years away from my everyday reality. The refugee camp was approximately 400 x 600 meters large, with about 12,000 residents.

The area our plugah is presently responsible for stretches from about four kilometers east of Ramallah for about twelve kilometers to the west, until the green line. Our jurisdiction, if it can be called that, runs north, from about seven kilometers north of the green line, where the western outskirts of Jerusalem are situated, for about twelve kilometers. This is rural, hilly territory, with numerous small and medium sized villages dotting the landscape. I don't know the total population, but it's probably similar to that of the entire Tulkarem refugee camp. On the whole it's a calm and quiet area, though of course no area in the territories has been really quiet during these three and a half years of Intifada. On the other hand, things look very similar to how they looked ten or fifteen years ago when, as civilians, we would go on tiyulim in this area, hiking to springs or walking through riverbeds filled with bustanim — fruit tree gardens might perhaps be the best translation. And just as then we hardly thought twice before walking through the village, or buying fruit in the village market, or even of eating the fruit on the trees (after all, this was conquered territory, and even if you didn't want to behave like the conqueror, you found it very easy to do so), today we wouldn't consider not patrolling in groups, armed, frequently checking behind us to be sure that nobody is sneaking up on us.

Thursday, 18:15

I've been writing while standing watch at our outpost, and then a little more than an hour ago went on a short tiyul around the area — mostly as a display of our presence. Now that I'm back on watch I can pick up where I left off. And that's quite desirable, seeing as how I still haven't explained where I am.

Our plugah, about fifty people altogether, not counting those on leave, is stationed in three different outposts within the area I've described. In order to best understand where these outposts are located, it's important that I describe one more characteristic of the area we're in — numerous small Jewish settlements. To get to these settlements — three in our immediate area, and altogether around ten or twelve in and around the full area of our jurisdiction — it's necessary to travel on roads that go through a number of villages, and often, so we've been told, stones or perhaps molotov cocktails are thrown at the Israeli vehicles on their way to and from the settlements. Israel is presently allocating large sums of money for roads which will bypass these villages, thus helping make the settlements desirable places to live not only for the ideologically motivated but also for those who want cheap suburban housing — and no contact with a hostile Arab population. And this is what's referred to as the goal of peaceful co-existence in official Israeli propaganda.

So our three outposts are located by villages that the main roads pass through. These aren't necessarily particularly hostile villages, though there certainly is no special reason for them to be friendly. Their location is what's important, not their behavior. One particular village in our area is known for being extremely hostile, and we have orders not to enter it unless told otherwise. This is another sort of co-existence — since the village isn't on a road of any consequence, it's best to let well enough alone.

In order to ensure that we don't go off the main roads and by taking a wrong turn enter an unfriendly village — with uncomfortable consequences, mounds of dirt or stones have been set up at the wrong turns. Israelis in general (Israeli Jews?) and the army in particular know that they're not to go past these roadblocks. Within larger, urban, areas, like Ramallah, the main roads that lead to places

that the army has to get to (command headquarters, for instance) have a yellow line painted on them, and our instructions are to always travel on the road with the yellow line. These precautions are the result of experience — people who have made the wrong turn-off have run into ambushes.

Yesterday, as I've already mentioned, I accompanied a jeep to Ramallah for its weekly check-up and repair. The driver and I didn't have a map, and hadn't made the trip before unaccompanied, or in daylight. I have a good sense of direction and rarely get lost, and I trust myself on this. Still, we had a rather uncomfortable feeling when, on the way back, the driver thought we were on the wrong road. These aren't exactly times in which an Israeli soldier can ask directions to his outpost from Arab villagers whom he meets along the way.

Thursday, 21:00

Until a couple of months ago a plugah stationed in this area would have been divided into two outposts — the one I was at until this morning, and another by another village farther west. Both these outposts house around 25 people, and the basic work is patrolling the area, day and night. Though these outposts are situated in villages, they don't really have contact with them.

This isn't the case with the outpost I'm at in 'Ein 'Arich. 'Ein 'Arich is today a quiet, even picturesque, village with a spring in its center to which everybody comes to fill buckets of water and bring them back home since the village isn't connected to a central water supply. It would undoubtedly be nicer to have running water at home, but the village doesn't really seem particularly poor. But I'll try and describe more of the village at another time. What's presently important is the fact that though this is a quiet village it apparently wasn't always that way. Though I doubt that 'Ein 'Arich was ever a particularly hostile village, stones have been thrown at vehicles passing through, and from where we're stationed we can readily see the ruins of two houses, said to have belonged to "terrorists" and because of that destroyed by army authorities. I'm stationed on the roof of a house overlooking a turn in the road in the center of the village. The house, of course, was confiscated by the army, and the roof is now an outpost for six soldiers whose job it is to show their presence in order that the village remain quiet. Thus we sit on our roof and watch the goings on, and a couple of times each day we stroll around. Since at present all is quiet, we're apparently performing our job well. And as for me, political considerations aside for the moment, I'm in a beautiful spot where I can enjoy the view and occasionally be outside on rather relaxing and enjoyable tiyulim. And since there are only six of us here it's quiet and comfortable — the sort of spot I always like to get to on miluim, and rarely do anymore since I've been the plugah medic and thus almost always situated in the central outpost of our plugah.

Friday, June 14, 13:30

One of our responsibilities here is seeing to it that the bus from Jerusalem to one of the settlements, and back, gets through 'Ein 'Arich without any problems. A patrol of three soldiers on a jeep meets the bus near Ramallah and follows it until the settlement and back as one sort of protection — though since the bus is much faster than the jeep, by the time the jeep gets to us the bus has already passed almost five minutes earlier. We also send out a patrol on foot, three or four soldiers, who by showing their presence in the village are supposed to prevent stone throwing. Once again, considering that since we've been here all has been quiet, perhaps the system works. From the time the bus passes in one direction until it returns in the other perhaps half an hour can transpire, and since the bus is almost always around ten minutes late, in order to show our presence in the village for the few seconds during which the bus passes, the patrol has to be in the village for about 45 minutes. All of this, by the way, is for a bus which since we've been here has had no more than five passengers, and usually less, at any one time.

Just waiting around for the bus for that long a time can be quite boring, so we take the opportunity to wander a bit around the village. This is also an opportunity for us to fill a few bottles with the clear and tasty water of the village spring, and perhaps buy a watermelon at the Mom and Pop store right next to it. Or perhaps we'll simply sit in the shade of some of the fruit trees in one of the village's many bustanim (the figs aren't really ripe yet).

All this is still, of course, occupation. We give our neighbors our leftover bread and vegetables

and get large tasty pitot in return. We have the ripest fruit on the trees pointed out to us, or perhaps when we want to get from one terrace to another, but the terraces are fenced off, someone will obligingly show us where the not so obvious opening is. The young girls at the spring flash friendly smiles when they take our empty bottles and fill them for us. We say "please" and "thank you" and perhaps a few other phrases or sentences that we know in Arabic. But we're walking around with rifles, our outpost is heavily protected by a barbed-wire fence, and we peer uninvited into the daily lives of the village's inhabitants with our binoculars, or wander uninvited through their yards and gardens, and an Israeli flag flies from our outpost atop a confiscated house in a manner which the people of the village must unavoidably define as provocative and threatening. No question about it, this is definitely occupation.

Though, considering the circumstances, I'm stationed at a very comfortable spot where it's possible to get lots of sleep, and to read and write a lot, when the opportunity presents itself to explore the territory on foot, I almost always jump at that opportunity. Thus yesterday afternoon, when the bus had to be "protected", three of us took a long walk through the bustanim of the village, observing the basic, but effective, irrigation system, and recalling how not too long ago a tiyul such as this could be made without weapons. We also walked pleasurably through part of the residential district.

This morning we decided to take advantage of the fact that the day still wasn't too hot, and we climbed the hill behind the village to the south. The sergeant of our outpost, Yossi R., had heard a religious member of our plugah remark that from the vantage point of the top of the hills he had understood once again why we can't give up any part of Eretz Yisrael. (I think that what he mostly meant was that from a high vantage point one can see how small Israel is, and thus in need of the territories, but he probably also meant that one could get a feel for a geographical, and thus indivisible, whole, mixed as well with the pastoral, perhaps Biblical [more on that another time] beauty of the area.) Yossi remarked that who knows, maybe if we'd climb up to the top and catch the view, we'd finally understand as well. Since I wanted to see the view anyway, and since until then "because it's there" was about the only other reason I had for making the trek, I decided to willingly suspend my disbelief and entertain the possibility of being convinced. Though the view was definitely very impressive (and the figs at the top of the hill — an incline of about 150 meters — riper than those in the bustanim of the river bed) we weren't convinced.

On the way back to our outpost we passed through part of the village and noticed that although everyone takes water from the spring, a rather basic form of internal plumbing has developed. Some of the water is pumped uphill, and then goes via pipes and hoses to people's homes. Others carry large quantities of water to their homes, and fill large tanks with pipes attached to them. I really don't know what people do about toilets, and we have the same problem. Though our conditions are on the whole excellent, to relieve ourselves we have to venture outside, walk about thirty or more meters along a terrace, find a clean spot, and go to work. This is actually quite comfortable, and after all, field toilets are never more than holes in the ground anyway, so there's not much difference. But I suppose that it's not supposed to be very becoming for the occupier to be caught with his pants down — that can perhaps cause the occupied to think that we're no better than they are.

Shabbat, June 15, 1345

During my watch yesterday I took the opportunity to do a good deal of writing, and then in the late afternoon the Shabbat newspapers arrived (at least parts of some of them arrived) and we read them and I also finished the book I was reading. Last night I was on guard duty for our early shift, from 21:00 until midnight. This meant that I could comfortably go to sleep at a rather logical hour and sleep at least until 06:00. I slept until after 07:00 and woke quite refreshed. A short while ago I tried to nap a bit, but discovered that I wasn't tired. Before guarding last night I replaced part of a patrol for about an hour and in that way caught a ride to our plugah where I was able to phone Tzippi. She wasn't home, but I reached Bennie and Ruchama who promised to tell her I'd called to wish her Shabbat Shalom.

Since close to nothing happens here of major significance I don't find myself falling behind on writing, but on the other hand I've been making notes about numerous items that deserve mention and it seems that on these I've got some catching up to do.

In one of the Shabbat papers I read a report on a B'Tzelem investigation on the death of a fourteen year old boy on Tuesday or Wednesday.

My writing was interrupted by a visit by one of our patrols. It's the patrol's responsibility to be on the roads, ready to be called to wherever necessary on immediate notice. Statistically anything can happen at any time in any area of our responsibility with the same degree of probability, meaning that unless the patrol has some specific responsibility that requires that it be somewhere in particular, it doesn't really matter where the patrol is. Basically for that reason the patrol has been sitting and visiting with us for the past two hours, and has only left while I've been writing this sentence. During my watch I had conversations with each of the three patrollees, and was thus (more or less pleasurably) kept from writing. I was replaced on watch about fifteen minutes before the patrol left. And now, back to the B'Tzelem investigation.

The boy who was killed was shot by Israeli soldiers from the g'dud to which we're presently connected — about three kilometers south and ten kilometers west of where I'm situated. (Most of our g'dud is in the area of Hebron, but one plugah, ours, was exchanged with one plugah from the g'dud responsible for this area. The g'dud we're with is from the tank corps, and at a rather high decision making level it was decided that an infantry unit should be kept in this area as well, thus the exchange.) The official army version of the boy's death is that he was throwing stones at a patrol and that the patrol followed the prescribed guidelines in trying to stop and arrest him. Though I have little faith in the army when it comes to explaining away mistakes, I have to admit that this particular story is too far fetched to have the honor of being considered seriously. Army policy, as explained to us in our briefings, is that only if we're in immediate danger can we open fire on stone throwers, and that only if they appear to be above the age of 16. We're not even supposed to chase after them if they run away, let alone shoot at them. Seemingly how the boy killed was shot from behind, he must have been running away, and if he was running away, then according to army orders it was forbidden to shoot him. That the present official version is absurd is obvious. How long we'll have to wait for a new version isn't clear.

One of today's patrollees with whom I visited is a religious rightist and close friend who enjoys sparring with me. Today he chose to attack B'Tzelem for being one-sided, meaning anti-Israel. He told me about a left, kibbutznik, friend of his who has connections to army investigations who has told him this, as well as that he's embarrassed by B'Tzelem's work. He then of course waited for me to say something. I tried to explain to him that B'Tzelem had neither the resources, nor the authority, to conduct full scale investigations, and that it therefore had to do its best to raise questions about army investigations and demand that they be more than only whitewashes. But there wasn't much point in arguing further.

I should add that B'Tzelem quotes a friend of the killed boy who was with him at the time of the shooting. From what's written in the papers, the boy seems to claim that they weren't even throwing stones. This may be true, though it seems to me much more believable that they were. I also don't think that an admission of stone throwing should in any way diminish the believability of the boy's story. And it certainly makes sense that Palestinian youths throw stones every so often at Israeli patrols.

I, by the way, am often "accused" of preparing reports for B'Tzelem when I'm seen writing which is quite frequently. I always respond that I'll be happy to report on any inappropriate actions with which I come in contact. I also add that my objection isn't to any particular inappropriate action, though of course I'm against "exaggerated" actions, but to the conquest in general.

For the approximately five days that we've been here things have been very quiet. Last night one of our patrols met with a roadblock of burning tires near Ramallah, but it seems that this was dealt with quickly and rather easily. (We haven't yet spoken with the patrol of last night in order to get more details, but from the reports that we received on the field radio during the "incident" things were taken care of quickly and without complications.) I can't think of any other incidents here that would suggest that we can't expect a rather quiet month. Then again, the shooting of this boy may suggest otherwise.

It may also be a matter of expectations. One patrol of two nights ago passed through our village and reported to the other patrol soon to follow to be careful, because it seemed that the residents were organizing some sort of demonstration. We heard this on the field radio and intervened. From where we were stationed all was quiet except for a vegetable vendor advertising his wares via a loudspeaker

on his truck, and many people gathering around to buy. This the patrol identified as the start of a demonstration. It turns out that if you want to find trouble you can find it in even the most innocent of situations.

Parts of the Shabbat papers relate to new developments within the leadership of the Palestinians in the territories. During this past week a public forum was held in East Jerusalem in which much of the mid-level leadership in the territories criticized the too rampant Palestinian violence, most frequently visible in the killing of people accused of collaborating with Israeli authorities. I'm not really surprised that this sort of thing happens since on the one hand Israel has tried to prevent any responsible leadership from developing in the territories, while on the other a street class of gangs and criminal elements has become "politicized" and has filled the vacuum by translating its regular activities into political terms. It's definitely heartening to note that a reaction to this is developing. Since Palestinian violence has been giving the Intifada a bad name in the international press, the new leadership is willing to hang out its dirty laundry in public, expecting and hoping for sympathy for this new tactic of public criticism. (American Jews on the whole are still caught in the dirty laundry syndrome and don't do much of a service to Israel by not being critical of what we're doing.)

Israel claims that the Intifada is deteriorating (and has been making this claim off and on for about the full three and a half years it's been going). The Palestinians claim that what's taking place is a regrouping of forces, a seeking of means to allow the Intifada to continue without it having too trying an effect on people's lives. In other words, they're trying to dig in for the long haul. I tend to believe that they're right. And for the moment it seems that things will remain relatively quiet, until something happens to making things explode again.

During today four of the six of us stationed here joined, in two different shifts, numerous others from our platoon who swam in the pool of a moshav in the westernmost portion of the area of our responsibility. I chose not to go. On the whole I don't really enjoy swimming in pools, though without a doubt two hours in a pool would have been a much more enjoyable way of spending my time than simply staying here. My main reason for not going, however, was political — though that's hard for most of the people I'm with to understand. So hard, in fact, that we hardly get into discussions or arguments about it — it's simply outside of their world of considerations. The moshav is, of course, located in the territories, and though it certainly doesn't turn to me in order to gain legitimacy, I still want to avoid doing anything that bestows that legitimacy. For personal reasons I didn't refuse to serve this time. I've discussed these with some of my friends, and they're understanding, but they also seem (rightly, to my mind) rather apathetic to my personal dilemma. On the one hand, for the vast majority of them, serving in the territories raises absolutely no moral dilemmas, and on the other, they can rather disinterestedly respond to me "what does it interest me what you thought of doing, or think you should do — you're here now, and that's what counts." And in many ways, they'd be right.

Before these miluim I sent letters to my g'dud and platoon commanders, explaining to them without going into the details of Tzippi's pregnancy and the tests yet to be performed, that though I'd quite definitely made up my mind this time that I would refuse, for personal reasons I really couldn't allow myself that moral luxury under the present circumstances.

Monday, May 27, 1991

Dear Khanan

Among the many things that I'd planned to do around now, sitting down to write you a letter wasn't one of them. Toward the end of the school year and the beginning of the summer it's natural that one think of more pleasant topics than a month a miluim in the territories. But on second thought, perhaps it was unavoidable that this letter would be written. The reality of the State of Israel at the end of the twentieth century will continue, apparently, to be a reality of rule over another people, and my reflections on my place within that reality will continue to be reflections of doubt and of painful decisions. Thus as our approaching miluim get closer I once again am writing you a letter.

It's hard for me to explain, precisely what happened that brought about a change and caused me ultimately to serve in our last miluim. Perhaps more than anything else I was curious to see with my own eyes what service in the territories was like, and thus your argument that before I could

refuse I should first know what it was like first hand impressed me. I was influenced as well, as you knew before those miluim. by the feeling of belonging to my plugah with all that that implies about commitments to friends and to a fighting unit. You also knew that I didn't see refusal to serve as a political solution, but instead only a last personal refuge of conscience from an impossible situation. And yet, even though you probably thought that in the end I reached the correct decision, the feeling that I'd made an incorrect decision continued to trouble me.

This isn't to say that I felt sorry about my decision to serve. It's clear to me that to a certain extent I owed to myself this meeting with service in the territories, and I admit that I learned a lot from it. It's hard to say that those miluim in the territories left a particular mark on me, other than a deep feeling of the banality of the occupation. In this light it's important for me to emphasize that I don't see the soldiers who serve in the territories as monsters or as blood thirsty criminals. I had contact with many soldiers who made an effort to behave in a humane manner during their service, and it seems to me that as far as this was possible, they succeeded in this effort. There were times when I felt a need to interfere and to try and restrain certain behaviors (mostly in the cases of conscripts who were serving with us) but I learned that under the prevailing conditions and the excitement of action it's very hard to influence another soldier.

But these thoughts are beside the point. Above all else I went to our previous miluim with the deep set feeling that I wasn't furthering Israel's security but was instead being an accessory to the weakening of the true security of the State. This feeling stood out above all others that I felt during those miluim, and it's the central one in my consciousness and my memory when I have to once again consider serving in the territories.

About two weeks ago I spoke on the phone with Yossi Peretz and explained to him my misgivings. To a certain extent he was surprised since we'd already gone through one month together in the territories and he didn't identify signs of particular suffering by me. Still, he has already grown to know me, and my inclinations. He suggested that I start this miluim and that I check by myself if I want to continue or if I want to be court martialed. I explained to him, as I'd explained to you last summer, that the way I see things, it's much more serious to refuse during our service than it is before we start. Yossi promised me that in his opinion these aren't miluim like in Lebanon or in the midst of battle, and he reiterated his suggestion.

This time, due to weighty personal considerations, I'm inclined to accept his offer, even though my deepest feeling is that I should refuse to serve from the very beginning. There's never a particularly appropriate time to sit in a military prison, but for me this coming month is a particularly inappropriate time. Today, more than in the past, I'm very aware of the fact that we live not only in a world of values and ideas, but also in a world of personal relations and of commitments and responsibilities, and that compromise is often the only means by which to bridge between these two worlds.

Each day of the past few weeks has been a day of questioning, of doubt and of personal reflection. I find myself torn between different realms of responsibility and commitment. It seems that things will continue that way until the day we enlist, and perhaps during our miluim as well. In the meantime, it was my responsibility to share my thoughts with you.

Sincerely.

But unlike my last miluim, refusing or not refusing to serve isn't much of a topic of discussion.

I've already noted that 'Ein 'Arich is a quiet and picturesque village, but I haven't really described it. The village is built around two sides of a road running east to west. The road runs along a river bed which is of course the lowest part of the village. On each side the hills rise about 150 meters, with the populated area rising for about a third of that, and not much more than 100 meters in either direction from the spring. The bustanim are situated to the west. Although the houses go in both directions, the bustanim are only in the direction of the flow of the water. On the southern side most of the buildings are concrete, while on the northern side more are from stone. We're on the northern side. Interestingly, the village is both Christian and Moslem with the Christians on the north, the Moslems on the south. Above us is a church with rather hollow and unimpressive bells, while right in front of us, built on top of the spring, is the mosque. Sometimes the mu'azin has a full and convincing voice,

while at other times we hear a recording which is filled with static. Though I'm far from an authority on mu'azins, I think I heard some Bulgarian or other Balkan rhythms and motifs in some of what I've heard here, while at other times, the cries sound much more mainstream Arabic. This may be because of the mixing of Moslem and Greek Orthodox cultures, but it may simply be that I'm mistaken and that all of what I've heard is "mainstream".

Picturesque and pastoral are good descriptions of the village, but without a doubt one of the most accurate descriptions is "Biblical". This is particularly so because a good deal of the life of the village focuses around the spring in its center. During the day, and especially toward evening, women come to fill buckets of water that they carry back home on their heads. Children also fill buckets, and play around with the water. I've seen boys with wagons for the buckets going back and forth, and it looks as though this is a privilege reserved only for males.

Though I don't have any statistics, my guess is that there are about 700 people living in the village. During the day we don't see many men. They're probably away at work, many of them in Israel. Sometimes we see them getting home from work via Arab buses, and toward evening we see them walking along the main street, often with their children. At present the daylight continues until after 20:00. By 21:00 everybody seems to be at home, and by 23:00 almost all the lights have been shut off. At that time, if the dogs aren't barking, or the frogs not croaking, the gurgling of the spring comes through loud and clear, and it's a peaceful and calming sound.

It's hard to avoid the description of Biblical. Yesterday afternoon a patrol visited us and looked out on the village and the spring and was impressed and pleased with the view. One of the soldiers started to say something about the similarity to Ya'acov and Rachel when another interrupted him and remarked that the village was something right out of an Indiana Jones movie — thus revealing a culturally rich and literarily deep pool of associations.

A couple of days ago we noticed a group of women sitting on the ground at the cemetery above the village. Perhaps fifty people congregated there, with some young boys bringing date palm leaves which they left near a grave. This didn't seem to be a funeral, but rather some sort of memorial service. At the same time someone was distributing cakes from a large tray down below next to the mosque. It seemed as though he brought them up to the cemetery, distributing them to everyone along the way.

Today I noticed a boy and girl of about 16 in very western dress strolling together through the village. This was the only time I've seen this, though it may not at all have been out of the ordinary. They weren't holding hands, just strolling together. On the whole there's a rich mix of traditional and modern dress in the village. Many of the married women cover their hair, though I don't think that all of them do. Since there's someone on almost each patrol that visits here who remarks that he'd be happy to live here, it's fair to ask how many of the village's residents want to continue living here, and how many would prefer to move to a more western and technologically advanced setting. I don't really have any way of answering that question, but I want to be careful not to wrongly assume that the people living here have chosen to have a laid-back life style. It's more than only possible that they would be happy to make some technological improvements in their village which might make it less picturesque but more amenable to a comfortable, modern life style.

Perhaps the most interesting scene that I noticed today was what seemed to be a family visit. At first I noticed a girl of about 16, in very western dress (meaning mostly very tight jeans) and a camera, wandering around one of the houses near us. After a while I saw what seemed to be her two younger sisters since they were dressed quite distinctly differently from the other girls in the house. It seemed as though they were being shown around, and then some obligatory family pictures were taken. I had the feeling that the girls were visiting their grandparents since a considerably older couple in traditional dress was posing in the family pictures. I don't know if the girls were visiting from the city, or perhaps even from abroad. (I think it's already summer vacation in the States, whereas in the Arab school system of Israel today was a school day, though since these girls are on the Christian side of the village, perhaps they have Shabbat off where they live. But, though the scene definitely interested me, all this is pure conjecture.

Sunday, June 16, 15:45, at home

I arrived home at around 13:15 and have since had time to eat lunch, shower, catch up on the mail, and visit with Tzippi who is presently out teaching and attending to various other tasks. And

this gives me a chance to do some catching up that I was about to get around to this morning when I was replaced earlier than I'd expected by someone returning from leave and I was thus able to start out on my way home.

This was at about 10:30. I'd slept until 8:00 and then fried eggs and made some salad for a few of us, and we simply sat around and talked. At first this was only Yossi R. and myself, and since our political opinions are very similar we were able to use that base for jumping off into cultural issues in general. Much of what we talked about revolved around how the occupation is or isn't reflected in Israeli culture and how it's effected the daily lives of not only the Palestinians but of ourselves as well. This could have flared into a heated political argument when another member of our plugah woke up and joined us, and almost catching the drift of the conversation, started to try and explain to us why peace with the Arabs ("Palestinians" is a bit too sophisticated a word for him) was an impossibility. He by the way even tried to convince us that the present peace with Egypt wasn't really peace. It took a little while, but by not taking the bait and thus avoiding getting into an argument we succeeded in getting across to him that not everything was reducible to simplistic slogans. One small victory for reason? I doubt it.

At about 10:30 I decided that I'd replace the person on guard duty at the time since though he still had perhaps another hour to guard, I was going home today and could afford to put in some time guarding. Besides, it would give me an opportunity to do some writing. But it was then that I received word that I was about to be picked up to be brought back to the central base of our plugah and from there catch a ride into Israel.

Before falling asleep last night, at around 02:00 after two hours of guard duty and an interesting evening tiyul that I'll return to later, I asked myself why I was going into so much detail about this village. I think that the answer has only partly to do with the fact that for a number of hours a day I sit perched above much of the village and peer into people's lives. There's very little of importance toward Israel's security that I can expect to find through watching the village, and the army seems to realize this since unlike at outposts on the borders we're not asked to write down what we see or make reports out of which military intelligence will try and make sense. To a large extent our main task is that of intimidating the people in the village by constantly reminding them that we're here and watching them whether they like it or not. Through our binoculars we can readily follow people's daily activities. It's easy to look at the faces of the people (mostly women) who come to the spring to fill their buckets with water, or peer into lit windows after nightfall. Almost all of us here have said that we've felt embarrassed when someone we're watching looks up and watches us watching him/her.

So in part the reason I write about what I see in the village is that observing the village is a main part of my job and thus fills up a good deal of my time. But I think that it's precisely as a result of that job that I actually go into detail about what I'm observing. The army, after all, doesn't really care what goes on in 'Ein 'Arich, unless it's of significance to Israel's security. When I write down what I'm observing about people's lives I'm in some small way giving them back their personalities; I'm resisting seeing them in the solely black and white terms of for us or against us which the occupation forces onto both sides of this conflict. Writing down my observations of the village helps me to overcome some of the dehumanization of the occupation.

Last night we almost had the opportunity for some "action". Not that any of us were particularly interested in said action, but we're not the ones making the decisions. The residents of the Jewish settlements who have to pass through 'Ein 'Arich to get to their settlements have been complaining that Motz'ei Shabbat, when guests leave for their homes and settlers return from a Shabbat away from the settlements, is the night when the most stones are thrown at them. The second in command of our plugah (the first was away at home, preparing for exams) decided that we should offer these settlers whatever aid we could. A number of activities were prepared throughout our area of responsibility, and at 'Ein 'Arich four of us wandered around the village and on the road from around 22:15 until 23:30, the times when the bus from Jerusalem was supposed to go back and forth through the village. Our orders were to catch stone throwers, if possible, to stop cars with license plates from the territories and check the identification cards of the people in them, and to stop and question anyone wandering around the village during that time.

We had a bit of a hard time relating seriously to this assignment since we were quite convinced that almost no cars would be on the roads, no stones would be thrown, and nobody would even be outside at that time. We jokingly prepared for the venture as though we were preparing for a trek into

Lebanon which we're sometimes called upon to make when on the northern borders. Such a trek can be dangerous and demands rather meticulous planning, whereas we knew that this particular outing would be little more than a hike. In the end things went as we'd known they would, and altogether we had a rather pleasant nighttime hike through the village — nothing more.

Shabbat, June 22, 1991, 10:30

Since I've been at home throughout almost this entire week perhaps this should be a separate letter instead of part of my miluim journal, but it's not just the chronological continuity that makes me include my writing of today as part of this journal. Though I've been comfortably at home throughout the week I've still very consciously been in miluim as well. Partly this is due to speaking with people, telling them where I'm located, hearing from them where they last were, and the like. It also has to do with the way I listen to news reports — there's a certain immediacy that some reports can take on that perhaps aren't felt when they're not about to have a direct effect on you.

Not that this was often the case this week, but it was certainly something that I felt. There have been a number of reports during this week of leave that suggest unrest in the territories — unrest that may be reflected in what's happening where I'm stationed — but on the whole things have been quiet. But more than these reasons, miluim, whether in the territories or not, have a way of interrupting one's life. And I very distinctly felt that while on leave this week. I think that everyone has the sensation, when stationed somewhere in miluim, of time going by incredibly slowly. There's a certain drabness to even the most "interesting" miluim which makes them feel almost endless. But when you get home on leave you somehow feel that the true reality is what you've left behind and that you've returned home for only a short break from it. So even though I accomplished a number of things during this week I was always distinctly aware of the fact that this was "in between" time.

I "took" a week of leave now, even though it probably means that I'll be almost a full three weeks back with my plugah, without leave, until the end of these miluim, because it seems as though this is the most definite time that I can be home. A couple of the other medics in my plugah have pre-arranged leaves because of their studies and it looks as though I'll be needed for the remainder of our month. I thus told my plugah commander that since chances were very poor that I'd be able to get out during the last three weeks of our service I'd be happy to take a full week now, when it's available, even though a full week is a bit more than I might ordinarily be able to expect. My reasoning made sense, and after all, I am the oldest person still on "active" duty in the plugah, and that commands a certain amount of respect. So now I'm finishing up this, under the circumstances, week, and I can only be hopeful that I won't have difficulty digging in for the remainder ahead of me.

It was pleasing to get word from Tzippi that the blood test that returned brought encouraging news with it. We still have one more test to go before we're given a full all-clear (as much as that's possible) but we're definitely encouraged. We've spoken about the possibility that once that all-clear is given I'll be able to refuse to serve the remainder of my miluim, though both of us are quite aware of the fact that there isn't much sense in declaring that I want to be court martialed after about 3/4 of my month and at that time to take the chance of still being sentenced to a full month of jail. Then again, there are those who will claim that there's no sense in refusing at all since it doesn't accomplish anything and ultimately only causes me to suffer. Actually, what disturbs me most, as I think it did as well during my last miluim in the territories, is the fact that it's incredibly easy to adjust to the role thrust on me of being an occupier. Without too much difficulty I can explain away my actions, claiming that my present role of occupier is (compared to what?) rather innocuous and not outrightly hurtful. And of course that's a basic part of the problem — the occupation has become nothing if not banal, and banality is perhaps among the hardest things to overcome simply because it's seemingly so inoffensive. One of the people who serves with me will soon be moving his family to one of the newest west bank settlements (R'vava) — one of those set up flauntingly by the Israeli government to show the States who's in charge here. Though this particular friend is no doubt aware of the extent to which moving his family to this new settlement is a political act, most of the people I'm with see this settlement as no more than just another place to live — another example of the banality of the occupation. And all this leads to my difficulty in explaining myself to the people I'm serving with. When they hear that I'm considering refusing they invariably respond — but we're not doing anything extreme, we're not breaking bones, nor shooting at anyone, why should you refuse to be part of this

service? My response of "that's precisely the reason" is sadly not that clear to many people.

This leads to perhaps the only item I've got listed in my notes that I didn't get around to writing about before my leave. When I went to our regional command headquarters for our jeep's day of repairs I had a chance to see how some other Israelis relate to the occupation. The headquarters' garage is filled with young soldiers who have various jobs there. The Israeli army is different from most armies in that the most capable people become combat soldiers whereas it's the less capable who are given jobs behind the front lines. (And even when, as today, highly capable people are needed for behind the lines jobs like computer systems that require high intelligence and quick thinking, there's still a large degree of status associated with combat, and especially infantry, roles.) But this is slightly beside the point. What's important is that numerous young kids, the vast majority of them far from the elite of Israeli society, spend their service in an army garage in Ramallah or in similar jobs there. These kids serve beyond the green line, though I doubt that many of them are consciously aware of that fact. Ramallah today is, after all, a short drive from the northern-most suburbs of Jerusalem, and these kids have been born into the fact of the occupied territories and probably have no reason to see them as anything different than other parts of Israel.

Yet to get to Jerusalem and back they're required to travel with their clips in their weapons, and thus even though most of them have received only minimal weapons training, they learn to feel secure with their weapons; strong because of their weapons. The note I made to myself was "boys with guns", and sadly that's all too accurate a description of the situation. A generation ago we used to quote Mao: all power grows out of the barrel of a gun. I doubt that I really believed that then, and find it even harder to accept today, but there's little question that the occupation ultimately rests on Israel's military power, and that these kids, though in many ways a minor and even insignificant part of Israel's military, get a certain satisfaction from the sense of power that comes with having a weapon.

The major topic of discussion in Israel over these past two weeks hasn't been the occupation, but instead the declarations of our Minister of Absorption. Yitzhak Peretz has been known to say some pretty extreme things in the past — that a traffic accident in which children were killed was due to the fact that the city the kids came from was filled with "unkosher" mezuzot, or that Israeli soldiers were being killed in Lebanon because of the low moral standards of women soldiers. This time he didn't exactly outdo himself — he simply chose the kibbutzim to pick on.

Explaining why he didn't want Ethiopian olim to go to kibbutzim he recalled the days of the North African aliyah of the 1950's (he himself is of Moroccan origin) when, he claimed, traditional Moroccan Jews who were sent to kibbutzim were forced to leave their traditional religious practices. He of course added that the rejection of tradition caused an increase in crime and he pretty clearly suggested that wherever you find a Moroccan criminal or prostitute today you'll find a kibbutz in his/her past.

Did anyone really relate to this outburst seriously? That's hard to say. The outpouring of support for the kibbutz movement was the largest we've seen in a very long time, and every newspaper was filled with North African kibbutz members or those who were educated on kibbutz who had only positive things to say about their kibbutz experience. There are no doubt many in Israel who agree with Peretz (and just as many who are pleased with the opportunity to knock the kibbutz movement) but on the whole after rounds one and two of this particular issue the kibbutz movement certainly came out in a very positive light.

What disturbs me is the fact that we still don't seem to realize to what an extent we're in the midst of a cultural struggle. No doubt we're going to have to learn to accept one another and Israel is going to have to find ways to remain a tolerant and pluralistic society. But there's also no doubt that ultimately the Zionist movement sought to radically change the Jewish people, and that part of that change is a rejection of the traditional religious viewpoint. Today the proponents of radical Zionism, thinking that with the establishment of the State they've achieved their goals, have toned down their arguments and argue only for tolerance, while at the same time the extremist religious elements are gaining strength and we're hardly offering an ideological alternative to their offensive.

I of course make a connection between the struggle for a secular Israel and the struggle for an Israel without the territories — an Israel whose security is based on real security needs rather than on some messianic conception of a greater Israel. But while sitting in the territories, pre-occupied with the occupation, I hardly knew about this other controversy until the Shabbat papers arrived last Friday afternoon.

When I got home Tzippi and I checked which evening we could get a car, and then found that complimentary tickets were available for that same night at the Philharmonic's concert. And thus Monday evening we went to Tel Aviv for an enjoyable, if not particularly inspiring, evening of music. Tzippi was away Tuesday and I took that opportunity to transcribe what I'd written while on miluim.

I'd wanted to get home on leave for last night since this was the evening of the concert of Tzippi's students (and those of the hired piano teacher we have as well). A bit to Tzippi's surprise the kids played very well and everyone was impressed. My kvutzah was busy with their activities around the subject of Indians which they'd started before I left for miluim and I had a good deal of contact with them around that topic during the week.

One of my activities during this week was doing a bit of research on the area I'm in. There doesn't seem to be much mid-level material available, and I'm not really interested in doing too much reading on the geological make up of the area and the like. Thus I've mostly found only passing references to the villages in the area and perhaps a couple of interesting sentences about each. A friend also gave me a short article describing a pleasant tiyul in area, and perhaps I'll be able to interest some people in such a tiyul in our free time. Of course this article was first published well before the Intifada when wandering around the area where I'm stationed was much easier, but the places, if not the atmosphere, are still the same.

And this morning Mom called and we had a chance to talk, and talk.... I hope that I was able to relieve her anxiety. We really are much less anxious today than we were two weeks ago, and I'm happy to pass that positive feeling on to her.

Sunday, June 23, 1930

I did close to nothing today, and can't say that I'm particularly happy about that. Not that I'm looking for action, but by this point in a long day I start to reflect on the fact that it was long, but little else.

I left home at 7:00 this morning and was in Ramallah by 9:15 expecting to find a ride from there to where my plugah was stationed. I did find a ride, but it didn't leave until around 13:00 meaning that I had little to do but sit around (and do some reading). For three tediously uneventful hours, from 15:00 until 18:00 I personned the field radio, and then at 18:00 I was finally able to take my shoes off after a long day. I've been promised that I'll have to have them on again for at least part of tonight.

Though things seem very quiet, enough apparently happened in our area during my week of leave to "merit" more activity. Fire was set to some fields at the very west of our area of responsibility, and there have apparently also been some incidents of stone throwing. This has caused the decision making ranks in the area to demand that we accelerate our activities here — toward just what goal is still unclear to me. I'm supposed to get a better picture tonight.

It was only on this morning's news that I heard of the central issue that's been keeping everyone up in arms. Friday evening's television news carried an army approved report on an army unit that dresses up in "Arab" clothing and loiters, or something like that, in refugee camps, follows suspected "terrorists" until they have a chance to spring on them and catch them. Our final action last year in Tulkarem was related to one of these units. It was clear that this was in general a secretive unit, but at least to my mind the sort of secret that was also common knowledge. It's generally understood that Israel, like probably everyone else, has unconventional units for the performance of unconventional tasks.

Thus I was personally surprised by the intensity of the public response against the uncovering of these units — did people really think they were that carefully kept secrets? So today was a day of close to public furor over the uncovering, with many people claiming that the well being of the soldiers in these units was jeopardized by making them public. Amid all the public furor (or support for the uncovering, invariably for the reason that it supposedly helps to frighten prospective "terrorists" from taking action if they have some picture of what's waiting for them) almost nobody is questioning whether these special units are justified, or whether the sort of activities they're involved in really further the cause of bringing quiet to the territories. The reigning "liberal" position seems to be that the uncovering was a positive move since it doesn't really endanger anyone, while on the other hand it shows the Palestinians that Israel's "special" actions aren't directed at the general population but only at particular persons identified as hostile and dangerous. For me, this only avoids the issue of whether units of this sort and the actions they're involved in are really in Israel's best interests. In

other words, for me this is still a political question, and I have grave doubts about whether units of this sort have any chance of furthering peace.

Tuesday, June 25, 15:00

I'm somewhat rested after a nap of about an hour which followed lunch and a shower after returning from six hours of a vehicle patrol throughout the area from 06:00 until 12:00 this morning. Though there's a good deal of scenery in our area, and this morning wasn't as hot as the last couple of mornings, I returned very tired. My being tired is definitely the result of a good deal of travelling but six hours of a patrol probably yields a net time of less than three hours really on so road, so that's not my only reason for being tired. Another major reason is my activities of last night — more on that later.

During my patrol, for the first time since the start of these miluim, I got to see all of the territory we're responsible for. When I first arrived here two weeks ago via windy and hilly roads it was night and we had the feeling of having landed in the middle of nowhere, yet also facing the entrance to a rather large house at the eastern edge of the village we're in — Al Jania. This is, from what I've seen, a slightly larger, but on the whole less interesting, village than 'Ein 'Arich. But actually what I think makes it less interesting from my perspective is the fact that we don't really have any spot from which we can get much of a view of the village. We're not even expected to take much interest in what happens here. This is home base, and from here we go out to our various tasks. It's of course simply a function of time and the opportunity to get to know the area that makes me feel almost embarrassed about feeling disoriented when we first arrived. On the other hand, during "normal" miluim we're stationed on a border and no matter how long the road to our outpost, it's very clear from which direction we came, and where the border is. Here, less than half an hour's drive either from Jerusalem or from Tel Aviv, the area all around us, in whatever direction we turn, is considered hostile territory and we have no way of knowing from which direction trouble might surprise us.

And that pretty much describes the situation while on patrol. Instead of patrolling the borders we're simply showing our presence, on the whole expecting and hoping that nothing is going to happen to disturb the tranquil and quiet atmosphere, but trained to take action if the situation merits it. On the whole, however, we've learned that "trouble" is on the whole a very temporary, and subjective condition. We for instance receive reports of rock throwing that have to be checked out, and invariably when we get to the scene of the "crime" all is quiet. We've learned that in situations such as this it's best to simply leave well enough alone, and admittedly most of us aren't looking for "action" and would prefer finishing our shift without having anything extraordinary happen.

So today we patrolled, visiting the various outposts in our area, and driving through the villages on the route. At one point we met a Jewish settler who told us that he'd just removed a fake bomb from the road and that we should do something about it. Of course if what he found in the road looked enough like a bomb (or a package with a bomb in it) then it would be highly foolish of him to take his chances and remove it from the road. If it was obviously fake, then it wasn't anything to get excited about, and not worth our dealing with. We reported what he told us, and continued. Had anything really happened that should be called trouble or a disturbance? (And perhaps even — was this Jewish settler telling us the truth, or perhaps he'd only seen a sack of straw which had fallen on the road and let his imagination take free flight.) There really isn't any way for us to know. Yet this "incident" will probably be listed in a statistical summary of the month's activities and will help someone prove that the Intifada is still going strong while someone else will use these same statistics to show that it's petered out.

Last night we met a car whose driver told us that its broken side window had been broken perhaps ten minutes earlier by a rock thrown near one of the villages in our area. The window was most definitely broken, and the village was already most definitely quiet.

For the past couple of nights there have been greater expectations of disturbances because this has been the Moslem holiday of the sacrifice. Holidays, being times of greater religious and national identification than regular times, are expected to bring more disturbances. I don't know whether this expectation can actually be proven by statistics, and it seems to me that doing so is an impossibility since the army takes certain measures to keep the quiet which may actually in the long run cause more disturbances which remain connected statistically to the holiday.

And that brings me to my activities of last night. Last night I joined our second in command as a sort of back up unit for a group of enlisted soldiers who entered the most hostile village in our area. Just what they were supposed to do is beyond me, since what they hoped to do was catch suspects, and they hoped to catch them when they would start to run from us. This suggests, of course, that without us there things would be quiet and that we're thus perhaps working against our own best interests, but these are of course political considerations, and the army isn't political. Whatever, as they approached the village they spotted a group of males running from them and called on us to try and catch them. They identified the house they thought they'd taken refuge in and we entered the village, found the house, and entered it as well. To nobody's surprise, we found nothing. Three women were watching television (I think it was Israeli TV) in the house, and having little choice in the matter, they let us look around.

It was a large and richly, and rather modernly, furnished house—at least what I saw of it. In general the village seemed to be well off. Most of the houses I saw were fairly large, seemed finished, and they had gardens and gates around them. Then again, since it was night, perhaps I got a wrong impression. One of the things I definitely did notice was that all the walls were covered by slogans that hadn't been erased or painted over. The army enters other villages in the area and commands the residents to erase the wall slogans, but this particular village, Na'ameh, is too hostile to be bothered with, especially since it's not on a main road.

The enlisted soldiers we were backing up succeeded in catching one of the group they chased. Though this particular 20 year old wasn't on the wanted list (more on that later) we were told that he should be brought back to the area headquarters for questioning (at the least). We crammed him into our jeep to which we also crammed two of the kids from the unit we were backing up. It was crowded, and he was uncomfortable and frightened (and his hands were tied behind his back) but his short ride with us was uneventful. On the other hand, when we returned to the main road we met up with one of our patrols which had caught someone who turned out to be on the wanted list. Apparently their suspect, seeing that Israeli soldiers were approaching the village (though they tried to do this quietly and without being seen) decided to get away, and was caught by the patrol which had set up a roadblock. Numerous different forces met up on the main road, many of them excited and proud over having caught a suspect. When he (also handcuffed behind his back) was moved from one vehicle to another, one member of our plugh took the opportunity to give him a healthy punch in his stomach. I wasn't watching at the time, but it was apparently done purposefully while our second in command wasn't watching. In a couple of seconds everything was over, and most of the people standing around enjoyed the brief show. Our second in command was definitely mad when he found out what happened, and bawled out the puncher, but there was little else he could do, and I think that he understood this. I would have found it hard to explain to him why I wasn't as upset as he was over what happened, but we didn't talk. I think he was too upset. After all, I hold no illusions that there is such a thing as an enlightened occupation and am convinced that even the most civilized occupier will ultimately deteriorate into the use of brute force in order to maintain power. So though I might hope that our behavior be beyond reproach I don't really have any expectations that it will be. And this is all the more the case for young kids who've grown up with the occupation, and the use of force that it supposedly justifies, as a fact of life. (On the other hand, the LAPD seem capable of being much more brutal than us.)

The wanted list for the territories is most probably a military secret. For the entire area of the west bank, a population of let's say 700,000 people, there's a wanted list of approximately 800. Since all of these are males, and almost all between the ages of 16 and 50 (this is conjecture on my part, but rather logical conjecture) the correct percentage isn't worked out by figuring out 800 out of 700,000, but 800 out of perhaps a quarter of that — 175,000 (and even this seems a bit large). That gives a figure of about one in every 220 persons, or about one half of one percent of the population on the wanted list. It seems to me that one half of one percent of the adult male population is too large a number. It doesn't figure that that many people are suspected of "terrorist" activities or connections. And of course they're not. The list also includes people suspected of tax evasion, perhaps people who haven't paid traffic tickets and others of this sort, wanted for much more innocuous crimes than "terrorism". But we see any name and number on the list as a dangerous suspect, and somehow think that statistically, if we stop 220 people we'll find one on the list. The procedure is relatively simple. If we stop someone we forward his identity number to our plugh headquarters via our field radio and there we have a list

that checks out whether the person is listed or not.

Wednesday, June 26, 13:00

I'm very tired, and don't seem to be able to sleep, so perhaps it's just as well that I'm presently personing the field radio. I was starting to get used to the idea that not much happens even where I'm presently stationed (and of course I have no objection to that) but then things seem to have picked up a bit. Since my patrol of yesterday morning, that started at 06:00, I've slept about four hours, but that's not due solely to being busy. Somehow I've gotten out of synch and can't seem to sleep for more than two hours, after which I wake up and can't fall asleep again.

Monday was a day during which I didn't get around to writing — but not due to being busy, but because there was almost nothing to do and a number of us simply spent the day visiting — discussing the various topics that we always discuss, but doing so anyway. At one point I even took the part of Moti, my Chabbadnik compatriot of over ten years, and told him what he would say about each topic — and he agreed that I was right.

But things got a good deal more hectic, even though at the moment, in retrospect, perhaps there isn't that much to get excited about. I've been writing while personing the field radio, and during this time one of our patrols has had the job of accompanying U.N. trucks that are distributing food to some of the villages in the area. They reported being met by rocks and bottles in one village. They apparently warned the villagers that if things wouldn't quiet down the food wouldn't be distributed. Another patrol reported entering a village and finding there Palestinian flags (as in the past, the report was "PLO flags" and I made the correction) which they had taken down. But though these incidents suggest unrest, on the whole the day is going by quietly.

Still, last night things were hectic. At about 22:30 I was preparing to go to sleep for a full night's sleep after finishing a shift of three hours at the field radio, and participating in about an hour of exercises around the possibility of an attack of some sort in the area. We'd just finished our exercises when word came of a real attack — an incendiary device was blown up as a bus was passing (with little damage and no injuries) at a spot to the north of us — outside of our area of jurisdiction. We were called on to help out and drove north to join the forces blocking off the area, and searching for the perpetrators. Nobody found anything and at around 01:30 we received word we could return to our posts. When the jeep I was in returned to our outpost at around 03:00 we decided that instead of waking the people who were listed for the late patrol shift we'd simply continue until 06:00. So I crawled into bed exhausted and intending to sleep at 06:00 — and for some reason was awake by 08:30. Not what I'd intended. We haven't yet seen today's papers so we don't know just what it is that happened last night, but it was definitely more serious than sporadic stone throwing.

Wednesday, 19:00

I've been writing off and on throughout the afternoon, during and after my shift. The rest of the time has mostly been spent resting and visiting. At one point I was sitting with our second in command and he told me that he'd wanted to ask me what I'd thought about what happened Monday night — but had been too upset to ask. I told him that I'd thought that that was the case, and told him why I hadn't been surprised with what had happened. His politics seem to be decidedly middle of the road, meaning that it's hard for him to imagine a political solution that ensures Israel's security other than continuing to hold on to the territories. He thus wants to believe that an enlightened occupation is possible and is disappointed by behavior which I see as more or less inevitable.

Friday, June 28, 17:45

Almost two full days have elapsed since I last wrote, and a good deal that bears being written down has taken place. I've definitely been active, and even busy, for much of this time, but I've also caught some much needed sleep as well. In order that everything doesn't all get confused in a blur of fading memories before I can write things down, I've found that I've had to make a few notes to myself of what's transpired.

Friday, 19:15

I've been personing the field radio now for over an hour, but only now am I getting a chance to sit quietly and write. That's not because anything of particular import has been taking place but simply because numerous small tasks have kept me busy.

Wednesday evening I got very little writing done, even though I'd hoped to write what's so far the most interesting story of these miluim. Instead of writing I spent most of the evening visiting — even remembering old war stories — until about 22:00 at which time I caught about two hours of sleep before guarding from midnight until 03:00 and then returning to sleep for about five more hours of sleep. Much of my visiting was with Moti, the Chabbadnik member of our plugah. We talked about how miluim permits people an opportunity to present themselves differently than in their civilian lives. We've covered this same territory before but it's always interesting for us to wonder out loud if the people we're with during miluim are the same when they're in their homes and to picture to ourselves how they may be different when at home. And of course this change of character being relative to the different surroundings in which we find ourselves is true about ourselves as well. I suppose that it's a sign of how close we've grown over the years that we were able not only to analyse the subject psychologically and sociologically, but also quite personally. As a sort of case in point, a bit later in the evening a group of us, mostly vatikim of the plugah, sat around after supper and told "war" stories from our past. I think that most people who know me in civilian life would be surprised to see me taking an active part in a conversation such as this.

Thursday morning trucks from the U.N. were once again going to distribute food (I think it's mostly, if not solely, sacks of flour) in our area, this time in the most hostile village in our area. We were thus ordered to prepare a rather large unit that would accompany the trucks, though just why this is needed is a good question. Our second in command claims that if we don't accompany the trucks the various "terrorist" organizations commandeer them and take the goods for their own interests. Thus we have to be there to see to it that the villagers get their flour. Once again, enlightened occupation. I think the reason is much simpler. We can't stop the U.N. from distributing food, but we can still show who's in charge. In order to get their flour from the U.N. the villagers have to recognize that we're in charge. The village doesn't particularly like us (surprise?) and met us with stones (thrown solely by kids of around ten or twelve years old). The civil administration which we're accompanying which in turn is accompanying the U.N. warns the village that if they don't stop throwing stones they won't get their food — even though the food isn't from us.

In the end this was a surprisingly uneventful activity. The villagers apparently chose not to come to where the trucks were to get the flour, and after a wait of almost an hour everyone turned around and left. We met with numerous stones (and got a flat in our jeep when we drove over a nail elegantly placed for us to drive over when we swerved a bit off the road in order to avoid a small roadblock of rocks on the road itself).

I'm beginning to notice that quite a number of the people I'm here with are becoming irritated. They're disappointed that things are as quiet as they are and want more action.

Upon returning from my leave on Sunday I tried to organize tiyulim to what seemed like the most interesting spots in our area. I readily got our second in command interested but it took us a while to find the proper time. Yesterday, from noon until about 16:00 the chance presented itself for us to hike through the village of 'Ein Kinyah and visit the springs in the area, and then to get to a few other impressive and attractive nearby spots before reaching a main road where we waited to be picked up and brought back to our outpost. Of course when in miluim, and especially in the territories, a simple tiyul isn't really possible. We have to be in uniform, and with our rifles, and we have to have a field radio with us so that we can be reached if needed. It's also preferable for one of us, usually the medic, to have his battle belt with him. In other words, a rather simple tiyul can become quite an operation. Unless we look at things from an opposite point of view. As part of our job here we're supposed to send out foot patrols. What can be easier than to send out a foot patrol to an area where it can not only fulfill its central function, but also enjoy the scenery? Thus five of us went out on a patrol which was at the same time (and purposefully so) a pleasant nature hike. Under the circumstances I can't complain.

And now it's after 22:00. I've finished my shift of, this time, four hours. Our Shabbat meal started while I was still on my shift. I don't really mind missing the kiddush and the like, particularly because

unlike the sort of Kabbalat Shabbat I can identify with, in the army I too often have to hear religious extremist nationalist views expressed as though they're the real normative Judaism. Anyway, when I was replaced on my watch and got to the meal I asked whether there had been a sermon and was told that this time there hadn't been. I asked what this week's parasha was and was told it was Balak. The person I was sitting next to knows that I have a good grounding in Jewish source material and he only slightly laughingly invited me to give a sermon. I told him that there was an obvious connection between this week's parasha and our miluim in the territories that was simply waiting to be expressed in a Kabbalat Shabbat sermon: In the parasha Bil'am is asked to curse Israel and in the end says words of blessing. In the same way, 24 years ago everybody thought that getting the territories was a blessing, and now we understand how much of a curse they really are for us. I didn't make these observations more public than to the people sitting closest to me.

Shabbat, June 29, 11:15

The only Shabbat paper that we received here this week was the magazine section of a favorite paper of mine that a friend who returned from leave brought especially for me. After a full night of restful sleep I'm back at the field radio and for the past hour I've read the paper. And now I've got a chance to write a bit.

After a short nap Thursday afternoon we started preparations for a long and full night of "action". Much of the action that takes place here is cat and mouse and it's totally predictable that some action from the Palestinian side is going to elicit an opposite and disproportionate reaction from us. The fact that the reverse is also the case — that the Palestinians respond to things that we do (whether equally or disproportionately isn't the question at the moment) isn't well understood by the military mentality. Israel and the army always seem to see themselves as the party being attacked and having to respond, which is, of course also the way the other side sees things.

About two weeks ago arsonists set fire to the fields of a moshav very near the green line. Footprints apparently led to two villages just over the line, Nil'een and Al-Media. Thursday night "action" was taken. At about 4:00 early Friday morning the Border Patrol, along with the army, entered these two villages, declared curfew, and called on all the males between the ages of 15 and 35 to come to central spots in the villages for questioning. The Border Patrol was responsible for the work inside the villages — rounding up those who didn't come of their own volition, and questioning. We were responsible for roadblocks and catching people trying to run away — in this case almost nobody. Another unit was kept occupied with lookouts on the villages, and of course we were also on call if anything problematic were to develop. Altogether about 100 soldiers and policemen were involved. Though our unit was responsible for roadblocks, our plugah commander had the job of patrolling back and forth between the villages, and since I'm on his jeep (and was one of the few medics in the whole operation) I was on the roads almost all the time.

At about midnight all the forces involved in this action gathered at one of the settlements just inside the green line to receive a briefing. It was then that I heard the catchy phrase "motivational talks". In other words, in addition to questioning, the men in these villages also get to hear a sort of sermon in which I can guess that what they're told is that if they behave properly and don't make trouble, Israel won't have to enter their village and round them up.

To the dismay of a number of members of our plugah, everything went quietly. Travelling back and forth I found that my main task was trying to keep my eyes open, at which I was far from successful. And this gives an interesting perspective on the whole operation. From the personal angle of the ordinary soldier, this action wasn't much of a success. I returned exhausted, others were hungry and tired, and still others were upset because they didn't have anything to do during the action that "really" merited their being there. It really doesn't matter to these soldiers that all the males of two villages were rounded up at 04:00 in the morning and herded together until at least 10:00. That's their problem. Just as it's their problem that the entire village was awakened before dawn, and was essentially occupied for about six hours. In the briefing we were told that it was hoped that everything would go quickly so that the prayers at the mosques would take place at the regular time. In other words, somebody still believes in an enlightened occupation.

Being on a jeep that went back and forth between the two villages I was able to see the disturbing sight of all the males being rounded up. I've got the uncomfortable feeling that I'm one of the few

people who seeing this would feel much discomfort. I have no idea whether this action was considered a success from the perspective of intelligence — whether in questioning something significant was discovered that wasn't known previously. And then again, perhaps that wasn't really the objective. Perhaps the central objective was only to remind everybody who's in charge.

Upon returning I ate and showered and slept, and then at around 14:00 I left for another patrol/hike to another nice spot. This was a shorter tiyul, and in the end we got to another outpost from where I was able to call Tzippi and we wished each other Shabbat Shalom. Since then things have been quiet and relaxed, and though it would be incomparably better to be home, this has been a relaxing Shabbat. And chances are good that things won't stay this way throughout next week.

Sunday, June 30, 21:30

Things have levelled off a bit, meaning that beside the one big story which I've yet to relate, I'm caught up with all I've wanted to write about and nothing earth shattering has happened that bears reporting. Last night I personed the field radio from midnight until 04:00, and then I took the opportunity to start reading a book, which I've been enjoying so much that I've continued reading it during my free time today as well.

On the other hand, I've had a change of venue which merits being reported. Since this morning I'm now at a the western most outpost of our plugah, in the village of Kharbata — about five kilometers west of Al Jania where I was this past week, and about another five kilometers from the green line. The work here is more or less the same as that in Al Jania, in some ways a bit busier, but on the other hand, because this isn't the center of our plugah's activities, less intense. One important difference is that we've got plumbing, and since there's nothing that says that a month of miluim has to transpire without regular toilets, that's a positive change.

The reason I was transferred to this spot is because the work load is rather intense — around eleven hours of being busy in some way each day (as opposed to perhaps nine at the most where I was last week), and the person who acted as work manager until now was released today and somebody responsible was needed to replace him. Since this person was also a medic and the outpost can't be left without a medic, it made sense for me to get the job. Though I'm not looking forward to being busier than I've been until now (and making up the work list will take time from reading or writing) there's something positive in breaking my month up by being in a number of different places and being with a number of different people. This definitely makes the time go by faster.

Monday, July 1, 05:30

It's true that nothing earth shattering has happened of late, but I can no longer write that all is quiet. Last night, at about 22:00, I had finished writing and had crawled into bed, reading a bit before going to sleep. I had to be up at 04:00 for guard duty. All of a sudden word came of some kind of explosion at the easternmost area of our responsibility. We were ordered to set up a roadblock for cars going west and we quickly got dressed and out to the road. Though I was among the first people to the road, I wasn't needed for the roadblock and after about twenty minutes I was able to return to my tent and get some sleep — but this time with my clothes on. I was still able to sleep, though less comfortably so. Those who stayed at the roadblock didn't return until after 00:30, meaning that they lost out on a couple of hours of sleep. The rest of the night was quiet, and now it's light out and I can write a bit before finishing my shift.

The main difference between Kharbata and where I'd been until now is that this outpost is attached to a small regional branch of the civil administration, and every day people line up to receive various permits from the administration, and on various days women and children come to a doctor who visits here. This gives those of us here one additional task — guarding the entrance to the administration and electronically frisking all those who enter (women are checked by a woman soldier who works here almost every day). I haven't yet had the pleasure of having this task, and I'm not looking forward to it. I can decide not to give it to myself and probably nobody will complain, though I'm not sure that's very fair. What's more, if I've already decided to serve in the territories, what difference does it make what jobs I perform here — they're all dirty work, and frisking someone coming here to get a work permit, or something similar, isn't necessarily dirtier than playing a

supporting role in helping round up all the males of a village. The fact that it's perhaps more distasteful because it involves personal contact is actually rather unconvincing when I think of it. A good argument can probably be made to show that one to one contact is much more "humane" than the mass and purposefully impersonal contact of rounding up all the males of a village.

Monday, 15:30

I'm back on watch and have more or less finished tonight's and tomorrow's work arrangements. Tomorrow is a bit easier to arrange than today's because people will be returning from leave, and although they'll be replaced by others taking leave, I'll still be able to get a few hours work out of those taking leave, and that lessens the general load a bit.

From what I've been able to make out, yesterday evening's explosion wasn't an explosion at all. Someone, probably a Jewish settler in the area, saw something on the road that looked like an explosive device, and his/her report set off the entire area. But of course if I say that that's nothing to get excited about, then I can probably be rightly accused of not taking all necessary precautions.

This morning I went out on an early morning tiyul a bit to the west of our outpost. I prefer walking patrols to vehicular ones (and I seem to be in a minority about that) but the area of this morning's patrol was on the whole not very interesting. On the other hand, it was nice to be out and around.

Kharbata may be a very interesting village, but there isn't much of interest from the vantage point we have here. The mosque, which we face, has loudspeakers like all the other mosques we've seen here, but they don't work, and instead the mu'azin stands on the porch, cups his hands, and cries out whatever he has to say — just as this was done for generation upon generation.

Today's most interesting event was spending an hour ushering villagers into the civil administration. I'd promised myself that I'd avoid this task, but when one of us hadn't yet arrived this morning I took responsibility on my own shoulders and replaced him until his arrival an hour late. While another member of our plugah checked people one at a time with a metal detector, I guarded him. If these bodily checks are necessary, then I can also admit that they're also on the whole innocuous. Most of the people visiting the administration are familiar with the procedure and don't seem to get excited by it. It's worth noting that whenever we go to a concert or some other public event our bags are always checked, so to a certain extent Israelis have a reason not to see this procedure as anything particularly humiliating.

During my hour shift I noticed that one of the people entering had on a particularly interesting T-shirt. The T-shirt was black and green with a large "RISE" written on it. Above that was written something like "Arab land is ours", and at the sides of the front were two more slogans proclaiming the greatness of Arab civilization (all of this in English). (I almost always have some paper in my pocket with which to write down interesting things that I notice, but somehow this time I didn't, and thus I don't remember the exact wording.) But what was most interesting about the T-shirt was that it was more a sort of "designer" shirt than a T-shirt with a slogan, and anybody looking at it would have no reason to think that it or its wearer were making a political statement. I'd even venture the guess that the wearer didn't know what it said, and it was much more the sort of shirt one buys in a ritzy store than via a mail order political group. Even if the bearer did know what the shirt said it's hard to make a political statement if nobody knows that a statement is being made, and today, when all T-shirts seem to have some sort of slogan on them (usually something like "Sports Be in It" or something else devoid of any obvious meaning) nobody seems to read T-shirts.

Tuesday, July 2, 16:30

I'm on what has become my regular afternoon shift. This is a time when I can prepare the next day's work list, and also do a lot of reading. I've got very little to write at the moment, but since the list is finished and I also finished the book I was reading, I've got some time to write. About all there is to write at the moment is that another uneventful day has gone by. At present I'm much more preoccupied with seeing to it that the daily work load is fairly allocated than I am with the nature of the occupation — one more example of the banality of the occupation.

Wednesday, July 3, 07:45

It's a rather overcast and even cool morning, making it a comfortable time for a foot patrol. About an hour and a half ago I went out with four others from where we're stationed, Kharbata, until Dir Kadis, a village about three kilometers east of us. We have a similar patrol each morning and every day toward evening as well. Each time we try and vary our route a bit, though there seems to be a limit to the number of possible routes. Whereas yesterday evening we walked via the terraces, today we walked on the road. Since a major purpose of a patrol such as this is to show our presence, in a way it also makes sense for us to stop an occasional car and ask for identification and the like. At 07:00 in the morning one can be pretty sure that cars on the road are on their way to work, but that doesn't really matter because the purpose of stopping them isn't to find someone on the wanted list, but only to show who's in charge.

One this patrol we stopped one car — probably because it was new and shiny. Why do I write that? I've got a rather deep seated feeling that four Arab youth in a snazzy car register as more of a threat to the Israeli psyche than older people in a less impressive car. I was a bit surprised when after we'd checked this car the officer I was with took our main interrogator aside and told him that he could be much more civil and humane in his behavior while making the check. Since I find any check to be humiliating I don't see what should be improved, short of not making a check at all, so that it will be less so. Perhaps everything depends on tone of voice, perhaps on the extent of the search. This particular officer thought it very important that we perform our jobs as fully and as professionally as possible so that the villagers would know who's in charge. Yet somehow this also bothered him and he was uncomfortable with too clear a show of strength. Though I can look upon his dilemma from the outside with condescension, I can actually understand the dilemma he was faced with very well. Most people who aren't gung ho about the occupation have to continually question themselves about where they draw the line about their participation. Often it's less important just where the line is drawn, which can be rather arbitrary, than the fact that someone is deciding to draw one.

While on our patrol we were passed by numerous settlers in their cars on their way to work. It's interesting to note that they're distinctly different from those in the area where I was previously stationed, even though the distance between the two areas is only a few kilometers. The settlements I was near last week were rather small and religious, and affiliated with Gush Emunim. Even from very limited contact with the settlers one got the impression of their being highly ideologically motivated. (From hearing them on the walkie-talkie that connects between the settlements which we're also tuned in to I also noticed a good percentage of English speaking accents.) The settlements farther west (very close to the green line) are on the whole non-religious and seem to be in the territories mostly because they can enjoy large homes at cut-rate prices. This may actually be the reason that they can afford expensive cars — they definitely seem well off and comfortable from what I've seen of them.

Thursday, July 4, 09:00

This is turning out to be a rather good time to write, meaning perhaps that I'm pretty bored at the moment sitting on watch and I don't have anything much of interest with me to read. Last night a group from our platoon accompanied a couple of officers from the civil administration when they went to a nearby village to visit a few tax evaders. The procedure is that they get to the houses, knock on the doors, demand their identification cards (giving a temporary card instead) and then the person with the temporary card has to show up at the civil administration and pay his taxes in order to get his ID back. Not having an ID card in the territories is a very unsavory position to be in. This operation went by quite uneventfully and I might not have been aware of it at all had I not been on guard duty at the time, listening in on the reports via the field radio.

About the only interesting thing I've been doing here has been our foot patrols, and they aren't always all that interesting. Still, I've been listing myself rather consistently for these patrols. This morning, like yesterday morning, we walked on the road, but yesterday early evening we climbed over hill and dale on our way to Dir Kadis finding numerous "archaeological sites" — water holes, caves, olive presses and the like as we walked. This generated a bit of interest for the extent of this patrol, but as far as archeological sites go, these were highly uninteresting.

Though I've already had a full week of leave, I had no complaints when my plugah commander told me that he wanted to send me home for a few more days. He did this mostly because I have a certain degree of status in the plugah due mostly to my age and the fact that I still perform every task that I'm called upon to perform. And if he wanted to send me home for an additional leave, I was all for it.

Still, even though beggars can't be choosers, I wanted to be home for school yesterday because it was the last day of classes and we wanted to celebrate together — and among other things part both from me and from the teacher of this year, since both of us won't be with the kvutza next year. Actually, there were numerous times during this month when it would have been nice for me to have been home. There were numerous festivities which I'm sorry I missed, and I would have liked to have gotten to Jerusalem for the Tikkun conference, but no matter when I have a month of miluim there are always things that I'm going to be missing out on, and that's something that one simply learns to live with.

I'd told Tzippi on the phone that I'd almost positively be home on Friday, and that I wanted to get to the kvutza that morning. I didn't tell her that chances were very good that I'd be leaving my outpost Thursday afternoon — even though this was fairly definite I didn't want to generate expectations that in the end wouldn't be met. But by Wednesday night everything was more or less set, and most of my day Thursday was spent waiting for another medic from our plugah to be brought to my outpost so that I could be off. I was replaced at around 14:30, and at that time someone with a car from another outpost was passing on his way to Tel Aviv and I had the luck to catch an immediate ride.

The ride I caught was with a particularly colorful member of our plugah — a kid of around 25 with a sharp sense of humor, an excellent ear for the way people talk, a wonderful memory, and an inquisitive intelligence. On the other hand, he looks like the fat boy on the block whom everybody made fun of, and it's clear that for him being in infantry was an important challenge, and an achievement he's proud of. Since this kid is almost never without a joke he quickly endeared himself to the plugah, even though he's ready to joke about anything, and is most happy when the subject is something offensive to someone else. He also is a rightist of almost Kahanistic proportions, though it's very hard to tell whether these are his real political beliefs — he's too smart for them, he takes a certain pleasure out of sounding extreme, and he knows how to make himself sound less like a real person than like a stereotype.

Anyway, the previous night he'd been among the soldiers going with the civil authority people to deal with the tax evaders, and while on the way to Tel Aviv I asked him how things had gone that night. He told me that he hadn't been there — that he'd refused to take part in an action such as this. Knowing that something was coming, I waited for the punch line: For reasons of conscience he refuses to have anything to do with income taxes. I certainly had to give him credit for knowing who to tell that one to.

Getting home for the last day of school was definitely something I wanted to do. It was important for me to see the kids again, and also to get a couple of very pleasant gifts from them — a booklet with photographs of each of the kids with a sentence from each describing something they enjoyed from my work with them and also a rendition of me by each of them, and a T-shirt covered with drawings by each of the kids. During the day I also spread out a large sheet of paper on a table and asked each of the kids to draw something and sign it, and we made the entire sheet into a large thank you card for my plugah commander, thanking him for letting me get home for the last day of school.

Sitting at home is perhaps the easiest time for me to try and write about the most interesting episode of these miluim. Quite a while ago I noted that I've got an additional story to write, but I've been putting off doing so. The story doesn't involve me personally, and it doesn't particularly matter where I fit it in to this journal.

It was on the evening of Tuesday, June 25 that our g'dud commander visited us. That day had been a long one for me, and it continued late into the night and until 6:00 the next morning so it wasn't surprising that I didn't get around to writing this story then. Our plugah is separated from the rest of our g'dud which is serving in the area of Hebron, and we thus have only limited contact with Khanan, the g'dud commander. Khanan came along with his two drivers, both of whom used to be

sergeants in our plugah. (Since Khanan used to be our plugah commander it sort of made sense for him to give this job to two people whom he'd worked with before who were ready to move onto less physically trying jobs. Both of them are perhaps three years younger than I am, making them old enough to move onto jobs such as this.) While our plugah commander was speaking with Khanan, those of us still left of the vatikim of our plugah sat down with his drivers for a cup of coffee and to hear from them what things were like where they were stationed. It was then that Avi told his story.

Avi is a gruff and bossy person for whom the basic way of solving a problem is to use more and more strength. This is so whether the problem is replacing a flat tire, waking someone for guard duty, or dispersing a demonstration. It's not a question of politics but of character. On the other hand, he's always willing to do more than his share of the work, and somehow this characteristic overshadows his less positive qualities. We've always been proper toward each other, each giving the other the respect he deserves but without ever being friends or developing much closeness. We really have close to nothing in common, and frankly, I've never liked the guy, but even in cases such as this there's an undeniable closeness that results from being together many years in the same plugah.

Avi told us that during one of the first days of our month of miluim he was driving with the g'dud's second in command on the main road behind an army truck and a local car with a family inside when a large rock was thrown at the road, missing the truck and injuring the Arab family. He and the g'dud's second in command quickly got out of their jeep and ran after the rock thrower whom they clearly identified. They pursued him and yelled after him to stop, which he didn't. They shot bullets in the air, and this didn't stop him either. Both Avi and the second in command had telescopic sights on their rifles, and when Avi reported to the second in command that he had the rock thrower's leg in his sights, he got permission to shoot. He hit him in the leg, and the rock thrower fell. When they caught up with him they found only a small entrance wound, but the rock thrower was in very bad shape. They rushed him to a nearby Arab hospital and there the doctors refused to operate on him, saying there was little chance of saving him. Avi claims that the doctors preferred he die of injuries inflicted by the Israeli army than on an Arab hospital operating table. A short while later, he was dead. The bullet had entered his leg and spun up into his stomach, causing extensive internal damage that apparently brought with it massive blood loss. (As a medic I know that this is very possible. What's more, the bullets we use, an American design, are known for never exiting a body on a straight line from where they enter. The U.S. army has been known to take pride in these maiming bullets since they make the care for the injured in the field of battle much more complicated and that slows down the enemy's fighting.)

When Avi told us his story he emphasized that everything that they'd done had been according to prescribed and approved army procedure, and that although an inquest is unavoidable, so far he'd been commended by everyone who'd questioned him. For those of us listening, our first question was obvious and unavoidable — how could Avi shoot at him at all. Our orders are very unambiguous — if there's no longer any clear and present danger, meaning that if a stone thrower is already running away — there's no permission whatsoever to shoot. Avi explained to us that the standing orders of the general area that the rest of the g'dud is located in are different from those that we have. Whereas we have no permission to shoot, Avi claimed that under the circumstances he was faced with — a positively identified rock thrower (who had caused damage), cries for him to stop, a rifle with telescopic sights — he was actually fulfilling his orders by shooting.

The end result, of course is that someone has been killed. According to Avi's story, the family of the killed rock thrower acknowledged that this was a problematic kid (of around twenty) who was a known troublemaker, and they don't want to make an issue out of this. What's more, the rock thrown caused damage to an Arab family (that received medical treatment from the army), and for this reason the various Arab authorities in the area probably won't want to make an issue out of the incident. Thus, though everything isn't cut and dried and over with, Avi is fairly confident that nothing will happen to him.

To me, all this sounds a bit too blameless and clean cut, especially coming from someone whom I can't recall ever acknowledging any weakness, or admitting to a mistake. Though I have limited trust in the Israeli army's pursuit of the truth, too much sounds fishy in this case, particularly the idea that one can shoot at a fleeing stone thrower. (I was taken aback when at our first briefing I heard about the new tactics to catch stone throwers, but even in cases such as those the activity is planned and limited; it isn't open hunting season.)

But something else is at work here, and though it may not influence me as much as it influences others that I'm with, it takes its toll on me well. Avi is a former member of my platoon with whom I've served for many years, including during very trying times in Lebanon. We have a sort of instant identification with him and the desire to defend him is almost a reflex. If things ultimately come down to which side you're on, the pressure to be on the side of your buddy is immense. And of course all this helps to show even more clearly why it's so difficult for me to refuse to serve in the territories.

Monday, July 8, 07:30

Early this morning I went out on still another foot patrol, though this time it was somewhat different than the norm. Five of us got up at 03:30 and were driven to Dir Kadis before dawn. There we wandered around the village, making our presence known to whoever was awake at the time (and to the dogs, who judging by their barking definitely were aware we were there). The basic idea behind being in the village at dawn is no different than that behind almost all the rest of our actions here. We're the physical expression of the Israeli occupation, and we always have to find new or different ways of making our presence felt. There are those of us who think that we're not really performing our job when we wander through a village without reacting to the slogans painted on the walls or to the Palestinian flags hanging from the electricity cables. One of these is Oren, the officer I'm normally with on these patrols. He's also a kibbutznik, and frequently emphasizes that his political opinions aren't that different from mine (though we both agree that I'm more extreme). But he argues, as is all too often argued, that once we're here political considerations have to be put aside and we have to do our job as best as it can be done. This is the reason I was surprised that last week he was displeased with the way that one of us on a patrol with him checked a car. Oren thought the interrogating was too gruff and that it was humiliating to check under the seats of the car. Though I understand his approach, one can easily argue that this is the necessary means of performing our job.

Both Oren and I (and probably many others) have stories about people we've stopped without their ID cards whom it was obvious weren't suspect in any way (though just why this is obvious is an interesting question) whom we could have brought to the authorities. We knew, however, that this would be a long and probably uncomfortable process, and if it can be avoided, we're doing a service to the person we've stopped. Unless, of course, we view things from a slightly different perspective — such as why we're here at all, and what right we have to interfere in these people's lives. It's forbidden, and inadvisable, for instance, for these people to go outside of their houses without their ID cards, whereas I can think of numerous times when I'm not only out of my apartment but even off the kibbutz without any identification.

During yesterday's evening patrol one of our group noticed two men inside the gate of the yard of a house, and for some reason decided that they were suspicious. He had no qualms about demanding to see their ID cards though there was no tangible reason to suspect them. On the other hand, if I call this harassment, I'll coolly be told that this is no more than making our presence felt.

So this morning's patrol with Oren had a distinct ambivalence to it. On the one hand, we made no qualms about being in the village at dawn — that was the entire purpose. But when we checked the ID of the few people we met during the patrol it was clear that we were only going through the motions, and we tried to be as civil as possible. I suppose that I'd prefer some stranger to be civil to me if he stopped me when I left my apartment in the morning and demanded to see my ID, though I can't say that I'd particularly enjoy being stopped in the first place. Perhaps in this particular case "making our presence felt" should have meant making lots of noise (and waking the people in the village) though most of the people I'm with would probably admit that that goes over the line into harassment.

We left the village before it really started to wake up, but it was still interesting to see the beginnings of that process — seeing the first signs of morning as people leave their homes, and to wander around the village not really knowing where you are, but with the light of dawn getting your bearings.

Monday, 15:00

I've rather consistently been spending most of my guarding hours at the same spot — on top of the civil administration building. Since close to nothing happens, and there's very little to see, and

hardly anything to look out on for that matter, I'm able to do a lot of reading, though I also take this time to prepare the next day's work schedule. There isn't much that merits being written about. I returned to this post rather early yesterday morning, having caught a ride from very close to home with someone else from the plugah.

What there is here to see is mostly the people coming to the civil administration. This is another aspect of the Israeli occupation which is somehow different from the military show of force that we represent. The civil administration (which for some reason I don't understand is almost totally military) is responsible for issuing the various permits necessary for regular day to day life to go on in the territories.

Tuesday, July 9, 08:30

I didn't get around to finishing those thoughts of yesterday, but seeing as how once again this morning I'm again in the same spot, there's little reason to think that much should be different now that would prevent me from continuing them where I left off.

Except that there is something different. Today is the 9th of the month, meaning that it's an anniversary of the Intifada — it's now forty four months old. Apparently each month is commemorated by a strike. I don't know how extensive, or effective, this strike is, but outside the civil administration the line is much longer, and much more unruly, than normal. This is probably because people aren't going to work today, and if they're going to have the day free, then it makes sense for them to try and get some necessary paper work taken care of.

Tuesday, 11:15

Expectations are high today for more incidents than is normal, and our vehicular patrol has already had to check out a number of reports of nails on the road. Last night was also a night of somewhat intensified action, though for me all it meant was waking up a couple of times during the night before my shift to make some changes in the guarding schedule. In Gaza the last few days have seen a number of violent incidents, but although this can suggest that the same may be about to happen here, so far the relative quiet is still being kept.

I was on guard duty during last night's action — the entering of one of the villages in the area with the hope of catching someone in his home, and I listened in on the field radio although there wasn't much to hear. After this unsuccessful mission, around dawn, the action was capped off by the rather customary addition of slogan erasing. Listening in on the field radio I could distinctly hear the disappointment in the voices of some of those taking part. As much as they're happy to be finishing up here, they're also sorry that there hasn't been more "action" during this month.

But anyway, back to the civil administration. Though this is the formal representative of Israeli authority in the territories (as we, I guess are the representatives of Israeli "power") it is also the basis for whatever non-military, or non-violent Israeli-Palestinian interaction there is. Whereas it makes sense to find in this interaction an expression of occupier and occupied, of powerful versus powerless, informal relationships develop which though they may spring from this base, seem to go beyond it. Thus there are numerous times when I've noticed the enlisted soldiers working at the administration conversing genially with the Palestinian applicants. This is in part due to the fact that these soldiers know conversational Arabic (it seems to me that on the whole they don't know it from their homes) but this is only the starting point. Being in daily contact with the people here, seeing them as individuals through the fact that they come here with particular applications and requests, it seems that basic human relations develop. An additional issue of status may also be involved here. On the whole, relations are established with the more respected and privileged people in the region. After all, it's with professionals or with business people that the civil administration has the most extensive contact. On the one hand, it's easiest to develop contact with these people who tend to be more worldly than the average villager, and on the other these people probably derive some status from being on friendly terms with the civil administration. In these ways both sides seem to have some interest in the development of at least minimal relationships.

Yesterday one of us reported an interesting incident. Among the people who work at this civil administration branch are a number of local Palestinian villagers, and also at least one Israeli Arab

from Jerusalem. This particular person seems quite well off — he drives a nice car and dresses rather expensively. He also speaks a very good Hebrew, and though I doubt that many Israelis would mistake him for being Jewish, tourists might not be able to tell the difference. My guess is that when this person is here he feels more Israeli than he does Palestinian — if for no other reason than that in that way he feels more powerful. Each person entering the civil administration must first pass a body check — usually administered with a metal detector (women are checked by a woman soldier). But when I write “each person” the intent is of course only to the Palestinians who come here. Jews with business here don’t have to wait in line — they enter freely, and of course without being checked.

But on with the story. When this person came yesterday he told the person at the gate that he works here and doesn’t have to go through the metal check. Our person here told him that he didn’t care who he was, everybody (meaning all Arabs) entering the gate had to be checked. An argument developed in which the Israeli Arab tried to show that he was different from the Palestinian villagers, but of course he didn’t have much of a chance of convincing a Jewish Israeli soldier with a rifle.

When I heard the story later in the day I remarked that he was an Israeli citizen and as such deserving of the same treatment as any other Israeli citizen (meaning Jewish, of course). I think I caused a bit of a double-take, but I doubt that I was very convincing.

Wednesday, July 10, 2030, at home

I’ve been home now for four hours — about two hours more than Tzippi who was away in Tel Aviv at summer refresher courses for music teachers. The last day of miluim is almost always the same no matter where we are, and today wasn’t an exception. Most of the day is spent waiting for our replacements to arrive, and then we return our equipment and wait around impatiently until everything is finished — meaning that the collective equipment is returned and/or accounted for, which is usually the most time consuming part of the whole day — before we can get our release slips and start out on the way home. Things went relatively quickly today, meaning that our replacements arrived quite early and the returning of our equipment went smoothly, and even the final waiting around wasn’t too long. What’s more, I even got a ride all the way home. But perhaps the central reason that things went so comfortably was because I didn’t permit myself to become particularly anxious. I even stayed behind for over an hour at the outpost I’d been stationed at when almost all the rest of those with me went to the central outpost of the plugah and start returning their equipment, and because of that I was able to relax and not feel rushed.

But I didn’t get around to writing, even though this was one of the things I most wanted to do. I was stationed at our lookout from 10:00 until after noon, and had time to write, but somehow, even though I was relatively calm and relaxed, I didn’t have the necessary calm to write as I’d hoped I would.

Yesterday late afternoon I went out on the last afternoon foot patrol from our outpost. We were driven to Dir Kadis, and then, before returning from there by foot, we wandered a bit around the village. I guess that I can say that this was a good time to be outside on our patrol, because much of the village was outside at the same time, enjoying the cool of the early evening and in general relaxing. Many kids were outside, some playing, some doing various chores, and many more simply walking from one place to another. One of the people I was with commented to me that there were many very attractive children in the village, and I told him that I’d been thinking the same thing. This was perhaps the first time that we’d really seen the people of the village and it was a bit strange to realize that I’d felt that I’d come to know the place without at all knowing the people. A few minutes after his first comment this same soldier shook his head sadly and remarked that it was unfortunate that these people have to live the way they do. He may have meant that these people deserved paved streets and nicer homes, but I don’t think that I was letting my own political analysis get in the way when I understood what he said as an expression of dismay at the continuation of the occupation. I heard in his remark a realization of the sadness and inhumanity of a situation in which these people could quite easily go on with their lives, living them as they choose, were it not for a group of soldiers who are constantly entering their village and in that way reminding them that in ways both big and small they have to live with the fact of the occupation.

I'd wanted to finish up all my writing yesterday, but discovered that I was very tired. I took a break to watch the news and when they were over we decided to go to sleep early — even though I slept well on my last night of miluim I've learned that I'm physically exhausted after a month like this, no matter how easily it passes, and I woke up this morning after ten hours of sleep.

Wednesday morning I was once again inside Dir Kadis for one last foot patrol, but this was only for a few minutes before we returned to the road and headed for our outpost at Kharbata. Walking with me and one other from our plugah were three of the new unit that was replacing us — we have the job of showing them the work and the territory before they take responsibility. And this became an interesting patrol because it was with interesting people. Our replacements stopped frequently along the way to view the gardens inside the village, or appreciate the flora growing on the hillsides, or to pay attention to numerous other details. Too frequently I have to slow down the others whom I'm walking with in order to get them to observe what's around them (and give me time to do the same) so it was nice to be on a patrol with others who did this naturally. After only a short bit of walking I also realized that they were already getting into their traditional political arguments, and I quickly recognized who it was in this unit who has the positions closest to my own. Though we didn't talk much I understood from him that like me he's learned not to press his views on others but instead waits for the opportunities that inevitably present themselves to show how his point of view best matches the reality of the situation. On the other hand, I doubt that he had felt himself faced with any personal dilemma around whether to serve or not.

Though this was an interesting patrol, that of the previous evening held much more poetic value as the last of our patrols. As we walked through the village on that patrol we passed a wall which a group of old men were sitting against. They were engaged in friendly conversation among themselves and one had apparently made a joke because two had broad smiles and were laughing. One of our patrol thought that they were laughing at us and made some comment to that effect within our group. And, of course, from our point of view we could well understand that they could have been laughing at us. Here was a group of old men in a relatively poor village relaxing outside before evening, when all of a sudden a patrol of five Israeli soldiers passes in front of them. They sigh and wink to each other and say "this too will pass", or hint that even though they seem powerless in relation to us at the moment, in the long run they'll still be here long after we've withdrawn. With my political and social outlook I can imagine these men saying these things to each other, and laughing among themselves. It's interesting that something very similar seems to have gone through the mind of someone who thinks very differently than I do. Somehow he knows that our occupation, although based on massive military strength, is still very precarious and stands a good chance of being no more than a passing stage in the lives of the people in this and other villages.

And of course something else even simpler is at work here. Soldiers don't like to think that they're being laughed at. There's a feeling of being caught with our pants down. Don't these men know that if they make me mad I can easily shoot them and continue on with my patrol without giving them a second thought? They should be more careful. My guess is that thoughts of this sort run through the mind of most young soldiers who carry guns and meet with the civilian population of the villages they patrol. They know that they're not permitted to use their weapons, and hope that the villagers aren't aware of this. When a villager laughs at them this suggests to an already frustrated soldier that they know that the soldiers can't use their guns and this frustrates them all the more.

Tuesday was the 9th of the month — an anniversary — it's now forty four months since the beginning of the Intifada. Thus it was predictable that we'd find freshly painted slogans on the walls of the village. We'd been walking comfortably through the village, getting almost pleasant eye contact with the villagers, smiling to the kids because at the very least it's easier to smile than it is to frown or scowl (and getting smiles in return) when we got to some walls that apparently had too many slogans for us to ignore. (I write "apparently" because I had no problem ignoring them, but others did.) We knocked on some doors in the area and when the people inside came out we told them in Hebrew and in broken Arabic to get some paint, or anything else that would be effective, and to cover over the slogans. Not much explanation was necessary since the people of the village are pretty experienced in this (the walls have had quite a few layers of slogans already and I never fail to note that if we leave things as they are there won't be room for more slogans whereas if we have the villagers paint over

them we're only making room for new ones) and they quite readily found the necessary utensils to get the job done.

Though the villagers we approached did the job, we had to admit that we were only half-heartedly interested in seeing it done. After all, we were leaving the next day and though we could perhaps say that we were leaving our replacements a clean slate, we really didn't care that much, nor did it matter. Thus after people arrived with paint to cover over the walls we told them that we'd be back tomorrow to check whether they'd really done the job and continued on with our patrol. We knew that chances were good that they'd stop the work the moment we were out of sight, but we also knew that it didn't make much difference.

When we started calling on people to erase the slogans groups of kids started to gather around us to watch the show. Perhaps in another village this could have led to stone throwing and then to some reaction on our part that could have too easily spiraled into unnecessary violence (though we didn't have any anti-riot equipment with us and definitely wouldn't have used live ammunition, meaning that at the most we would have retreated and called on a vehicle patrol to quickly get to the village). I'm perhaps assuming too much, but the kids who gathered around to watch the show might have been thinking to themselves that this particular unit, that's been around their area for about a month, hadn't made them erase slogans in the past, and perhaps they were curious as to why we were doing this now. Whatever, our efforts were only half-hearted and we were happy to leave well enough alone (as long as well enough was within the confines of the orders we had), and the kids of the village, along with an irrepressible youthful curiosity, seemed to have a similar outlook to that of the older men — they seemed to be saying to each other, with a mixture of nonchalance and amusement "this too will pass".

And of course in one way, it did pass. Today there's a different unit in that area, fulfilling its orders more or less as we did, probably choosing to be less involved in energetically showing its presence than the highest ranks in the area might want. The villagers in the area where we were stationed have seen one more plugah come and go, and though they don't seem tangibly closer to achieving independence, for both sides the month went by rather quietly and comfortably, and that's also somewhat of an achievement.

And if it passed for them, it passed for us as well. In many ways this month of miluim was more like a month on our borders than like our month in Tulkarem of about nine months ago. In Tulkarem something was almost always happening and we were all too often called on to deal with demonstrations and other various incidents. This month went by with very few incidents, and most of the actions that disturbed the relative calm (or the status quo) were actions which we initiated. Whereas in Tulkarem becoming involved in incidents was rather unavoidable, during this month most of the time our tasks were the standard and regular tasks of guard duty and patrols that on the whole held very little out of the ordinary.

I was home for a good deal of this month — almost one third of the time, which is without a doubt a very substantial amount of leave, and I was thankful for being able to be home so much. I also benefitted from being stationed in three different spots during the month and because of that not being in a position where I too quickly got bored either with my surroundings or with the people I was with. And I was able to do quite a bit of reading, something which I almost didn't do at all when in Tulkarem. In numerous other small ways this month was "normal" and I often had to remind myself that it was in the territories lest I began to feel that I was stationed on a border.

Until the end the people I was with didn't understand why it was that I resisted going to the pool of the settlement only a few minutes away from where I was stationed for the last two weeks. For most of them the pool made these miluim quite comfortable and almost each afternoon a car filled with soldiers from our outpost went there to relax for a couple of hours. Though my main reason for resisting going to the pool was political — not wanting to recognize the legitimacy of the settlements over the green line — I had an additional reason. I resist the idea that a month of miluim the purpose of which is to enforce the occupation should be a relaxing and comfortable month. If the opportunity presents itself when we're on the Golan Heights to swim in the pool of one of the settlements there, I'll jump at the opportunity. But I want to continue to differentiate between two different tasks — defending Israel and its borders, and enforcing the occupation.

During a month like that which we spent in Tulkarem I found that it wasn't all too difficult to become adjusted to the everyday tasks of our job, and I felt embarrassed by that realization. During a

month like this past month it's even easier to forget that the name of the game is still occupation, and often I had to remind myself of this when things became too "comfortable". It's a fact of life that we learn to live with — that emotional stress isn't always accompanied by physical suffering. Sometimes we have a strange desire for a bit of suffering in order to justify feelings of stress. If I didn't continually remind myself of the reason for my presence in this area it was all too easy during this month to let my feelings of relaxation and comfort override the plain facts of my job.

At the end of my last leave, before returning to my last four days of miluim, Tzippi thanked me for not refusing to serve and going to jail. Though things worked out well and it seems that we've no longer got any out of the ordinary reasons to be anxious about this pregnancy it made the month much easier on both of us that I was available had I been needed. I readily understood her feeling because I shared it.

Yet somehow I feel as though I'm passing a very dangerous threshold. After having served two month long stints in the occupied territories I've internalized the basic message that everyone has tried to convince me of — it's not that bad. After all, I've had only limited contact with the "native" population, and much of that wasn't confrontational. I've even been able, very slightly, to restrain a couple of people who might have gotten out of hand. It's become easy to relate to the details and to disregard the bigger question — whether I can permit myself to continue to take an active role in the occupation. For personal reasons I allowed myself to avoid a confrontation with that question this time, and I don't regret that decision. Since an end of the occupation still isn't in sight chances are good that whether I want it or not I'll have an additional chance for that confrontation. I'm still not sure what I'll do then.