

This is How We Fought in Gaza

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This is How We Fought in Gaza

Soldiers' testimonies and photographs from
Operation "Protective Edge" (2014)

**[BREAKING
THE SILENCE]**

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Glossary

APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
Breaching frame	A frame constructed out of a chain of explosive segments, used for breaking through doors or walls
D9	Armored bulldozer
'Dry'	Without using live fire
'Flowers'	An IDF term denoting wounded soldiers
GOC	Ground Arms Command
H.M.G	Heavy machine gun
LAW	Portable anti-tank rocket
MAG	Machine gun
MATADOR	Anti-tank rocket
Mk 19 grenade launcher	Grenade machine gun
Moshav	A rural town in Israel
NEGEV	Light machine gun
'Oleanders'	An IDF term denoting soldiers killed in action
{Operation} 'Pillar of Defense'	The eight-day IDF operation in Gaza in 2012
Population officer	An officer charged with supervising combat-related humanitarian issues
Puma	A type of APC; commonly used by the Combat Engineering Corps
Rampart enclosure	Defensive compound made of rubble embankments

Raphael OWS	Machine gun operated from within the tank
'Roof knocking'	A method by which a small missile is fired on the roof of a building as a warning shot before it is struck
RPG	Anti-tank rocket
Spike Missiles	Guided anti-tank missiles
Suspect arrest procedure	A procedure that dictates firing warning shots before directing fire at a suspect; this is the standard procedure in the IDF's operation in the West Bank
Tavor	Assault rifle, used by a number of Combat brigades in the IDF
Tzefa or Hatfan	Anti-mine tools that operate by detonating a chain of explosives dozens of meters long; similar to the American M58 Mine Clearing Line Charge (MICLIC)
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
'Wet'	Using live fire

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Introduction

This booklet is a collection of testimonies from over 60 soldiers in mandatory and reserve service that took part in Operation "Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip. About a quarter of the testifiers are officers that go all the way up to the rank of major. The testimonies underwent a meticulous investigative process to ensure their veracity. The testifiers, who served in various units – from ground, to naval, to air forces, and in headquarters and command centers – expose the nature of IDF operations in various combat zones. The testimonies in this collection close the yawning gaps between what the IDF and government spokespersons told the public about the combat scenarios, and the reality described by the soldiers that took part in the operation.

While the testimonies include pointed descriptions of inappropriate behavior by soldiers in the field, the more disturbing picture that arises from these testimonies reflects systematic policies that were dictated to IDF forces of all ranks and in all zones. The guiding military principle of "minimum risk to our forces, even at the cost of harming innocent civilians," alongside efforts to deter and intimidate the Palestinians, led to massive and unprecedented harm to the population and the civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Policymakers could have predicted these results prior to the operation and were surely aware of them throughout.

This policy was evident first and foremost during the briefings provided to the forces before entering Gaza. Many soldiers spoke of a working assumption that Palestinian residents had abandoned the neighborhoods they entered due to the IDF's warnings, thus making anyone located in the area a legitimate target – in some cases even by direct order.

This approach was evident before the ground incursion, when the neighborhoods IDF forces entered suffered heavy shelling, as part of the "softening" stage. This included, among other things, massive use of statistical weapons, like cannons and mortars, which are incapable of precise fire. They are intended for broad area offensives, through the random distribution of shells over a range that can reach up to hundreds of meters from the original target (see testimonies 1, 88, and 96). In practice, during the preliminary shelling, the army pounded populated areas throughout the Strip with artillery shells in order to scare off enemy combatants who were in the area, and at times also to urge the civilian population to flee.

IDF policy determined the open-fire policy for the forces. Many of the soldiers testified that the rules of engagement they were provided with before the ground incursion into Gaza were unclear and lenient. The soldiers were briefed by their commanders to fire at every person they identified in a combat zone, since the working

assumption was that every person in the field was an enemy (see testimonies 2, 56, and 75). While official military orders allow for fire only after identifying a weapon, intent, and the enemy's realistic capability, many soldiers testified that they were told to shoot at any threat, imminent or suspected (see testimonies 24 and 28). The use of weapons and means of warfare that required approval in the past by senior officers – like firing a tank shell – were permitted at the discretion of junior commanders.

Alongside these instructions, soldiers testified to unabated fire on "suspicious points." Commanders did not clearly define the meaning of the term "suspicious point," so soldiers were free to interpret it in the field as they saw fit. In practice, almost every object or structure within the forces' eyesight had the potential to be considered suspicious and thus targeted (see testimonies 32, 34, and 84). Sometimes movements identified in the window of a house hundreds of meters away from the forces led to a strike on that house, based on the suspicion that it was an enemy lookout. That is also how people seen walking hundreds of meters away were implicated at times on the basis of protocol and then targeted (see testimony 35).

The "minimum risk" policy also impacted the way the infantry units entered residential homes that served the forces as temporary posts, or solely for surveillance purposes. Before the forces entered the houses, they fired tank shells, and at times sufficed with machine gun fire. House incursions were usually done after breaking a hole in a wall using explosives, bulldozers, or missiles. The searches

were generally conducted amid the firing and throwing of grenades. Although, based on their briefings, the soldiers assumed that residents had abandoned neighborhoods, in several cases the soldiers ran into people or families who remained and were hiding out in houses. People were only discovered when those buildings were taken over (see testimonies 4 and 62).

The forces left behind massive destruction upon exiting the Palestinian towns and neighborhoods. In addition to the damage to buildings, many of the houses were completely destroyed during the operation, or directly after the forces left (see testimonies 42 and 74). Engineering forces operated nonstop throughout the ground operation, leaving thousands of houses destroyed (see testimonies 9, 12, and 21). Some buildings were destroyed by directed attacks to neutralize concrete threats, while others were demolished to thwart theoretical threats, even if there were no associated risks facing the forces in the field. In practice, for many combat forces, the damage to Palestinian property was not a consideration when determining the scope and force of fire.

In addition to the damage to property and harm to civilians, the lenient open-fire policy was accompanied by aggression and at times even racism, (see testimonies 70 and 106). Testimonies describe illicit statements by senior commanders, who called for brutal and unethical conduct. From the testimonies it is clear that the aggressive combat methods and massive use of fire, at times without any operational relevance, filtered down and influenced

soldiers in the field. The testimonies expose, among other things, cases of unwarranted fire at vehicles by units that made bets among themselves, leading to vandalism and looting (see testimonies 27, 38, and 44).

Throughout 'Protective Edge,' the IDF operated according to one of three predetermined activation levels for opening fire (see testimonies 104 and 107). The officers charged with opening fire received orders during the operation about activation levels at any given moment. These changes in activation levels, among other things, determined the kinds of weapons to be used, as well as the safety ranges from civilians. The definitions provided were at times ambiguous, leaving junior officers with much discretion regarding the amount of fire to use, and the acceptable degree of collateral damage that may be caused. The limitations, which increasingly diminished as the operation progressed, and the changes in activation levels, were disregarded when there was suspicion that a soldier was kidnapped. A case in point is the Hannibal Directive in Rafah, or the rescue attempt of a Golani soldier in Shuja'iyya. During these episodes, there was fire on a much more massive scale directed into neighborhoods and populated areas, while disregarding the necessary safety ranges from the civilian population (see testimonies 58, 60 and 103).

Massive fire was sometimes even activated during attacks launched at a distance, on targets designated in advance throughout the Strip. These attacks were planned and carried out by soldiers and officers

positioned in command centers and attack cells outside the Strip, equipped with weapons that allow for precise targeting – whether with aircrafts or through other means. The munitions used in such attacks, such as half-ton to one-ton missiles, were usually fired by advanced aircrafts. When attacking structures in this framework, the method of providing advance warning to residents in a house (in cases when the goal is not to harm them, but rather to harm the structure) allows for harming anyone who does not leave the area. The advance warnings included wide-scale use of the "roof knocking" approach. This practice calls for firing a small missile at the structure that does not cause significant damage to the building. A few seconds to a few minutes later, a missile is fired on the house in order to destroy it (see testimonies 19, 82, and 109). The soldiers' testimonies point to cases in which this practice rendered the advance warning ineffective, failing to prevent harm to innocent people. In addition, the testimonies reveal that similar principles to those that guided the ground forces were activated during these kinds of offensives. In moments when the targets were defined, there was no need to take the damage that would be caused to nearby property or structures into consideration.

In addition, the range of discretion officers were permitted in the various command centers was broader. According to officers that operated in command centers, there was a broad range of discretion allowed for reaching decisions regarding the identification of targets (authorization for identifying a target on the basis of intelligence).

Permission was provided, in some cases, without being based sufficiently on intelligence, thus haphazardly endangering civilian lives. In practice, the identification of many targets was done on the basis of unclear criteria, and attacks were authorized even in cases when there was partial information regarding the likelihood of harming innocent people (see testimonies 100, 102, and 108). Officers and soldiers that took part in activating forces, in general, and commanding attacks from afar, in particular, specified that it was easy to notice the impact from the combative, racist atmosphere during the operation. The public discourse in Israel, external to the military, influenced decisions made within the military regarding the determination of targets and the authorization of attacks. This impact was evident from the racist and violent statements voiced by decision-makers and the "trigger happy" attitude of officers responsible for authorizing attacks.

The testimonies point to a shift in the open-fire policy throughout the operation, with regard to the different targets that were authorized and the scope of injuries to innocent people that were permitted. This policy changed for various reasons, including the dwindling of the target lists, the desire to prevent Hamas from attaining a "display of victory" ahead of the ceasefires, and the desire to attack as many targets as possible before the ceasefires went into effect. The top echelons of the IDF command determined these changes in the open-fire policy. At least in some cases, the deliberations and circumstances that led to changes in this policy were not directly

related to the combat itself or to defending the troops in the field – but rather served political and diplomatic interests.

* * *

The IDF's military doctrine during the operation, as reflected by the testimonies, raises questions regarding the ethical norms that guide IDF conduct in general, and throughout the operations in Gaza, in particular. From all the testimonies that reached Breaking the Silence, a very disconcerting picture arises about the way IDF forces were instructed to operate during combat in Gaza. The operation, which was conducted under a policy determined by the most senior commanding ranks who instructed the soldiers' conduct, casts grave doubt on the IDF's ethics. As IDF soldiers and officers, in mandatory and reserve service, we feel it is our civil obligation to publicly expose these testimonies. The findings that arise from the testimonies call for an honest and thorough investigation into how IDF forces were activated during Operation Protective Edge. Such an investigation will only be effective and meaningful if carried out by an external and independent entity, by actors that can examine conduct at the highest ranks in the security and political establishments. Anything less, as we have seen in past experience, will lead to placing the responsibility for the acts on more junior and lower ranks, thereby precluding the ability to bring about fundamental change that can prevent a recurrence of the harsh reality we witnessed in the summer of 2014.

The Gaza Strip



01

Palestinians only sing the chorus as they have no verses (houses) left

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Major · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

There is one part [of the operation] that includes an ‘accompanying screen’ – the firing of artillery shells before the forces arrive. You notify the [Palestinian] residents, throw leaflets – whoever fled, fled – and then you fire. I’m talking about a pretty massive use of fire. The artillery, its purpose is to allow our forces to enter without being hurt. Any place that has been identified by intelligence or is an open area, gets hit with artillery. But if you check to see how many open areas exist in Gaza, there aren’t so many. We’re talking now about artillery, but the air force attacked endlessly. There’s targeted fire, but what kind of collateral damage is caused by such targeted fire? The air force knows how to take down one house that’s inside a neighborhood, but that doesn’t mean all the houses around it don’t get damaged. It’s not like the houses

The air force knows how to take down one house that’s inside a neighborhood, but that doesn’t mean all the houses around it don’t get damaged. It’s not like the houses in the [Gaza] Strip are all new and protected with bomb shelters. In the end, these houses get damaged again and again and again, until they collapse

in the [Gaza] Strip are all new and protected with bomb shelters. In the end, these houses get damaged again and again and again, until they collapse. According to intelligence reports and military communications, you're talking about a situation in which all the houses are classified as some type of hostile location. Are all the houses really hostile locations? I don't know. Is it really possible to isolate one house inside a neighborhood that's just blocks upon blocks? I don't know. I do know that the practical result was flattened areas where houses had once stood.

Did you see any 'before and after' aerial photos?

Sure. Neighborhoods erased. You know what joke was being told in the army at the time? The joke says that Palestinians only sing the chorus because they have no verses [houses] left. (*in Hebrew, the word for verse is the same as the word for house*).

02

There's no such thing there as a person who is uninvolved

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

The rules of engagement are pretty identical: Anything inside [the Gaza Strip] is a threat, the area has to be 'sterilized,' empty

of people – and if we don't see someone waving a white flag, screaming, "I give up" or something – then he's a threat and there's authorization to open fire. In the event that we arrest and restrain him, then one strips him to make sure there's no explosive device on him.

To get authorization to open fire, does he need to be armed, or with binoculars?

I think he just needs to be there.

When you say open fire, what does that mean?

Shooting to kill. This is combat in an urban area, we're in a war zone. The saying was: 'There's no such thing there as a person who is uninvolved.' In that situation, anyone there is involved. Everything is dangerous; there were no special intelligence warnings such as some person, or some white vehicle arriving... No vehicle is supposed to be there – if there is one, we shoot at it. Anything that's not 'sterile' is suspect. There was an intelligence warning about animals. If a suspicious animal comes near, shoot it. In practice, we didn't do that. We had arguments about whether or not to do it. But that was just a general instruction; in practice you learn to recognize the animals because they are the only ones wandering around.

During the period that you were there, did you see an armed

The rules of engagement are pretty identical: Anything inside [the Gaza Strip] is a threat, the area has to be 'sterilized,' empty of people - and if we don't see someone waving a white flag, screaming, "I give up" or something-then he's a threat and there's authorization to open fire

Palestinian?

Nothing, I didn't see a single living human being, except for the guys in my platoon and a few from the Armored Corps.

03

People that look at you from
the window of a house, to put it
mildly, won't look anymore

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: Sergeant First Class ·

Location: Gaza City

What was your procedure towards people engaged in surveying you?

They're treated like terrorists. Like a person shooting at you. There were people there who were spotted holding binoculars, or standing on a roof and looking in our direction – they're terrorists for all intents and purposes, and usually they're shot at.

If you identify a person watching you from a rooftop, do you fire a shell there?

It really depends on when – at the beginning [of the operation], you didn't wait for authorization, or you waited for authorization to make sure they were not our forces. You didn't wait to incriminate. You identify a person, and if the tank commander considers him a suspect, you open fire. You don't ask for authorization, no one

asks for explanations. It doesn't feel strange because that's what we did in nearly every battle we were in, from the start up until then. **And what about people looking at you from the window of a house?** People who look at you from the window of a house that is in your designated area – they, to put it mildly, won't look anymore.

04

We didn't know they were inside

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

There were 30-40 [Palestinian] guys in the first house at which we arrived. An opening was made [by our forces] in its outer wall with a breaching frame – it's this device with explosives in it – and then we entered.

Was there a public warning for people to get out?

We didn't know they were inside at that moment. Before that stage there had been all these leaflets (warning people to leave), and we saw them running away when we started entering [the Gaza Strip]. It was evident that the civilians understood that we were coming. At this point there was a massive deployment of backup forces, of the various assistive forces. This specific house hadn't been hit by any tank shells when we entered it. As far as I could tell this was due to a mistake – it was supposed to have been hit. Lucky

for them it hadn't. But in general, every house you were meant to enter was supposed to have been fired at beforehand, if not with a tank shell then with a tank-mounted 0.5 [machine gun]. This one was a house with a very, very large courtyard, and that's where they were all gathered; there were signs indicating that they had packed quickly. I think they may have been under the impression that they would be able to stay. The field interrogator grabbed one of them and took him aside with the company commander; I have no idea what happened there, I suppose he tried to get as much information out of him as was possible. Ultimately, it was made clear to them that now they need to get

There were 30-40 [Palestinian] guys in the first house at which we arrived... But in general, every house you were meant to enter was supposed to have been fired at beforehand, if not with a tank shell then with a tank-mounted 0.5 [machine gun]

the hell out of the place. They did.

Where to?

Further south, I guess. That was of no concern to me whatsoever. At 4:00 AM, four or five women came over – they had put bags on a stick, like white flags. I don't speak Arabic, but from their gesturing I gathered that they had come back – so they claimed – to take stuff they had forgotten in the house, stuff they considered critical. Obviously that didn't happen.

What did you do at that point?

We fired toward their feet.

05

Use as much of our arsenal as is needed

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: First Sergeant

One talk I remember especially well took place during training at Tze'elim – before entering Gaza [the Gaza Strip] – with a high ranking commander from the armored battalion to which we were assigned. He came and explained to us how we were going to fight together with the armored forces. He said, “We do not take risks, we do not spare ammo – we unload, we use as much as possible.”

He said we were slated to enter an area where nearly all of the buildings were already destroyed. The greenhouses were in pieces. He said the place was supposed to be empty. He said that if we come across a building that no [IDF soldiers] had entered yet, we get in radio contact with him, he orders the tanks to aim, unloads two shells on the house – and only then do we go in, ‘wet’ (with live fire) of course, with grenades and everything. He said that, if necessary, mortars could be used, too. The idea was to minimize

During this talk in Tze'elim he showed us the urban combat facility and said, “Everything you see here – picture it as though someone came through now and destroyed everything. There are almost no buildings left standing”

casualties on our side, and use as much of our arsenal as was needed to eliminate any chance of there being someone inside. This commander had come from the northern division [of the Gaza Strip], and during the talk he also described massive amounts of destruction there. During the talk in Tze'elim he showed us the urban combat facility and said, "Everything you see here – picture it as though someone came through now and destroyed everything. There are almost no buildings left standing." The inclination is to avoid taking risks – rather, to destroy everything we come across.

06

Why would anyone come near? To die?

Unit: Infantry • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Northern Gaza Strip

For the first five days we were in the same house. Most of the time we weren't doing anything, really. There were explosions all the time, and the noise from the drones pierced your brain. Once in a while you hear them shout, 'fire barrage' and then everyone covers their ears and 'rat-tat-tat...' You stop everything and then keep going. After that we moved on to another house. We advanced to the next line of houses and then to the next. At no point did I see an enemy. There were no face-to-face engagements. Every

house we entered, we were forbidden to enter through its door. Either you blow it up with an [anti-tank rocket], you make a hole, or a D9 (armored bulldozer) comes over and takes a wall down. There was lots of fire, lots.

Did the guys from the battalion take any hits?

They did, but even those who did – none of them actually saw an enemy with their own eyes.

You didn't return fire?

We did, the whole area gets blown up – gets hit with heavy barrages. But you just fire kind of randomly, at the windows... It was very organized. There's a dividing line, and you know that there are no forces of ours across it when you shoot. There isn't a soul around, the streets are empty, no civilians. At no point did I see a single person who wasn't a soldier. We fired a lot. In total we launched about 500 grenades, I think. They were always directed at windows, doors, cars, but they were never direct. That's policy, that's what we're taught, it's also what's taught in basic training. If you're fired at – you open fire. It doesn't matter where, in what direction; you show them that you're responding. The first thing is to return a few bullets and then to take cover and get a sense of what's going on. To show that we're strong, that we respond and don't go silent. We would fire heavy machine guns and grenade launchers, heavy fire.

There isn't a soul around, the streets are empty, no civilians. At no point did I see a single person who wasn't a soldier. We fired a lot. In total we launched about 500 grenades

There were synchronized barrages – every night, once an hour, [all of us] fire a barrage together at all the houses, ‘rat-tat-tat’ we blow up all the windows in the area then go silent for a moment and see if there is any reaction, then another barrage, then go silent again.

Did you identify fire in your direction from these areas?

Even if we didn’t.

So why shoot there?

To try and trigger a response, to deter. Our objective at that time was not to eliminate anyone we saw – our objective was to blow up the two tunnels we were sitting right on top of. We kept this line for five days and made sure no one came near. Why would anyone come near? To die?

07

Suddenly I saw a horse collapse to the ground

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Deir al-Balah

During the entry [into the Gaza Strip], there was a total mess. An entire company of reservists firing at the neighborhood of al-Bureij in order to paralyze it. So that no one will come out of there, so that they’ll keep their heads down. There was a little hilltop in front, from where you could see the fire. [The reservists]

were there, suppressing them with fire until we went in. If you see Juhar al-Dik today, you'll see nothing but a sand dune. When we entered [the Gaza Strip] it was a full-on orchard. I pointed the cannon at an orchard, toward an area that was half built up, half open, and every few minutes we blasted a barrage of MAG (machine gun) fire into it, nonstop. Every once in a while we fired to keep people's heads down, so that no one would come close. If you just stand there like an idiot, eventually someone will come at you.

I pointed the cannon at an orchard, toward an area that was half built up, half open, and every few minutes we blasted a barrage of MAG (machine gun) fire into it, nonstop. Every once in a while we fired to keep people's heads down, so that no one would come close

Where did you shoot?

One of our guys accidentally shot a horse – by accident. I was shooting fan-shaped bursts into the orchard the whole time – right side, left side. You sort of keep playing around with it. It was night, and our night vision showed white and green – white indicates someone's body heat. This soldier turned around and looked at the screen and suddenly saw something white, so he fired a burst at it straight away, and suddenly I saw a horse collapse to the ground.

08

No one spoke about that at all

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: First Sergeant

In the talk you had with the commander, was the word ‘war’ used?

The word ‘operation’ was used – ‘war’ was not – but I think something in the atmosphere, after that morning in Shuja’iyya for sure, projected war. In the way they told us, “There’s a house and we’ll go in first with the air force, and then with tank shelling, and then you guys go in ‘wet’ (with live fire).” In that situation it’s a bit hard to even consider it an operation. There was something that had ‘war’ written all over it – something really difficult, really serious.

Did they discuss rules of engagement with you? What’s permitted and what’s forbidden?

During training, in that respect, [they told us] that we only enter houses ‘wet,’ with grenades, and the more of them the better – and [grenade] launchers if you can use them. You’re going to ‘open’ a house? Don’t take any chances, use your grenade launcher, utilize every effective tool you’ve got. Aim, fire and only then go in. You don’t know if there is or isn’t someone in there. Go in ‘wet’ with grenades, with live fire. These were the orders for entering houses.

How does one launch a grenade at a house?

You move back to a distance that's effective for a grenade launcher. I don't know – it explodes from about *** meters, more or less. You walk a distance back, and lob it through the window, into the house. These were the scenarios for which we trained. We weren't presented with scenarios of 'terrorist, not terrorist.' [We were told] "This is the house, first thing – aim." Instructors from the GOC (Ground Arms Command) would tell us "Aim your weapon, fire the grenade, and then after that enter the house 'wet.'" And this is after the commander says, "To 'open' a house, we start with two tank shells, and then if it's necessary we call in the air force." They tell you, "There is aerial assistance up there at all times. If you need something, speak up. Just say the word." Eager for battle, in a crazy way.

Did they discuss [dealing with] uninvolved civilians with you?

No one spoke about that at all. From their point of view, no one should be there at all. If there is [any Palestinian] there – they shouldn't be. I think there was something very frightening, and also a bit paralyzing in the atmosphere. And I think that the feeling among [the soldiers] too, was that we really need to give it to them.

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09

We can be good kids, on our best behavior, but even then a D9 will show up and flatten the house

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: Sergeant first class ·
Location: Deir al-Balah

In regards to looting, there was a pretty strict dialogue, in general. It was clear that that kind of thing wasn't going to take place in our company, that it would not be tolerated. Once, we got into an argument over eating fruit [belonging to Palestinians], whether it's ethical. This was an internal dialogue, within the company.

In the houses you were in, where would you pee?

Usually outside, because usually there was no water [in the toilets]. Whoever was first to enter sometimes had the luxury of one flush, but nothing beyond that. The whole issue of making use of the [Palestinians'] houses was marked by serious tension. On the one hand, for some people it was a difficult and unpleasant experience to enter someone's house and realize that it's their home. You see the kids' room, the parents' room, the living room, and you don't want to take advantage of the things in there. On the other hand, you also know that using some of those things could drastically change your stay there. For example mattresses, which are found in every house. And we knew that when we leave the neighborhood,

it was clear to us that that the neighborhood was going to be flattened, because of its geographic location. We knew that we were entering a house and that we could be good kids, on our best behavior, but even then a D9 (armored bulldozer) would show up and flatten the house. We figured out pretty quick that every house we leave, a D9 shows up and razes it. The neighborhood we were in, what characterized it operationally was that it commanded a view of the entire area of the [Israel-Gaza barrier] and also of some of the [Israeli] border towns. In the southern and some of the eastern parts of Juhar al-Dik, we understood pretty quickly that the houses would not be left standing. At no point until the end of the operation, until the unit commander debriefed us, did anyone explain to us the value of razing houses. During the talk the unit commander explained that it wasn't an act of revenge. That the houses situated on a high axis on this side of the ridge dominated the entire area between [the separation fence with] Israel and the neighborhood, and that is why they couldn't be left standing. They also overlook the Israeli towns and allow for them to be shelled with mortars. At a certain point we understood it was a pattern: you leave a house and the house is gone – after two or three houses you figure out that there's a pattern. The D9 comes and flattens it.

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You saw this happen?

You see it. It's close. We started in the northern part of the neighborhood and worked our way south. Every time we left a house – no more house. When we got out of there, there were only a few houses left standing.

What did the neighborhood look like when you left?

A hill of ruins, pretty much – lots of broken up concrete, and sadly also large swaths of agricultural lands dug up by tanks. Some of the hardest sights were the chicken coops. Often there were reports that the tunnels (dug by Palestinian militants) were being dug inside greenhouses to camouflage them. The coops were inside these greenhouse type structures, which were also flattened by the D9s. You

saw all kinds of chickens – sometimes inside the coop and sometime outside, and sometimes half in and half out, totally in pieces. A whole lot of farm animals were wandering around the neighborhood. Not really a neighborhood anymore. And when updated maps were issued after we left [the Gaza Strip], we saw the only two houses that remained standing when we left, marked on them.

10

I'm sure the dogs there just died

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

We were in the area of al-Bureij, at the center of the [Gaza] Strip. When we entered for the first time we didn't see a single person. We saw no enemy, and no [civilians] either. We went into houses, some of which were already riddled with holes. [The forces that entered the area before us] purposely left a few standing for us, so we 'opened' them up the way we were taught to in urban area combat training. We broke down the door, entered, 'cleaned' the house with bullets; you walk in shooting. In the beginning you shoot [across a wide area] in a fan, 'open' anything that looks weird, you roll up carpets, move things around to make sure there's absolutely nothing there. The house was totally abandoned. In most places [IDF]

soldiers also shot the water tanks (usually located on rooftops).

Why?

Don't know. When I got to the houses that's how it was.

How is a house sweep carried out?

First thing, before you even enter, you shoot at certain spots. I would shoot – from behind a barrier of some sort – at dangerous spots: closets, beds that might be concealing something underneath them or inside them, inside the mattress. You shoot at everything,

even refrigerators. As for [cooking] gas canisters, we didn't shoot them – we took them out and emptied the gas. Besides packs of cigarettes, we didn't find anything valuable. One could say those cigarettes saved some people's sanity, because there was a day we ran out. And then we stayed put in the house and secured ourselves. "You are guarding the tanks," they told us, but we didn't really guard a single tank. We sat around in Gaza and took it easy. We surveyed. They gave us locations to watch. We were staying in abandoned houses. The people's stuff was left inside, but not things like electrical appliances. They must have taken everything – they fled. I did not see any casualties that were not clearly enemies there, because

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everyone was told to flee north from the very start. That's what we knew. They left their houses closed up tight. It was clear that people had been preparing for our entry. [When we went in] we turned the houses upside down, because there was no other choice, you had to. We found weapons. What was really awful was seeing lots of animals that they had left behind, their personal pets, they fled without them. People left their dogs behind – it was a pretty awful sight. You would see dogs with collars on. It was clear these were pets, not guard dogs. We looked after them as much as we could, but I'm sure the dogs there just died. We saw lots of animals there – farm animals, too. Entire groups of ducks and chickens. The animals didn't know a war was coming. It's not some natural disaster, they can't sense it coming. We saw carcasses too. Mostly carcasses belonging to large animals, like donkeys.

11

The people at their finest hour

Unit: Combat Intelligence Collection Corps ·

Rank: Sergeant First Class · Location: North Gaza Strip

What was said during the debriefing?

You could say they went over most of the things viewed as accomplishments. They spoke about numbers: 2,000 dead and

11,000 wounded, half a million refugees, decades worth of destruction. Harm to lots of senior Hamas members and to their homes, to their families. These were stated as accomplishments so that no one would doubt that what we did during this period was meaningful. They spoke of a five-year period of quiet (in which there would be no hostilities between Israel and Hamas) when in fact it was a 72-hour ceasefire, and at the end of those 72 hours they were firing again. We were also told that what had emerged was a picture of the people [of Israel] at their finest hour, the civil unity, the [national] consensus. Discounting a few weirdos who didn't see it fit to rally around this thing.

12

By the time we got out of there, it was all like a sandbox

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

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What does that look like?

First of all, it's impressive seeing a D9 take down a big two-story house. We were in the area of a fairly rich, rural neighborhood – very impressive houses. We were in one spot where there was a house with a children's residence unit next door – just like in a well-off Moshav (a rural town) in Israel.

The D9 would simply go in, take down part of the wall and then continue, take down another part of the wall, and leave only the columns intact. At a certain point it would push a pile of sand to create a mound of rubble and bring down other parts, until the house was eventually left stripped, and from that point it would simply hit the house [with its blade] until it collapsed. The D9 was an important working tool. It was working nearly non-stop.

13

I really, really wanted to shoot her in the knees

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: North Gaza Strip

There was this mentally handicapped girl in the neighborhood,

I don't know if I was right or wrong, but I was convinced that this girl was a test. Eventually, enough people fired shots near her feet for her to apparently get the message that 'OK, maybe I shouldn't be here,' and she turned and walked away

apparently, and the fact that shots were fired near her feet only made her laugh (earlier in his testimony the soldier described a practice of shooting near people's feet in order to get them to distance themselves from the forces). She would keep getting closer and it was clear to everyone that she was mentally handicapped, so no one shot at her. No one knew how to deal with this situation. She wandered around the areas of the advance guard company and some other company – I assume she just wanted to

return home, I assume she ran away from her parents, I don't think they would have sent her there. It is possible that she was being taken advantage of – perhaps it was a show, I don't know. I thought to myself that it was a show, and I admit that I really, really wanted to shoot her in the knees because I was convinced it was one. I was sure she was being sent by Hamas to test our alertness, to test our limits, to figure out how we respond to civilians. Later they also let loose a flock of sheep on us, seven or ten of whom had bombs tied to their bellies from below. I don't know if I was right or wrong, but I was convinced that this girl was a test. Eventually, enough people fired shots near her feet for her to apparently get the message that 'OK, maybe I shouldn't be here,' and she turned and walked away. The reason this happened is that earlier that day

we heard about an old man who went in the direction of a house held by a different force; [the soldiers] didn't really know what to do so they went up to him. This guy, 70 or 80 years old, turned out to be booby-trapped from head to toe. From that moment on the protocol was very, very clear: shoot toward the feet. And if they don't go away, shoot to kill.

14

Anything that could shatter had been shattered

Unit: Engineering · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Gaza City

We entered [the Gaza Strip] in two files, the entire battalion, with tanks accompanying us the whole way, right alongside us. One thing that struck me as something we had never seen before was that the tanks were firing shells while we were [walking] just a few meters from them. A flash of light, boom.

What were they shooting at?

I got the impression that every house we passed on our way got hit by a shell – and houses farther away too. It was methodical. There was no threat. It's possible we were being shot at, but I truly wouldn't have heard it if we were because that whole time the tanks' Raphael OWS (machine guns operated from within the

tanks) were being fired constantly. They were spraying every house with machine gun fire the whole time. And once in a while blasting a shell into each house. There isn't a single moment that you don't hear the rumble of the tank next to you, or the next one up.

Was there also artillery cover fire at the same time?

Sure, constant shelling. We started hearing it before the entrance [into the Gaza Strip].

When you got near houses, was there resistance? Were you being shot at?

I don't know, it's possible – but during our walk there was no sign of any face-off or anything. There was a lot of shooting, but only from us. We entered the house when it was already daylight. Half the battalion waited in the courtyard of one of those houses and then they fired a MATADOR (portable anti-tank rocket). See, the battalion commander doesn't want to go in through the front door, so you open up a way in through the side. There was an outer wall and an inner wall, and he shot a missile, which passed through the outer wall and then through the inner side one. A sweep was conducted in this really large house, which apparently belonged to one really big family. It was four stories high, there was enough room in there for the entire battalion. We would sleep on the floor, and we had made a round of the house to collect pillows and stuff, so there would be what to sleep on. Whoever managed to get hold of a bed, he was set. When we left, I remember the living room was an absolute mess – but I don't know whether that was intentional or just because when you pass through, you go in with

a heavy carrier backpack and you step on stuff. You're tired after the night, you aren't going to start worrying about their couches or whatever.

How is the sweeping of a house conducted, when you enter it?

We would go in 'wet' (using live fire). I could hear the shooting, everything was done 'wet.' When we entered this house everything inside it was already a mess. Anything that could shatter had been shattered, because everything had been shot at. Anything made of glass – windows, a glass table, picture frames – it was all wrecked. All the beds were turned over, the rugs, the mattresses. Soldiers would take a rug to sleep on, a mattress, a pillow. There was no water, so you couldn't use the toilet. So we would shit in their bathtub. Besides that, the occasional hole you would see in the house that was made by a shell, or ones made as firing posts – instead of shooting from the window, where you would be exposed, you would make a hole in the wall with a five-kilo hammer and that was used as a shooting crenel. Those were our posts. We had a post like that and we manned it in shifts. We were given a bizarre order that every hour we needed to initiate fire from that room.

Toward what?

There was a mosque identified [as a hostile target] that we were watching over. This mosque was known to have a tunnel [opening] in it, and they thought that there were Hamas militants or something

I got the impression that every house we passed on our way got hit by a shell - and houses farther away too. It was methodical. There was no threat

inside. We didn't spot any in there – we didn't detect anything, we didn't get shot at. Nothing. We were ordered to open fire with our personal weapons in that direction every hour. That was the order.

A few bullets or half a magazine?

The order didn't specify. Each soldier as he saw fit.

15

A 500-meter radius where not a single house is left standing

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

Uprooted olive trees everywhere. The houses themselves were broken, scattered about, a mound where a building once stood, houses simply scattered around. We didn't actually get an operational order stating that that was the objective - but ultimately, no house was supposed to be left standing. A 500-meter radius where not a single house is left standing

When we entered the [Gaza] Strip, our role as infantry was to

take over houses and sort of turn them into little posts. Using the Palestinians' houses in which we were stationed, we secured the tanks, which were operating mostly in our area. When we entered those houses, it was a very, very violent entrance – with lots of firepower, in order to make sure there wasn't any hostile force within the structure. After we had stationed ourselves in the houses, then what's called 'post routine' began. What happens is we start setting up posts – we decide which rooms overlook which directions, and what we can put to use. Every room that's chosen as a post room, we cover its windows with shading nets, and then we use the house's curtains. We used nails to attach them to the inside of the windows, and stretched them out with duct tape. And from that point the guarding routine begins, because you're on guard duty almost half the time, during which you need to be looking around at what's happening. While we were stationed there, the armored forces would fire at the surrounding houses all the time. I don't know what exactly their order was, but it seemed like every house was considered a threat, and so every house needed to be hit by at least one shell, so that there's no one in there. The armored [corps] fired a lot, relatively. All the houses around, when you looked at the landscape, they looked sort of like Swiss cheese, with lots of holes in them. Houses were erased during the time we were there - the ground was flattened, it all looked different. Any areas with sheds, the D9s (armored bulldozers) took them down - there was a big greenhouse area there, which was marked on the map as being used for firing [rockets] and storing munitions – the D9 flattened stuff over there, too.

What do markings on maps represent?

They just detail places where according to intelligence there's a tunnel, or houses that belong to militants, I think, or locations designated as 'hot spots' that weren't exactly defined – training zones, tunnels, launching sites. And booby-traps - places that were booby-trapped were marked.

After you left, were there still any houses left standing?

Nearly none. Once when we went to a house to which we were called, in which it was believed there was a militant, so we walked and there were paths which were more broken-up wherever the tanks had passed through - it was just sand, it wasn't agricultural land with plants any longer. Uprooted olive trees everywhere. The houses themselves were broken, scattered around, a mound where a building once stood, houses simply scattered around. We didn't actually get an operational order stating that that was the objective – but ultimately, no house was supposed to be left standing. A 500-meter radius where not a single house is left standing.

16

Shoot, shoot everywhere

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Not for publication · Location: Gaza City

Any fire by the assistance forces goes through a system of

authorization. You get on the two-way radio and ask for approval. Most were approved – for us especially, since we were the first to enter [the Gaza Strip]. The commander gets on the radio, says, “There’s this building here,” the threat is assessed, it’s stated, and then comes the authorization. If there’s a hint of concern in someone’s voice – that’s justification for anything. That’s a deciding factor in any judgment call. Approval is clearly necessary if someone comes up on the radio and you can hear shots in the background, and there’s a terrorist. If someone is coming under fire, it’s 100% certain authorization [to open fire] will be granted. Besides that, if there’s a building that poses a threat, if you say, “I feel threatened by that tall building, I want it either smoke-screened or taken down,” then it’s deemed a target, located on the maps, they get on the radio with the brigade and report it. The feeling was that it’s all very much up to the guys on the ground – however they describe the situation to the level of oversight – the response will be in line. If [the soldiers on the ground] say “That building needs to be taken down,

But the more time that passed [since the operation started], the more immediate authorizations became. The rules of engagement for soldiers advancing on the ground were open fire, open fire everywhere, first thing as you go in. The assumption being that the moment we went in [to the Gaza Strip], anyone who dared poke his head out was a terrorist. And it pretty much stayed that way throughout the operation

it poses a severe threat to my forces,” it will be shelled. In the beginning, we weren’t granted authorization if there was any fear of [harming] civilians. In the beginning there was a lot of concern about the media and that stuff. But it’s all very subject to change because you’ve got drones, and when the artillery coordination officer raises a request [to the brigade], they sit down together and look at the visuals from the drone, and ask military intelligence, “Does anybody know anything about this?” And then say, “Yes, you can go ahead and fire.” As long as there wasn’t any concrete information that [shooting a specific target] would be harmful to us – it’s “Fire away.” But the more time that passed [since the operation started], the more immediate authorizations became. The rules of engagement for soldiers advancing on the ground were: open fire, open fire everywhere, first thing when you go in. The assumption being that the moment we went in [to the Gaza Strip], anyone who dared poke his head out was a terrorist. And it pretty much stayed that way throughout the operation. As long as you don’t violate the perimeter of another force’s zone – in other words, risk friendly fire – you are allowed to open fire.

17

If you shoot someone in Gaza it's cool, no big deal

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

There was one time when I looked at some place and was sure I saw someone moving. Maybe I imagined it, some curtain blowing, I don't know. So I said, "I see something moving." I asked for fire to be opened on that spot, I opened direct fire and they hit it with a barrage. It wasn't far, 100 meters from me. We hit it with some Tavor (assault rifle) bullets and that was the end of it. I don't really know what was in there, I don't think it was anything.

What were the rules of engagement?

There weren't really any rules of engagement, it was more protocols. The idea was, if you spot something – shoot. They told us: "There aren't supposed to be any civilians there. If you spot someone, shoot." Whether it posed a threat or not wasn't a question, and that makes sense to me. If you shoot someone in Gaza it's cool, no big deal. First of all, because it's Gaza, and second, because that's warfare. That, too, was made clear to us – they told us, "Don't be afraid to shoot," and they made it clear that there were no uninvolved civilians.

People located on rooftops, how are they defined?

In those cases you report it and fire at the house. There were several situations in which people reported seeing someone. I can't tell you whether they really did or whether they just imagined it.

18

Check it out, there's nothing at all left of Juhar al-Dik

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

Before we entered we saw orchards on a slope, a low fence beyond them and then Juhar al-Dik up on this little hill. You've got the barrier [between Israel and the Gaza Strip] and then Juhar al-Dik is on some high ground that overlooks it, and it's very green. When we left after the operation, it was just a barren stretch of desert. Incredible. Of all the houses that were there, I think I saw maybe four or five still intact, or relatively intact. It was crazy. We spoke about it a lot amongst ourselves, the guys from the company, how crazy the amount of damage we did there was. I quote: "Listen man, it's crazy what went on in there," "Listen man, we really messed them up," "Fuck, check it out, there's nothing at all left of Juhar al-Dik, it's nothing but desert now, that's crazy."

What caused all the destruction?

Most of it was D9s (armored bulldozers). They just took down all the orchards. Not a single tree left. They worked on it for three weeks. When they didn't have a specific job like leading our way or opening up a specific route for us or some other mission, they just went and flattened things. I don't know what their specific order was, but they were on a deliberate mission to leave the area razed, flattened.

Houses, too?

Lots of houses. The D9s destroyed lots of houses.

When they didn't have a specific job like leading our way or opening up a specific route for us or some other mission, they just went and flattened things. I don't know what their specific order was, but they were on a deliberate mission to leave the area razed, flattened

19

If 'roof knocking' was conducted and no one came out after a few minutes, then the assumption was that there was no one there

Unit: Not for Publication • Rank: Not for publication

There were cases in which families were apparently killed by fighter

'Supposed to be' is one thing, but in reality there were people in there sometimes. In the urban areas of Rafah and Khuza'a, every other house was marked as 'active' (being used by militants). It was a real hornet's nest in there, and they took down those houses systematically

jet strikes. How do you explain that?

A lot of houses were hit, and some of those houses were also shared by occupants aside from [Hamis] militants. I think most of the families that were hurt were in cases like Shuja'iyya, (the testifier is referring to the artillery shot in the aftermath of the event in which seven IDF soldiers were killed when their APC was hit by a rocket) where the threshold for opening fire was more lax because forces were in immediate danger.

But the forces were operating in neighborhoods that were supposed to be uninhabited.

'Supposed to be' is one thing, but in reality there were people in there sometimes. In the urban areas of Rafah and Khuza'a, every other house was marked as 'active' (being used by militants). It was a real hornets' nest in there, and they took down those houses systematically. 'Roof knocking' (a method by which a small missile is fired on the roof of a building as a warning shot to its residents that it is about to be struck) followed by a boom, 'roof knocking,' a boom. Despite the fact that no one was 'supposed to be' in there. **But there are means of confirming that there aren't any people [in the houses], so how did it happen that they got killed anyway?**

We can't know everything. We did everything we could in order



to know. If the family had no phone and a ‘roof knocking’ was conducted, and after a few minutes no one came out, then the assumption was that there was no one there.

You were working under the assumption that once a ‘roof knocking’ was conducted everyone leaves the building immediately, and if nobody leaves it means there was no one inside?

People who are willing to sacrifice themselves, there’s nothing you can do. We have no way of knowing if there were people in there who decided not to get out.

But the bomb was dropped on the house?

Yes.

And say after a ‘roof knocking’ 10 people go up on the roof of the house?

Then you don't strike the house.

And what if after a 'roof knocking' 10 people stay inside the living room?

If people were inside the house I didn't know about it. But I don't think that was taken into consideration [over whether or not to bomb the house].

Is it a requirement to make sure no civilians are in a structure before it's attacked by a fighter jet?

It's not obligatory. Say the target was [Hamas'] deputy battalion commander in Shuja'iyya, an attack would be launched if the number of civilians wasn't too high. By too high, I mean a two-digit number.

20

It's simple: whoever feels like shooting more - shoots more

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

Often one of the commanders would order us to engage and we would fire at something, or order us to get into observation posts and keep an eye out – mostly on al-Bureij, which posed a threat. Once in a while some tank shoots a shell here or there. Obviously

the idea was to constantly keep up a certain volume of engagement with al-Bureij, because it posed a threat to us. It dominated us in terms of elevation and was positioned at a geographical vantage point, both in terms of vision and for shooting. They tried to maintain constant fire towards al-Bureij, mostly to keep their heads down. There was no specific target. Every so often, 'boom', a shell, or 'boom', suddenly a machine gun was fired.

What were you shooting at?

At houses.

Randomly chosen houses?

Yes.

How much fire were you using?

There was constant talk about how much we fired, how much we hit, who missed. There were people who fired 20 shells per day. It's simple: Whoever feels like shooting more – shoots more. Most guys shot more. Dozens of shells [per day], throughout the operation. Multiply that by 11 tanks in the company.

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21

Everything exploded. Everything destroyed

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

We fired ridiculous amounts of fire, lots of it, and relatively speaking our fire was nothing. We had spike missiles (guided anti-tank missiles) and artillery, and there were three tanks with us at all times – and another two D9s (armored bulldozers). I don't know how they pulled it off, the D9 operators didn't rest for a second. Nonstop, as if they were playing in a sandbox. Driving back and forth, back and forth, razing another house, another street. And at some point there was no trace left of that street. It was hard to imagine there even used to be a street there at all. It was like a sandbox, everything turned upside down. And they didn't stop moving. Day and night, 24/7, they went back and forth, gathering up mounds, making embankments, flattening house after house. From time to time they would tell us about terrorists who had been killed.

Did you see any bodies?

No. But they told me lots of Hamas militants were killed, and I trust them.

What's left after two to three days of three to four barrages per

day? What's left to shoot at?

You keep shooting at the same houses, at the same windows. When you shoot at a house it doesn't totally collapse. They stay standing. I was surprised by how long it takes until they fall. You can take down three walls and somehow they remain standing despite the fact that they're all blown to bits, it's all ruined. It's like "Call of Duty" (a first-person shooter video game). Ninety-nine percent of the time I was inside a house, not moving around – but during the few times we passed from place to place I remember that the level of destruction looked insane to me. It looked like a movie set, it didn't look real. Houses with crumbled balconies, animals everywhere, lots of dead chickens and lots of other dead animals. Every house had a hole in the wall or a balcony spilling off of it, no trace left of any streets at all. I knew there used to be a street there once, but there was no trace of it left to see. Everything was sand, sand, sand, piles of sand, piles of construction debris. You go into a house by walking up a sand dune and entering it through a hole in the second floor, and then you leave it through some hole in its basement. It's a maze of holes and concrete. It doesn't look like

I remember that the level of destruction looked insane to me. It looked like a movie set, it didn't look real. Houses with crumbled balconies, animals everywhere, lots of dead chickens and lots of other dead animals. Every house had a hole in the wall or a balcony spilling off of it, no trace left of any streets at all. I knew there used to be a street there once, but there was no trace of it left to see.

a street anymore. I really remember how every day we would get new aerial photos and every day a few more houses were missing from the map, and there would be these sandboxes instead.

22

Anything still there is as good as dead

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

We entered a neighborhood with orchards, which is the scariest. There were lots of stories going around about being surprised by tunnels or explosive devices in these orchards. When you go in you fire at lots of suspicious places. You shoot at bushes, at trees, at all sorts of houses you suddenly run into, at more trees. You fire a blast and don't think twice about it. When we first entered [the Gaza Strip] there was this ethos about Hamas – we were certain that the moment we went in our tanks would all be up in flames. But after 48 hours during which no one shoots at you and they're like ghosts, unseen, their presence unfelt – except once in a while the sound of one shot fired over the course of an entire day – you come to realize the situation is under control. And that's when my difficulty there started, because the formal rules

of engagement – I don't know if for all soldiers – were, "Anything still there is as good as dead. Anything you see moving in the neighborhoods you're in is not supposed to be there. The [Palestinian] civilians know they are not supposed to be there. Therefore whoever you see there, you kill."

Who gave that order?

The commander. "Anything you see in the neighborhoods you're in, anything within a reasonable distance, say between zero and 200 meters – is dead on the spot. No authorization needed." We asked him: "I see someone walking in the street, do I shoot him?" He said yes. "Why do I shoot him?" "Because he isn't supposed to be there. Nobody, no sane civilian who isn't a terrorist, has any business being within 200 meters of a tank. And if he places himself in such a situation, he is apparently up to something." Every place you took over, anything you 'sterilized,' anything within a range of zero to 200 meters, 300 meters – that's supposed to be a 'sterilized' area, from our perspective.

Did the commander discuss what happens if you run into civilians or uninvolved people?

There are none. The working assumption states – and I want to

We asked him: "I see someone walking in the street, do I shoot him?" He said yes. "Why do I shoot him?" "Because he isn't supposed to be there. Nobody, no sane civilian who isn't a terrorist, has any business being within 200 meters of a tank. And if he places himself in such a situation, he's apparently up to something"

stress that this is a quote of sorts: that anyone located in an IDF area, in areas the IDF took over – is not [considered] a civilian. That is the working assumption. We entered Gaza with that in mind, and with an insane amount of firepower. I don't know if it was proportionate or not. I don't claim to be a battalion commander or a general. But it reached a point where a single tank – and remember, there were 11 of those just where I was – fires between 20 and 30 shells per day. The two-way radio was crazy when we entered. There was one reservist tank company that positioned itself up on a hill and started firing. They fired lots – that company's formal numbers stood at something like 150 shells per day. They fired, fired, fired. They started pounding things down two hours ahead [of the entrance].

What did they fire at?

They were providing cover during the entrance [to the Gaza Strip]. They were shooting mostly at al-Bureij, which is a neighborhood with a dominant geographical vantage point, and is also a Hamas stronghold, according to what we were told. I don't know exactly what they were firing at and what they were using, but I do know they were firing a lot, tearing down that neighborhood, tearing it down to a whole new level. About 150 shells per day.

23

'Harassment' firing procedure

Unit: Not for Publication · Rank: Not for publication ·

Location: Gaza City

'Harassment' firing procedure is what you do to a place that you know constitutes a potential threat to you. You can't gauge exactly how much of a threat it is or isn't, and so you use this procedure, which is meant to keep enemy heads down. We're talking about a place where you know the enemy is located, and out of which you want to prevent them from operating. It could be a zone 200 by 200 meters wide, it could be a 600 meter long perimeter you want to shell, to show them that, "We've got a wall of bombardment here, don't test us." You apply the procedure on the area throughout the duration of your mission. You have analyses based on field intelligence and other indications telling you, "Bad news could originate there, 'harass' that place, blast it every few minutes so they know we have our sights on it." The procedure is put to use depending on the mission at hand. The minute the mission is over you can stop.

You have an artillery company commander, you dictate to him "I want 600 meters, three shells per minute" - that's something I know I'm allowed to demand from an artillery battery. And that's called 'harassment'

How much artillery is involved?

Usually there's one artillery battery per mission. They [fire] according to how much you dictate. One barrel is usually kept for emergencies, of course. Each battery means six barrels. You have an artillery company commander, you dictate to him "I want 600 meters, three shells per minute" – that's something I know I'm allowed to demand from an artillery battery. And that's called 'harassment.'

24**Yeah, it's moving, go ahead,
shell it**

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

We were sent to guard the exposure of a tunnel that was being carried out by [combat] engineers. We were guarding the D9s (armored bulldozers) while they were doing their work, and we were moving in our tanks from side to side, sometimes a bit forward, sometimes stopping beside some house. Suddenly I spotted these old window blinds, the old-fashioned white ones. I noticed one open and then flap shut, and open and shut again. I couldn't see anyone doing anything, I just see it open and shut in a way that

has got nothing to do with the wind. So I tell my officer, “I see it moving, that blind.” He goes, “What are you going on about,” and looks and says, “You’re imagining things.” A second later I tell him, “Now, look again.” He says to me, “Yeah, it’s moving, go ahead, shell it.” And I say, “OK, one shell over there,” and we fired two shells at it.

Were you in any danger?

No.

So why did you shoot?

Because the instruction was: “Anyone you identify in the area – you shoot.”

Did you spot a figure?

No. It was sometime between 10:00 AM and noon.

How far away was that window from you?

I think about 300 meters, I can’t really remember.

Did you manage to hit the window?

Yeah, it was very easy, very close. The distance was very close. I didn’t fire straight at the window because I didn’t want the shell to go through it and then right through the house. You need to shoot at the corner of the window, where it’s concrete. I fired, took down the wall, and that was it.

Suddenly I spotted these old window blinds, the old-fashioned white ones. I noticed one open and then flap shut, and open and shut again. I couldn’t see anyone doing anything, I just see it open and shut in a way that has got nothing to do with the wind





25

We want to make a big boom before the ceasefire

Unit: Engineering · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Gaza City

Before the first ceasefire they told us we were going in [to the Gaza Strip] to take down a house. We went down quick and got the gear we needed ready and then we asked, “Which house are we taking down?” And they said, “We want to make a big boom before the ceasefire.” Like that, those were the words the officer used, and it made everyone mad. I mean, whose house? They hadn’t picked a specific one – just ‘a’ house. That’s when everyone got uneasy. At that moment we decided pretty unanimously that we would go speak with the team commander and tell him we simply aren’t going to do it, that we aren’t willing to put ourselves at risk for no reason. He chose the most inappropriate words to describe to us what we were being asked to do. I guess that’s how it was conveyed to him. “We’re not willing to do it,” we told him. It was a very difficult conversation. Him being an officer, he said, “First of all, so it’s clear to everyone, we will be carrying this thing out tonight, and second, I’m going to go find out more details about the mission for you.” He returned a few hours later and said, “It’s an ‘active’ [militant's] house and it’s necessary you take it down, and not someone else, because we can’t do it with jets – that would

endanger other houses in the area, and that's why you're needed." In the end the mission was miraculously transferred to a battalion with which we were supposed to go in, and we were let off the hook. After the ceasefire a bulldozer and emulsion trucks (transporting the explosive liquid) and the driller (a drilling system for identifying tunnels) came to our area, and work started on the tunnels in our zone. It took two nights. At that stage, we returned to pretty much the same area in which we were stationed before, and we didn't recognize the neighborhood at all because half the houses were just gone. It all looked like a science fiction movie, with cows wandering in the streets – apparently a cowshed got busted or something – and serious levels of destruction everywhere, levels we hadn't seen in [Operation] 'Cast Lead.' No houses.

In Shuja'iyya too?

Yes. Every house that's standing – which of course no longer look like houses because each has a hole in it – at least one – from a shell. Bullet holes, everything riddled with holes. The minaret of a mosque over which we had previously provided cover fire

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No houses

was on the ground, everything was really in ruins. And non-stop fire all the time – I don't know why they were shooting non-stop, maybe so that none of the population would return. During the whole period of work there was constant fire. Small arms fire in the background the whole time. In addition to the shelling.

26

Person looking out from a house...
Whether he was or wasn't using
any lookout aids, one shoots in
that direction

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

What I can say about the armored corps, is that anyone they saw acting as a lookout, they fired into that house until it burned up and collapsed. That's what was on the two-way radio. Say someone was spotted in a building 200 meters from them, they would start firing at the nearby houses. A tank with more advanced equipment would be the first to make an identification, and it directed the other tanks as to where to fire. Every time it identified a target it directed the other tanks' fire. What you could hear on the radio was "Fire," the locating of targets, house number so and so, some

[other soldier] shooting an HMG (heavy machine gun), “No, another one to the left... No, another one to the left... A bit more... perfect,” and then a shell.

Heavy machine gun fire was used to locate the house and then a shell would be fired?

Yes. That’s the idea. When you identify a person looking out from a house, from a balcony or a window. Whether he was or wasn’t using any lookout aids, I wouldn’t know – but it doesn’t matter, one shoots in that direction, with intent to kill. When a shell is fired at it there is no expectation that anybody inside will stay alive.

Are we talking about a moment when tanks are coming under fire?

No. This is for when [the Palestinian who was spotted] doesn’t constitute a direct threat, not for when there’s an anti-tank missile being fired at us.

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27

A crazy urge to run over a car

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant

During the entire operation the [tank] drivers had this thing of wanting to run over cars – because the driver, he can't fire. He doesn't have any weapon, he doesn't get to experience the fun in its entirety, he just drives forward, backward, right, left

During the entire operation the [tank] drivers had this thing of wanting to run over cars – because the driver, he can't fire. He doesn't have any weapon, he doesn't get to experience the fun in its entirety, he just drives forward, backward, right, left. And they had this sort of crazy urge to run over a car. I mean, a car that's in the street, a Palestinian car, obviously. And there was one time that my [tank's] driver, a slightly hyperactive guy, managed to convince the tank's officer to run over a car, and it was really not that exciting – you don't even notice you're going over a car, you don't feel anything – we just said on the two-way radio: “We ran over the car. How was it?” And it was cool, but we really didn't feel anything.

And then our driver got out and came back a few minutes later – he wanted to see what happened – and it turned out he had run over just half the car, and the other half stayed intact. So he came back in, and right then the officer had just gone out or something, so he sort of whispered to me over the earphones: “I scored some sunglasses from the car.” And after that, he went over and told the officer about it too, that moron, and the officer scolded him: “What, how could you do such a thing? I’m considering punishing you,” but in the end nothing happened, he kept the sunglasses, and he wasn’t too harshly scolded, it was all OK, and it turned out that a few of the other company’s tanks ran over cars, too.

28

The instructions are to shoot
right away... Be they armed or
unarmed, no matter what

Unit: Engineering · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Gaza City

They warned us, they told us that after a ceasefire the population might return, and then they repeated the story about the old man who asked for water (earlier in his testimony the testifier described a briefing in which an incident was described where an elderly



Palestinian man asked soldiers for water and then threw grenades at the forces).

What were the instructions regarding [Palestinians] who return?

The instructions were to open fire. They said, “No one is supposed to be in the area in which you will be.”

During the ceasefire as well?

No, after the ceasefire. There was the first ceasefire that collapsed – I don’t remember anymore, there were lots of ceasefires. But after the first one there was that danger and we asked, “Will the civilian population return? What will the situation look like now when we go in [to the Gaza Strip] again?” And they said, “You aren’t supposed to encounter the civilian population, no one is supposed

to be in the area in which you'll be. Which means that anyone you do run into is [to be regarded as] a terrorist." This was a topic we had serious discussions over back in the days of [Operation] 'Pillar of Defense' (the eight-day IDF operation in Gaza in 2012) We held entire debates on the topic of, 'If when you run into someone while you are conducting a house sweep you shoot immediately without thinking.'

What was the commanders' response?

A typical officer's response was, "It's a complicated situation, I realize a situation might arise in which innocent people get killed, but you cannot take that risk or put your comrades at risk, you must shoot without hesitation." The instructions are to shoot right away. Whoever you spot – be they armed or unarmed, no matter what. The instructions are very clear. Any person you run into, that you see with your eyes – shoot to kill. It's an explicit instruction.

No incrimination process is necessary?

Zero. Nothing.

Is there any mention of [shooting] limits? Is 100 meters the limit, 200 meters?

Not at all. The only limits are the zone perimeters between IDF forces.

The instructions are to shoot right away. Whoever you spot - be they armed or unarmed, no matter what. The instructions are very clear. Any person you run into, that you see with your eyes - shoot to kill. It's an explicit instruction

To avoid friendly fire?

Right.

29

Good Morning al-Bureij

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

I remember it, all the tanks were standing in a row, and me myself, I asked my commander: "Where are we firing at?" He told me: "Pick wherever you feel like it." And later, during talks with the other guys - each one basically chose his own target, and the commander called it on the two-way radio, 'Good morning al-Bureij.'

During the first night [of the operation] we entered a place called Juhar al-Dik, a kind of suburb. While shooting a massive amount of fire, we entered some orchards. Orchards pose the biggest threat to armored forces – defending ourselves was a very difficult task. [We fired] lots of little blasts toward suspicious places – at orchards, at the metal sheets that cover houses, at assorted concrete things – little blasts. A lot of machine gun fire, lots and

lots. Once in a while shellfire – I fired two, I think, maybe three, at houses that slightly dominated us. Distances of 500 meters, or one kilometer.

After our night-time entrance into the Gaza Strip, to [the village of] Juhar al-Dik, morning came – between 7:00 and 8:00 AM – and we saw that there wasn't anything to do, and people started dozing off. All the vehicles were together in a sort of strange circle, a kind of parking formation, after we had taken over the neighborhood during the night. There was no threat and it was quiet, and then suddenly there's this command on the two-way radio: "Guys, everyone form a row, facing the neighborhood of al-Bureij" – which was this neighborhood that could see us from far off – it had a view of Juhar al-Dik, and that was higher than us. That is, they could see everything and we couldn't see everything from where they were. They were higher than us, and they could dominate us in terms of both fire and vision. And [the commander] gives an order: "Guys, all the tanks in a row, firing positions, all together facing the neighborhood of al-Bureij, we're commencing engagement." 'Engagement' means everyone firing at once, a countdown, "3, 2, 1, fire."

I remember it, all the tanks were standing in a row, and I personally asked my commander: "Where are we firing at?" He told me: "Pick wherever you feel like it." And later, during talks with the other guys – each one basically chose his own target, and the commander called it on the two-way radio, 'Good morning al-Bureij.' "We are carrying out, a 'Good morning al-Bureij,' guys"

that was the quote. Basically to wake up the neighborhood, to show those guys that ‘the IDF is here,’ and to carry out deterrence. I remember that all the tanks were standing in a row, and we were too, I was the gunner, and I looked at some building, which was very tall, at the center of that neighborhood, and I asked my commander, “OK, where do I hit that building?” And we decided between us – “OK, if you feel like aiming a bit to the right, a bit to the left, a bit toward that window, a bit toward the floor, let’s do that.” And then the commander says on the radio: “3, 2, 1, fire.” And everyone fired shells wherever they wanted to, obviously. Nobody had opened fire at us – not before, not after, not during.

30

Those guys were trigger happy, totally crazy

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Rafah

Before the entrance on foot [to the Gaza Strip], a crazy amount of artillery was fired at the entire area. Two hours, non-stop, ‘Boom boom boom.’ After that the tanks entered in two lines, and in front of the tanks a D9 (armored bulldozer) plowed the entire area, and we walked in their trail.

He lowers his blade on the ground and drives?

Lowers it and drives, doesn't stop for a second. You walk on rubble and pipes sticking out of the ground. And since the distance is relatively short – about 700 meters – you cross it real quick, you walk fast. Once we finished walking we started the offensive. Coordination is via two-way radio and wham, you start shooting at the house. Everything 'wet' (using live fire). From the moment we went in, we were firing MATADOR and LAW (portable anti-tank) rockets on every house we entered before 'opening' them up, everything 'wet,' grenades, the whole thing. War.

Every room you go into you open 'wet?'

Everything. When I got to a house, it was already half destroyed. Lots and lots of bullet holes inside it, everything inside a total mess.

The two hours of artillery fire before – what were they shooting at?

At scattered areas near the houses. All those agricultural areas near the houses. Before a tank makes any movement it fires, every time. Those guys were trigger happy, totally crazy. Those were their orders, I'm certain of it, there's no chance anybody would just go around shooting like that. [The brigade's] conception was, "We'll fire without worrying about it, and then we'll see what happens."

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Two hours, non-stop, 'Boom boom boom.'

After that the tanks entered in two lines, and in front of the tanks a D9 (armored bulldozer) plowed the entire area

The fire was directed at places deemed suspicious?

No, not necessarily. The tank fires at places that you know you will need to enter, it fires at those houses.

Only at the houses you're going to enter?

No, at the surrounding houses too. There are also agricultural fields there, the D9 rips them all up. And tin sheds. It takes down whatever's in its way, it topples greenhouses. Lots of houses were flattened in "Bar's Bar" (The nickname given to a housing compound in which the forces were positioned). Empty houses that bothered us. Bothered us even just to look at. I don't even know what to call that...

31

Blow it up, blow it up, use it all

Unit: Engineering · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Gaza City

To take down a house you need eight mines. Each mine contains 10 or 11 kilos of explosives. You place them on the building's foundation columns. Say the building has six columns, it's enough for you to place three mines. Three columns go down – the building goes down. But the thing is, you brought 40 or 50 mines with you. And you can't go back out with them, so you have to blow them up. That's how it works. So you put down 40

or 50 mines on the house. The houses nearby get hit by the shock, of course, and they also collapse, or it causes a fire or the whole greenhouse or workshop or whatever happens to be near the house also goes up in the air. The company commander tells you, “Blow it up, blow it up, use it all, I’ve got nothing to do with these munitions, I’m not going to return them – we aren’t going to get caught walking in the middle of Gaza carrying mines on our backs with no ability to defend ourselves if we get confronted.” This is an unusual situation that repeats itself in almost every engineering operation. You come to a house with the intention of blowing it up – it can be nothing but a 20 square meter affair, two stories. And you get there with lots and lots of explosives because they always give you extra, they always want you to blow it up and always want you to be prepared for any other missions that might pop up or something like that. So 45 mines are used, 45 mines is half a ton. Half a ton is like a bomb from a plane. We’re talking about half a ton of C4 [explosives]. The shock waves, they move along the terrain. It could be that in order to blow up the shaft of a tunnel and collapse a few dozen meters of it you would put down five mines – 50 kilos. See, the shock waves move through

The company commander tells you, “Blow it up, blow it up, use it all, I’ve got nothing to do with these munitions, I’m not going to return them – we aren’t going to get caught walking in the middle of Gaza carrying mines on our backs with no ability to defend ourselves if we get confronted

it and collapse the entire tunnel. And then a kilometer away, on the other side, you see the tunnel's other shaft fly up in the air. You blow up a house here, and sometime you see the effects half a kilometer away. Or for example if a concrete column that's one and a half meters tall and half a meter wide goes flying into another house, it destroys two rooms. It may not take the whole house down, but it destroys two rooms. The blast explodes in 360 degrees. To avoid getting hurt you need to withdraw to a distance of 300 meters and get in an armored vehicle, which means that things 300 meters away from the site of the blast are harmed, 360 degrees around. Not to mention the electrical poles that collapse, not to mention the electrical wires and all kinds of water pipes that get hit by the shock. One time I saw a big water pipe, which was already exposed after a D9 (armored bulldozer) ran over it – that was hit by something from either the infantry's Tzefa or Hatfan (anti-mine tools that operate by detonating a chain of explosives dozens of meters long). The pipe burst and gallons of water came pouring out. It was a potable water reserve, drinking water. You could tell it wasn't sewage. This type of damage isn't taken into consideration. It's 200 meters from the explosion, 100 meters from the explosion – and it gets hit. The explosions' effects cause major amounts of damage, but that doesn't interest anyone. "Use it, use it, explosives can't be taken back." The platoon commander says, "I don't want to leave with explosives on me. If an RPG (anti-tank rocket) hits my tank, I'm blown away." He says, "I'll just use everything I was given." He plays along. You're ordered to "not

bring it back.” You were given 40 mines? Blow them all up. Is there some lean-to, some storage shed near the building? Put two mines in it. And over there in that chicken coop, and in that shed. That’s the way it is, you’re given as many mines as possible. You also make a pile in the middle of whatever you find nearby. Fifty meters away you saw some cooking gas canisters? You take those, too, put them inside the house, pile it all up and then everything gets blown up together with the building.

32

There was a constant atmosphere of fire

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: Sergeant First Class •

Location: Gaza City

When we entered we were shooting terrorists – we identified lots and lots of terrorists there, people who were definitely terrorists. You see guys with motorcycles and Kalashnikovs. And you shoot in order to ‘generate fire,’ too. You shoot at buildings that were already destroyed, they’re called ‘suspicious spots.’ Were there really ‘suspicious spots’ in there? I don’t know. But that’s what happened on the first day, during the offensive stage. In the area of our neighborhoods, when we started taking over the area, until

When you're inside a tank without moving for four or five days you don't get to sleep, so soldiers doze off a lot. So you shoot all the time to maintain a sort of alertness, and to generate fire to keep up a constant stream of fire

the third line of houses – anyone in the zone, anyone you spot within visual range, is considered a suspicious person. During all previous operations in which I took part, the humanitarian issue, or the issue of harming civilians, was never a factor. That's not due to an interest in causing harm to innocent people, but rather to how at either the start or the middle of an offensive, any person you see within visual range is considered a suspect.

There was one time we were warned on the radio about suspicious activity by terrorists coming to gather intelligence in the area. There was a power station right up next to Shuja'iyya, a small station with lots of electrical poles and things like that, where people with weapons were walking around and watching us. We got close to it, along with another tank, it looked like we were about a kilometer away. Using night vision we could see lots of hot spots. We couldn't verify for sure whether it was something concrete, it looked like a person. We were given authorization to shoot despite the fact that we said we could see hot spots but were unable to identify people. So we shot two or three shells toward that area. During the first few days there was this thing of 'generating fire.' Every half hour or hour – at every hour of the day – we would shoot to create an atmosphere of fire. There was definitely no one there. There was very, very heavy

artillery being fired at the area at which we arrived. Afterwards we saw ‘before and after’ pictures of Shuja’iyya on Ynet (An Israeli news website). We got together and talked about it and agreed that the photos were nothing compared to what the real thing looked like. There was total destruction of the houses there, up to about the third row of houses. There was a constant atmosphere of fire, of someone shooting, all the time, all day long. Later in the week it eased up a bit, but there was always an atmosphere of fire. You never knew who was shooting. Now the artillery corps are shooting, now we’re shooting, now we’re being shot at? Once every half hour or hour we would go up, drive a few meters forward and shoot at a ‘suspicious spot,’ go back and continue our ambush. Someone goes up, fires a burst from a MAG (machine gun), and so on. It was like that nearly the whole time. At night it happened constantly. I knew we were doing these things primarily to generate fire, but also to keep the soldiers awake. When you’re inside a tank without moving for four or five days you don’t get to sleep, so soldiers doze off a lot. So you shoot all the time to maintain a sort of alertness, and to generate fire, to keep up a constant stream of fire.

33

The sons of bitches ate my cornflakes

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

What was it like, staying in a Palestinian house?

We slept on their mattresses. In the beginning when there was water we used toilets, and after that we used sandbags. There was an intense argument over whether it's OK to use their kitchens or not. I was in the 'yes' faction, but there were lots of guys against it. One guy was the first to go make black coffee and that led to

I pictured this family returning to their house and seeing it totally wrecked, the windows all broken, the floors torn up and the walls messed up by grenades and they say, "The sons of bitches ate my cornflakes, I can't believe it"

lengthy deliberations: to drink or not to drink. The way I saw it, I pictured this family returning to their house and seeing it totally wrecked, the windows all broken, the floors torn up and the walls messed up by grenades and they say, "The sons of bitches ate my cornflakes, I can't believe it." No chance. They won't care if you used their cooking gas, if you used their kitchen. That's total bullshit in my opinion. I don't think that type of quandary is complex at all. I think it's totally irrelevant, at that

point it simply doesn't matter if you do or don't use their cooking gas or their kitchens. All this happened before we knew the houses would be blown up once we left them. The very day we left Gaza, all the houses we had stayed in were blown up by combat engineers working together with a small force, and then we were told, "It's time to leave."

34

Worst case they'll ask what we shot at, we'll say it was a 'suspicious spot

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·
Location: Deir al-Balah

In the morning, the destruction wasn't that extensive. There were some wrecked houses, and a few paths already plowed by D9s (armored bulldozers). We joined the rest of the company and instigated engagement. In the armored corps, 'engagement' means the entire force firing at once. We were given a number of targets – I don't know if they corresponded to the number of tanks. It's so crowded in there, there aren't any spaces between the buildings. It's not like any normal city, where you'll see a building next to another building and there's a space between them. It looks like

But everything else that they didn't specifically instruct us to avoid shooting at - and except for a few other places, where nearby (IDF) forces were located to avoid friendly fire - you could shoot anywhere, nearly freely. There are also times when we said, "Let's fire over there, worst case they'll ask what we shot at, we'll say it was a 'suspicious spot,' that it looked threatening." That happened a few times

one fused layer.

And at that point were you being fired at?

No fire was directed toward us, but these were deemed 'suspicious spots' - which means a very lax policy of opening fire [was being employed]. That can mean anything that looks threatening to us. An especially tall building, or something that could be holding an antitank system - anything that feels threatening or fishy. Anything that doesn't blend into the scenery, that feels artificial. Things like that, or things that we really had intelligence about. There were lots of observation posts working alongside us, from lots of different forces, and we fired at that kind of thing. You're allowed to shoot at pretty much whatever you want to, unless you see something that would be unreasonable to shoot at, like a school. There were times we were told, "You see that building? That's a school,

don't shoot there. And that over there is the Gaza amusement park - one can see the Ferris wheel from a distance - we don't shoot at it." But everything else that they didn't specifically instruct us to avoid shooting at - and except for a few other places, where nearby [IDF] forces were located to avoid friendly fire - you could shoot

anywhere, nearly freely. There are also times when we said, “Let’s fire over there, worst case they’ll ask what we shot at, we’ll say it was a ‘suspicious spot,’ that it looked threatening.” That happened a few times.

Who authorizes opening fire?

Usually that would be the tank commander. Since regulations [for opening fire] were very permissive during the operation, tank commanders could authorize.

What rules of engagement were you provided with before you entered [the Gaza Strip]?

I don’t really remember what was discussed in terms of formal instructions before we entered, and after we entered nobody really cared about the formal instructions anyway. That’s what we knew. Every tank commander knew, and even the simple soldiers knew, that if something turns out to be not OK, they can say they saw something suspicious. They’ve got backup. They won’t ever be tried.

35

**They were fired at – so of course,
they must have been terrorists...**

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Not for Publication ·

Location: Southern Gaza Strip

There was a force that identified two figures walking in an

They check the bodies, and it was two women, over age 30. The bodies of two women, and they were unarmed. He came back and we moved on, and they were listed as terrorists. They were fired at - so of course, they must have been terrorists...

orchard, around 800 or 900 meters from the force's zone perimeter. They were two young women walking in the orchard. The commander asked to confirm, "What do you see," and whether they were incriminated or not. It was during daytime, around 11:00 AM, or noon. The lookouts couldn't see well so the commander sent a drone up to look from above, and the drone implicated them. It saw them with phones, talking, walking. They directed fire there, on those girls, and they were

killed. After they were implicated, I had a feeling it was bullshit.

On what was the incrimination based?

Scouts. "The [Palestinian girls] can surely see the tanks, and they can surely see the smoke rising from all the engineering work." After that the commander told the tank commander to go scan that place, and three tanks went to check [the bodies]. They check the bodies, and it was two women, over age 30. The bodies of two women, and they were unarmed. He came back and we moved on, and they were listed as terrorists. They were fired at - so of course, they must have been terrorists...

36

The real audiovisual spectacle

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

The real audiovisual spectacle was when we were in the staging area [outside the Gaza Strip], that's when we got to see a real show. It was on the day paratroopers and Nahal [brigade] soldiers went in. They were the first to enter. In the center of the Strip they got really clobbered because no infantry forces had gone in yet. Our view was of the center of the Strip. Let's say it was a real fireworks display. From a distance it looked pretty cool. I don't know exactly what they were firing at or who they were firing at or what was happening in there, but that's what was going on. And then the tanks went in. They 'sterilized' nearly every house with a shell, with a commander in the battalion authorizing fire.

Every shell gets authorized by the commander?

Maybe not during the first entrance [to the Gaza Strip], but when I was in there you needed to get authorization from a commander in the battalion. During the entrance it was more chaotic, they just went in and 'sterilized' everything, the whole area in which we were going to stay. By the time I went in most of the buildings in that area had already been run over by D9s (armored bulldozers). We went in at night and there was no visibility at all. If you looked

through a night vision scope you saw crazy wreckage, it was a real trip. From what I understood, tanks went in and were followed by D9s. Firing and wrecking, firing and wrecking, that's how they advanced.

What were they firing at and what were they wrecking?

Houses at strategic points in which we didn't want to position ourselves, dangerous things. Houses on hilltops, all sorts of things like that. They leveled it all.

What are strategic points?

Elevated, geographically commanding locations, multi-story buildings. It was all razed by the time we got there, or only the walls were left standing – two or three walls and the house is done for. Every house that was in any way suspicious got hit by a shell.

What would raise suspicions?

Structures that are a bit more strategically located, that could be more comfortably used to shoot from, or that could be used to stage an attack on one of our tanks – they got shelled. There were houses that were left 'sterile.' Every place I went into was sealed and locked up. The [Palestinian] families took everything and locked up the houses. Some of the houses were locked with their doors inverted and the hinges facing in, those doors were very hard to break through. There were a few James Bond moments when officers would shoot the locks. I believe they [the Palestinians] thought no one would go into the houses there, and rather than everything would be destroyed and toppled over with D9s. The D9s, they were operating constantly. They are the most strategic,

effective tools available for this sort of engineering operation, there's no doubt about that. They pass through anything, run over whatever's necessary.

What's necessary?

In the beginning there were walls that obstructed the tank's positions. You can demolish a suspicious house without having to shoot at it. It's a seriously effective tool, there are a thousand different uses for it. It was working non-stop. They were working around the clock. In tandem with the battalion.

How did the neighborhood look when you left?

I think over 50 percent of the houses were standing when I left, which indicates that there was selectivity. No doubt, I could see a difference from the way it looked on the day I entered. I did see more demolished houses one and a half days to two and a half days after I left. And it is possible that afterward they really did demolish the entire neighborhood.

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37

With regard to artillery, the IDF let go of the restraints it once had

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant

With regard to artillery, the IDF let go of the restraints it once had. Ahead of every ground incursion there was a day of scouting

One of the high rank commanders, he really liked the D9s. He was a real proponent of flattening things. He put them to good use. Let's just say that after every time he was somewhere, all the infrastructure around the buildings was totally destroyed, almost every house had gotten a shell through it. He was very much in favor of that

and artillery was fired at the houses that formed the front line. There's an artillery coordination officer in every unit, that's his job. He works with maps, talks to the artillery corps and directs fire. I have no doubt – and I say this loud and clear – I have no doubt that artillery was fired on houses. Tanks, too, were firing a lot in there.

In what sort of situation is a tank's aim directed at a house?

A unit commander speaks with the armored corps' company commander, telling him, "I want you to shoot here, here and here. I'm going to go in there a little while. Shoot, so that if by any chance there are people in there that we don't know

about, at least the house will take a few hits before we enter.” You stay a safe range from the forces and fire.

The D9s (armored bulldozers) are operating during this time?

Always. Whenever tanks pass through central routes there will always be a D9 going through and clearing out the terrain before them in every direction, so that they’ll be able to pass through if there’s an explosive device or something in there. One of the high ranking commanders, he really liked the D9s. He was a real proponent of flattening things. He put them to good use. Let’s just say that after every time he was somewhere, all the infrastructure around the buildings was totally destroyed, almost every house had gotten a shell through it. He was very much in favor of that.

38

We were we just trying to hit the cars

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

I saw a bicyclist, just happily pedaling along. I said OK, that guy I'm taking down. I calibrated the range, and didn't hit - it hit a bit ahead of him and then suddenly he starts pedaling like crazy,

because he was being shot at, and the whole tank crew is cracking up, "Wow, look how fast he is"

After three weeks inside the Gaza Strip we got to a sort of place where we had a view of a kilometer and a half over a route that's called the Tancher Route, in military jargon, which is a very, very central route, with two lanes going north-to-south and two lanes going south-to-north – and throughout the duration of the fighting there was an order not to lay a finger on that route. It's one of the [Gaza] Strip's central vital passageways; it's not related to the fighting zone – no shooting at it. We had the feeling this was coming down from the government, even – something very important that can't be harmed.

After three weeks in the tank, we went up to the post and saw this route and a sort of competition got going. "You're a gunner, let's see if you're a real man, let's see if you manage to hit a moving car." So I picked a car – a taxi – and tried to fire a shell, but didn't manage to hit it. Two more cars came by, and I tried with another shell or two, and didn't hit. The commander said, "OK, enough, you're using up all my shells, cut it out." So we moved to a heavy machine gun. We didn't manage to hit cars after a few times with that, either, until suddenly I saw a cyclist, just happily pedaling along. I said OK, that guy I'm taking down. I calibrated the range, and didn't hit – it hit a bit ahead of him and then suddenly he starts pedaling like crazy, because he was being shot at, and the

whole tank crew is cracking up, “Wow, look how fast he is.”

After that I spoke about it with some other gunners and it turns out there was a sort of competition between all sorts of guys, “Let’s see if this gunner hits a car, or if that gunner hits a car.”

Did you consider what happens if there are people inside there? I mean, did that come up in the talk you held within the tank, that it’s civilians?

Me personally, deep inside I mean, I was a bit bothered, but after three weeks in Gaza, during which you’re shooting at anything that moves - and also at what isn’t moving, crazy amounts - you aren’t anymore really... The good and the bad get a bit mixed up, and your morals get a bit lost and you sort of lose it, and it also becomes a bit like a computer game, totally cool and real.

39

When you go in with a tank brigade, who cares about a mortar?

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Not for publication ·

Location: Gaza City

It was a very difficult feeling. An APC was hit, two high ranking commanders were wounded. You want to hit them back, you want to hurt them, you want them to suffer. So getting authorization

for [firing at] targets gets way easier. It felt like we could request for things to be bombed, and targets that wouldn't be authorized two days ago would now be approved.

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What sort of targets?

Let's put it this way – taking down a multi-story building, using artillery cannons in particular, that's not a routine thing. This is generally not something that gets authorized, because before [the ground incursion], people were rational and reasonable with regard to combat procedure. But once the ground incursion started, regardless of the operational matters at hand, it became enough to say, "This looks a bit threatening to me," or "I spoke with the commander and we made such-and-such a decision about that building," and OK.

They authorized taking down the building?

They authorized.

What happened the night after the APC was hit (an incident in which seven IDF soldiers were killed by a rocket)?

There were more bombings carried out. There was a set ritual for the bombings before the ground incursion: At 3:00 or 3:30 AM there's an air force attack, which



hits targets that aren't bombed during the day. The bombings in the days that followed that incident were much more significant. And we retained the same mentality of bombardment as we advanced deeper inside Gaza, into more crowded areas. At 3:00, or 3:30 AM more targets get approved, there's more activity, you can fire artillery cannons a bit to the side because they will be overshadowed by the air force bombings. You can add more targets because now you're part of a large-scale offensive. It's as if because now you're entering with a tank brigade, firing mortars is totally fine – you're going in with a tank brigade, so who cares about a mortar? So now when you go in with the all the firepower of F-16s and F-15s, laying down one-ton bombs and blowing up

that hospital and all that, well, you can also fire a few mortars on the side while you're at it.

What do you mean 'on the side?'

There was an area out of which every two days [Palestinian militants] would shoot rockets – but it was also where their power station was, which generates electricity for an area where 200,000 people live. So take advantage and fire at the place – this one time you'll get authorization, because there's a surge in authorizations right now. When there's a wave of air force strikes going on, you know that whoever is making the decisions is sitting in front of his map right now and marking 'yes, yes, yes' – it's a larger offensive. When the offensive mentality goes large-scale, you can do things that fit a large-scale offensive.

Was any fire directed at power stations?

Yes. Like the bombing of the Wafa Hospital. It grows and grows and grows and then they say, "OK, come on, let's bomb it." We woke up one morning and went, "Huh, they took it down." And we marked another X on our list of optional targets.

Power stations were optional targets?

They were. It's a strategic site, an important site, you mark it as a target. When do you act against it? That depends how things develop, on the circumstances.

40

Just blasting things away

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

At some point at around 1:30 AM they told us “Movement is commencing.” We were advancing pretty quietly, hearing constant booms in the air and the sky was red. You walk either in a line or in pairs, depending on how much you can spread out, and you walk pretty slowly. The tanks are already positioned somewhere, and they are starting to pound away at anything you might need to walk across, or anything in which they think some [enemy] might be. Just blasting things away. During two weeks they shot over 1,000 shells. The commander said some people said it was maybe excessive, but...

This was the armored battalion you were with?

It was the armored battalion, which was fighting alongside our brigade task force.

Were the rules of engagement explained to you before entering [the

The tanks are already positioned somewhere, and they are starting to pound away at anything you might need to walk across, or anything in which they think some [enemy] might be. Just blasting things away. During two weeks they shot over 1,000 shells

Gaza Strip?

There were no rules of engagement. If you see anyone in that area, that person is a terrorist. In this context, it was simple. They told us they have intelligence that there are practically no civilians remaining in the area, and so if someone comes towards us, that person is a terrorist.

41

We were about to launch the rocket and then one of the soldiers yells at them not to shoot because he could hear people inside the house

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

When a [combat] engineering unit enters a house they blow up a wall, open up a hole, enter and then start by throwing grenades into the larger spaces. A grenade inside a house is super intense – within seconds the whole place is full of smoke. The platoon commander throws a few grenades into the larger spaces, you turn on a flashlight fixed to your weapon and start shooting at all sorts of places. And then he and his team go in first. One platoon was about to ‘open’ a house with a MATADOR (portable anti-tank

rocket), and there was a field interrogator – usually that’s a reservist who speaks Arabic who comes around with an electric megaphone and shouts really loudly that if anyone is in the house they should come out. They were about to launch the rocket and then *** yelled, “Don’t shoot” because he could hear people inside the house, he saved an entire family. They found this family in one of the houses and moved them to another house, a two-minute walk from there. It was very weird, protecting them. We put them in the guest room. They were all sitting there on a sofa, on a mattress, sitting and not saying a word. There were a few kids there, and a few women and someone who was definitely the father. He had the air of a father. *** guarded them first, and he had a bag of jelly candies in his pocket and he said he didn’t know whether to give them some. In the end we did give the kids some candy. This is a dilemma we knew from Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). You have no reason to be nice to a Palestinian at a checkpoint – he won’t like you any

In the end we did give the kids some candy. This is a dilemma we knew from Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). You have no reason to be nice to a Palestinian at a checkpoint - he won't like you any better for it. You're a son of a bitch, you're oppressing him with this checkpoint you're manning. And he said the same thing: "These kids, what's going on now is for sure the most traumatic thing to have ever happened in their lives until now - if I give them some jelly candy will they really feel any better? What kind of crap is that?"

better for it. You're a son of a bitch, you're oppressing him with this checkpoint you're manning. And he said the same thing: "These kids, what's going on now is for sure the most traumatic thing to have ever happened in their lives until now – if I give them some jelly candy will they really feel any better? What kind of crap is that?" In the end he did give them candies, 'cause they were cute. And we brought them water, and then we realized they weren't drinking or eating because this was during Ramadan and we had barged in before their Ramadan meal. An hour later somebody came around to escort them to the main route and bid them good luck.

42

They went in just to destroy stuff. Just to purposelessly destroy stuff

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Rafah

The forces went into the *** area, (an area at the edge of Rafah where certain IDF forces were stationed) and destroyed everything still left there. Literally not a single house was left standing. Tanks, MATADORs (portable anti-tank rockets), artillery. "We are entering the area in order to destroy the entire tunneling infrastructure that still remains there." If you think about it, that really means every house in the area.

You said that according to the intelligence the IDF had, no tunnels were left there.

Right. What they mean is, this is the area in which the brigade moves around, if it's still standing, it needs to be taken down.

How many structures are we talking about?

Around 12. A relatively small number. Mostly one-story houses and agricultural structures. This incursion happened the night before there was a ceasefire. The entrance happened at midnight, and everyone knew that at eight the next morning it will be over, apparently. And because they knew that, there was pressure to go in and finish the job very, very quickly. And also, because of that, they went in just to destroy stuff. Just to purposelessly destroy stuff, to finish the job, until they were told to stop.

43

It's enough for a gunner to be uncertain of what something he sees in some window is - 'open fire'

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: Sergeant First Class ·

Location: Gaza City

We knew we were going in and attempting to form a perimeter of two kilometers west of the [Gaza-Israel] barrier. We were to 'clean

The rules of engagement were very, very lax. I wouldn't say they shot anything that moved - but they didn't request authorization (to fire), either. There was no such thing as requesting authorization. Just fire. At the tank commander level, there was no problem

up' the area and then guard and assist the units coming in to deal with the tunnels, who were taking care of the area from that two-kilometer line and back toward the barrier.

Two kilometers in, does that mean already inside Shuja'iyya?

Yes. We knew that by the time we got there on Friday there were not supposed to be any people in the area, since leaflets were dispersed and also because there wasn't very much left of the place. The artillery corps and the air force really cleaned that place up. I'm being cynical. There wasn't much left in there. In previous times we

had entered Gaza, a D9 (armored bulldozer) would go in and everyone drove in its trail. But in this operation they decided to do something different – just to enter as an offensive. A row of tanks go in, they spread out wide, get into position, identify 'suspicious spots,' fire as required. The rules of engagement were very, very lax. I wouldn't say that they shot anything that moved – but they didn't request authorization [to fire], either. There was no such thing as requesting authorization. Just fire. At the tank commander level, there was no problem at all with machine gun fire and shellfire, too. For example, once we got a warning on the two-way radio about a cart of explosives strapped to a donkey. A warning. So a donkey

that just happened to be there at the time, strapped to a cart, he was shot. Was there an explosive device strapped to him? I don't know, it's hard to say. Suspicious things can be nothing but a suspicious-looking shadow. It's enough for a gunner to be uncertain of what something he sees in some window is – 'open fire.'

44

On Friday evening we made Kiddush

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

On Friday evening we made Kiddush (a Sabbath blessing) inside one of the houses. We used a courtyard inside the house where the infantry guys were stationed. We didn't open up the gate, we just went straight in with the tank – ran over the fence and went in. We 'parked' two tanks in there, which means we also had to destroy the wall between the street and the house. A little wall, a fence of sorts. We had to, because each tank takes up a lot of room. So we destroyed part of that fence, and there was also a motorcycle in the way that we ran over. We went in and made Kiddush in the living room with the infantry guys. I was in that house a few more times. Usually houses had one wall destroyed because a shell went through part of it, or had one wall collapsed. These houses

were no longer any good for returning to live in, but it's not like a bigger mess was made there than what was necessary – aside from the shooting into the house upon entry.

45

Blowing the house up and returning

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

At a certain point the neighborhood was in ruins. We had two raid operations. A raid means going to a place, blowing the house up and returning. The entrance into the house itself is carried out partly 'dry' (without using live fire), partly 'wet' (using live fire), depending on where you are 'opening' and where you aren't. And then a unit arrives and places explosives.

Why was the house blown up?

Because it overlooked the house we were in.

Was fire directed at you or at neighboring forces from that house?

No – the house I was in was situated in an inferior position compared to that one. If our house was three stories tall, then the house that was blown up was probably four.

And what about the second house that was blown up?

That was done by another platoon, but for the exact same reason.

46

Columns of smoke everywhere, the neighborhood in pieces

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

Each tank aimed at whichever direction it chose, and then we fired a whole lot at the little house with machine guns and also one shell to make sure there was no threat inside. And suddenly I see the whole neighborhood in front of me, and then there's stress, and confusion over the radio, and the commander was really improvising, and suddenly he tells me: "You see that house? Fire there."

There was one afternoon that the company commander gathered us all together, and we were told that we were about to go on an offensive operation, to 'provoke' the neighborhood that dominated us, which was al-Bureij. It dominated us in terms of altitude, people, view. When I say to 'provoke,' I mean we shoot a bit, blow up a few things, show them that we're in there –and maybe that will draw the terrorists out to respond and then we can hit them. Because up until then, we hadn't really had any real engagement with them.

The way the offensive took place was, when it started getting dark my tank led the way, we were in a sort of convoy, and there was this little house. And then suddenly we see an entire neighborhood opening up before us, lots of houses, it's all crowded and the moment we got to that little house, the order came to attack. Each [tank] aimed at whichever direction it chose, and then we fired a whole lot at the little house with machine guns and also one shell to make sure there was no threat inside. And suddenly I see the whole neighborhood in front of me, and then there's stress, and confusion over the radio, and the commander was really improvising, and suddenly he tells me: "You see that house? Fire there." Boom, I shoot. "Go, driver, go forward," and the driver goes a bit forward and we get to a sort of alley. "You see the house on the left? Fire at it." Boom, we fired, and we were just, like, purposelessly firing. There was no intelligence on this or that house – it was just my platoon commander and myself deciding to fire at it because you have to fire, you have to 'provoke.' It could well be that people were killed inside, but there really wasn't any intelligence on those specific buildings. And that's how it went on. "You see that house in front of you? Shoot."

He also asked me, "What can you fire at? Whatever you can physically see, fire at it." Like, "Feel free." And that's how it was, really – every tank just firing wherever it wanted to. And during the offensive, no one shot at us – not before it, not during it, and not after it. I remember that when we started withdrawing with the tanks, I looked toward the neighborhood, and I could simply see an entire neighborhood up in flames, like in the movies. Columns

of smoke everywhere, the neighborhood in pieces, houses on the ground, and like, people were living there, but nobody had fired at us yet. We were firing purposelessly.

47

We're blowing up this house, but we can't eat this bag of Bamba?

Unit: Infantry • Rank: First Sergeant •

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

They told us, "Don't shit in the bathroom because it'll get clogged and it'll be awful." So we would shit in plastic bags and chuck them out the window. The first few days it was really ugly and then it got a bit better. But it looks bad, first because you do everything quickly and you don't care - and also because your security is top priority, it justifies everything

What's the protocol for entering a house?

You hit it with a crazy barrage of fire, using whatever you have with you. You enter – there's always a force ready to provide cover

fire on the house – you hit it with a barrage: heavy machine gun fire, grenade launchers, ‘rat-tat-tat,’ and you go in as quick as you can, the moment the shooting stops. Never through a door, always via a different opening.

How do you make an opening?

Either with a MATADOR, (portable anti-tank rocket) a tank, a D9 (armored bulldozer) or explosives. You go in and then start ‘sterilizing’ the rooms – two men are assigned to each room and once in a while they throw a grenade or something like that.

You enter ‘wet’ (using live fire) or ‘dry’ (using no fire)?

Sometimes this way, sometimes that way, it depends on the mood. The house is ‘sterilized,’ we yell, “Sterilized, sterilized” to each other. We went into a house that was a candy shop once. There was candy everywhere. We just shoved everything aside.

You didn’t eat any?

No, first of all because it wasn’t especially tasty candy and also because during the first few days we were still in the ‘no touching’ phase, being moral and all that. Later we would laugh about it more: “We’re blowing up this house, but we can’t eat this bag of Bamba (peanut butter snacks)?” This was a two-story house. We went up to check the upper floor, to see what the situation was up there, where we could set up the weapons. We had to set up the grenade machine gun up there, and we had a problem. There was this balcony there that was very fitting for a post, but the balcony’s wall, it was a certain height, and the grenade machine gun, its barrel was at a lower height, and of course you can’t fire through

the wall – so we had to make a hole in it. But we had the explosives platoon with us at the time – how convenient. They have explosives, so we called them up and they put blocks of explosives on the wall, and we all went down, and it was all very exciting, really. They blew the wall up, and we went back up, and it had made a really nice, perfect hole in the wall – just what we wanted, exactly the right size, and the shockwaves had, like, thrown the rest of the house's stuff inside it. On the top floor of the house there were also massive sacks of rice and lentils, sacks of, like, two kilos each – and those were perfect for sandbagging the post and setting up the grenade machine gun on them, so we had a really sweet post there. We filled up lots of sandbags ourselves, and set up nice heavy machine gun and grenade machine gun shooting posts. The entire kitchen was upside down from the blast. The entire house, really, was full of goods, and they all spilled onto the floor and got stomped on. The balcony was right off of the kitchen, so when we blew it up the entire kitchen got turned upside down. You can't really use the place to live in after that. We got settled in, set up two posts upstairs. We blacked out the windows completely using plywood and cloth. We had a few military-issued wool blankets, I think, and we also used some bedding that we found. In one of the rooms we took a two-person bed and put it up against the window. We used furniture a lot – I enjoyed doing that, one gets to be creative. And we used the candy as pillows, it made for great pillows. There were also all kinds of packs of diapers and toilet paper, those were great for pillows, too.

What did the house look like after 30 soldiers were in it for three days?

It looked pretty bad, first because lots of things were blown up inside and also because no one cared. You smoke inside the house and then toss the butts inside the house. You throw your trash inside the house, no one cares. Our medic was a reservist doctor and it was really important to him that we be orderly and throw our trash in a bin and not shit inside the house – a hygiene thing, mostly. Pretty soon people did start getting diarrhea and lots of soldiers were evacuated because they felt really bad and had the runs. Toilets didn't work because there was no water, and pretty soon they were overflowing. They told us, "Don't shit in the bathroom because it'll get clogged and it'll be awful." So we would shit in plastic bags and chuck them out the window. The first few days it was really ugly and then it got a bit better. But it looks bad, first because you do everything quickly and you don't care – and also because your security is top priority, it justifies everything.

48

You fire shells at the houses and spray bullets at the orchard

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

We reached the first line of houses and the platoon commander ‘cleared up’ a few key spaces with grenades. You never ‘open’ houses ‘dry’ (without live fire) – you throw a grenade [before you enter]. It busts the walls, brings down plaster and paint. At some point you take over the house. Only a few minutes after we would finish taking over the houses, the area was ‘sterilized,’ a sweep was conducted, one made sure there was no terrorist with an anti-tank missile... Then tanks and D9s (armored bulldozers) come over at the same time. It was one of the most beautiful orchards I’d ever seen – it looked just like an old-style Moshav (a rural town), and within a few hours it was totally erased – reduced to piles of powdered sand. Tanks drove over it and broke up the ground, smashing it to smithereens.

Was [the orchard] ruined on purpose, or because heavy equipment was moving through?

It simply was not taken into consideration. It’s not like they said, “Hey, there’s an orchard here.” You don’t think in those terms. No one was told to destroy the orchard – it’s simply that the earth was pushed up; it was needed for a rampart. It’s not as if they

When we went to take over [the next house], there was an orchard on the way. And crossing that is scary, you don't know what's in there. There was this crazy part when tanks were firing shells non-stop, and then all at once spraying machine gun fire into the entire orchard. You fire shells at the houses and spray bullets [at the orchard]. Eight, 10 minutes like that, and then they say, "OK, you can start going through now."

were trying to consider the Society for the Protection of Nature or the JNF (Jewish National Fund) in worrying about the trees and the animals.

The area was needed for a specific reason?

Right, and so it was used. [Inside the house] what we do is use a hammer to break the tiles for the sandbags. One of the soldiers said he wasn't willing to do that because we could bring in sand from outside. They told him he couldn't do that, and there was some arguing about it. We broke tiles in a corner of the house, in a place where we wouldn't be sitting. We put sandbags and camouflage nets in the windows, so that when you guard there you're protected, so that only a very small part of you is visible. The next night they told us, "We're switching houses." You take over another house, and the same procedure all over again, sandbags and so forth. When we went to take over [the next

house], there was an orchard on the way. And crossing that is scary, you don't know what's in there. There was this crazy part when tanks were firing shells non-stop, and then all at once spraying machine gun fire into the entire orchard. You fire shells at the

houses and spray bullets [at the orchard]. Eight, ten minutes like that, and then they say, “OK, you can start going through now.” There are people whose job it is to strategically analyze what constitutes a threat, and there are lookout posts. If movement is detected, the house is blown up. If you detect movement inside a house that’s in an area where combat has been taking place for more than two days, it’s pretty clear that they didn’t just drop by to make some coffee.

You see a man smoking a cigarette in a window, are you supposed to shoot him?

You’re asking questions only a civilian would ask. That doesn’t happen.

49

I never saw anything like it, not even in Lebanon

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: Sergeant First Class •

Location: Gaza City

We went in [to the Gaza Strip] through the Nahal Oz entrance, we drove a bit north and then continued west. The houses were already in ruins by the time we got there. The D9 (armored bulldozer) used the rubble from the houses to form a rampart compound for

us. There were chicken coops that weren't destroyed by the aerial strikes, and the D9 simply came and peeled them apart. There was concern about tunnels there, so the coops were just crushed. The D9 comes over, lowers its blade on those houses and within an hour and a half everything is wrapped up into itself. Chickens in metal panels, in all those cages they have there, really big and pretty and it smells like roses. It was total destruction in there – the photos online are child's play compared to what we saw there in reality. It wasn't so much razing there – it was havoc, mostly: wrecked houses, collapsed balconies, exposed living rooms, destroyed stores. That's what we saw. I never saw anything like it, not even in Lebanon. There was destruction there, too – but never in my life did I see anything like this.

And were tunnel shafts found in the coops?

No. There were no shafts in the coops.

50

We would take a pot and stick a shirt in it, and then shit on the shirt

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Khan Yunis

We started walking, while being accompanied by artillery fire,



mortars, the armored corps and the air force. We walked up until we were 100 meters from the houses and opened up cover fire on them using Mk 19 grenade launchers (grenade machine guns) and two MAGs (machine guns). We fired a few grenades and shells at the houses. According to our maps the house was supposed to be surrounded by a concrete wall. But there wasn't any concrete wall, just a wobbly fence I could have broken with my bare hands. The plan was to make a hole in it using a MATADOR (portable anti-tank rocket) and then detonate explosives in the house. That didn't happen. There was an opening in the fence, and we went through it. We used the explosives in the house, made an entry hole in the wall. There were no terrorists there, nothing. We made

a hole and everyone went in 'wet' (using live fire). We 'sterilized' the first two rooms 'wet.' This house had four rooms, so another two guys came in and 'sterilized' another room, also 'wet,' and another two guys did the last room, also 'wet.' Once the house was 'sterilized', the entire force went in.

What does 'wet' involve?

Grenades, if necessary. But for this house we didn't use grenades. Because of the explosives the entire house was gray with smoke and dust in the air so you couldn't see anything.

What did the house look like?

A single-family Arab house, one for which construction hadn't been completely finished. You could tell people had fled from the house – there were beds, mattresses, furniture. Outside every house we were in there were ducks, goats, donkeys, dogs. Every house we got to we would immediately go to the animals and make holes in their cages for them so they could escape.

After you 'sterilize' [the house], what's the next step?

The entire force enters, you make sure the whole force is inside, that everyone arrived, and you prepare the house for defense. You set up a MAG shooting post, an Mk 19 shooting post; you make holes in the wall through which to shoot. In the end you have a post on each side. When the house is ready and all the posts are ready to fire from, you set up cover – sandbags, closets, beds – and when everything is ready and there are people manning the posts, you can rest.

How many soldiers were you with?

We were a platoon of 13, 14. The Arabs, they have tons of mattresses and pillows in every house. To rest you use either the beds, or those mattresses, or the floor, what can you do. We messed up in the first and second houses – the explosives were placed on the concrete right by a pipe. When it was detonated the entire sewage system blew up, the place reeked. When you arrive [at a house] the officer comes over and sets rules: where to shit, where to piss. Whether or not you're allowed to go out for a second to take a piss. If we were on the ground floor of the house and it was possible, we would go out and make a 'crap chair.' We would make holes in a chair and take it outside, and whoever had to shit would go out with a helmet on, armed and with a bulletproof vest. The guy next to him would go out with all the equipment and a combat vest, and they would walk four or five meters from the house, and he would sit there and shit while another soldier covered for him. If it was a multi-story building we would allocate a room for shitting.

On the floor?

No, in pots. You shit into the pot and then throw it out with the pot. But afterwards we would take a pot, put a shirt in it and shit into that.

A shirt from a closet in the house?

Yeah. And then you use the shirt like a pooper scooper and throw it out the window, and the pot stays.

Was there anything left in the closet after 14 guys were in the house?

Sometimes. Sometimes.

51

Firing shells in his memory

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant

They started saying that some guys were injured, some guys maybe killed, seriously injured, and the game of where and who-knows-what-happened got going. The company commander came over to us and told us that one guy was killed due to such-and-such, and he says, "Guys, get ready, get on your tanks, and we'll fire a barrage in memory of our comrade."

A week or two after we entered the Gaza Strip and we were all firing a lot when there wasn't any need for it – just for the sake of firing – a member of our company was killed. I remember it happened on Friday afternoon and we – my force, which is a tank platoon, we were separated from the rest of the company, not connected to them physically or in terms of missions – we were with an engineering force doing something else, and the rumors started flowing our way. They started saying that some guys were injured, some guys maybe killed, seriously injured, and the game

of where and who-knows-what-happened got going. The company commander came over to us and told us that one guy was killed due to such-and-such, and he said, “Guys, get ready, get in your tanks, and we’ll fire a barrage in memory of our comrade.” In the meantime the platoon stood in a sort of stationary circle, people were crying, people also broke some windows in the area with their weapons, and we got in the tanks and started them up. And the platoon commander asked the company commander, “We are preparing for engagement, OK?” ‘Engagement,’ that is, a tank firing at something. The company commander says, “Authorized, at your own time.” We went up, my tank went up to the post – a place from which I can see targets, can see buildings, can ensure that I can fire at them, and the platoon commander says, “OK guys, we’ll now fire in memory of our comrade,” and we said OK. Throughout the entire operation there was a sort of building far away near the coastline, around 4.5 kilometers from us, a building that nobody really even knew where it was located. I don’t even know what neighborhood that was. It wasn’t a threat to us, it had nothing to do with anybody, it wasn’t part of the operation, it was out by the sea, far away from anything and from any potential threat – but that building was painted orange, and that orange drove my eyes crazy the entire time. I’m the tank gunner, I control all the weapons systems, I have the sights and I’m the guy who actually fires and sees everything that happens, and the whole week or two, that orange was driving my eyes crazy. So I told my platoon commander: “I want to fire at that orange house,” and he told me: “Cool, whatever

you feel like,” and we fired. We fired at a distance of 4.5 kilometers, a shell that’s supposed to be used against tanks – it’s not useful for anything else, it’s not meant to harm people, only tanks, and we were just firing at that orange house because it was orange.

Did your guys discuss it later?

The bit about shelling purposelessly? No, because when you look at the bigger picture, that’s something we were doing all the time. We were firing purposelessly all day long. Hamas was nowhere to be seen – it’s not like they stood up on some roof for you holding a sign that says, ‘We are Hamas militants.’ You have no idea what’s going on, and because you don’t, your human nature is to be scared and ‘over’ defensive, so you ‘overshoot.’ And no one discusses that because it goes without saying that everyone wants to... And the rules of engagement were pretty easy-going – I was shocked when I first heard them.

52

This was one very stubborn family

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

How do you get around on the street?

The D9 (armored bulldozer) is in front; it opens up the area for you.

It also takes down lots of tin sheds, just goes right over them. If there's something or someone in there—it's gone. No one was in there – at least no human, or no living human. You have cover all the time, and you cover problematic locations. That can usually be figured out via a field analysis, and usually there's another platoon already covering problematic points. A tall building? Someone's already firing at it. It could be a tank, or another platoon, it could be the air force – someone's taking care of it. There's shooting all the time. That's absolutely pertinent: generating a stream of fire, generating fire all the time.

Is the [tank's] M16 being used the whole time?

The more the merrier. What weapons? The tank, endless ammunition, and a crazy amount of firepower. Constantly. If not via the cannon, then via the tank's heavy machine gun.

Where is it shooting at?

At everything, basically. At suspicious houses. What's a 'suspicious spot?' Everything is a suspicious spot. This is Gaza, you're firing at everything. You've got MAGs (machine guns) being fired, you have NEGEVs (light machine guns) being fired. A nearby house that looks suspicious can be blasted with a LAW (portable anti-tank rocket) while you're advancing – another platoon can do it for you. A lot of fire from all the forces. It all forms one big cover

We saw Gazan civilians only once, in daylight.

They just came over, with their hands up.

One Friday morning I saw a family going out to the street, their hands up, like in the movies

and the truth is, you feel relatively protected.

Did you see any bodies?

I don't remember. There were lots of dead animals, but I saw maybe one human body. This was basically an area devoid of people. We saw Gazan civilians only once, in daylight. They just came over, with their hands up. One Friday morning I saw a family going out to the street, their hands up, like in the movies. Right when we had just arrived. Eight or 9:00 AM in the morning. You could see them coming out – there was this more central area with no buildings in it – and they come out wearing white clothes and with their hands up. It's funny seeing people with their hands up, no one does that in reality. You only see that in movies. There was something comic about it. One of the platoons sent a squad out to them, the squad went until it was about 30 meters from them. [The Palestinians] stopped in the middle of the intersection, got down on their knees and put their hands in the air. No one had gotten into any sort of contact with them. They hadn't come out because someone had told them to, they just came out. The squad got there with a field interrogator, who called out in Arabic for the men to approach him. The men came, he spoke with them a little and then two of them went back with him. They said goodbye to their families – they would be going to the edge of Gaza, to the edge of the Bedouin neighborhood, north of us.

Why did they part with the women?

I assume for interrogation. The family started going south, to an area the IDF wasn't in.

How many people were there?

Six.

Did anyone offer an explanation as to how a family suddenly appeared in front of you?

No. We didn't discuss it. It was pretty weird because that was an area that had already been bombed and warned [that it would be bombed] the day before, and bombed and warned. This was one very stubborn family.

And weren't you worried that maybe there might be other families?

No. Because it just seemed totally absurd to us. It didn't seem at all logical that anyone would even consider sticking around there.

53

'Acquiring' the area around the tunnel

Unit: Engineering · Rank: Major

If we're talking about an attack tunnel that's meant to reach Israel, the most important thing for the military isn't to destroy its shaft straight away, but to try to understand where it comes out on the other side. If we're talking about non-attack tunnels, [but rather] defensive tunnels used by [Hamas] for controlling all kinds of areas, then what happens is that explosives are used

There's the matter of 'acquiring' the area around the tunnel, figuring out who can wrest control over the tunnel's opening. This can entail tanks opening up shellfire on buildings two kilometers away from that opening, since there might be a sniper up there who could hit soldiers

two kilometers away from that opening, since there might be a sniper up there who could hit [soldiers]. We're talking about really shaking up the entire sector. There was a massive amount of fire directed at buildings that weren't necessarily suspicious, but that could be considered suspicious simply because they commanded a view over the shaft. When we arrived at the area of the tunnel, about 100-200 meters from it, we would look at it, and assess the situation to understand which locations could command the tunnel opening. We identified the opening itself, and two rows of buildings a kilometer away that command it – i.e., [could be used by] a sniper against us. Then tanks would come and fire at those

to demolish the shaft itself. As far as blowing up the tunnel – if it's not an attack tunnel where we're talking about a truly big operation – then there's no issue of too big a radius. You insert ten mines – 100-150 kilos – and it blows up the shaft. It simply collapses in on itself. It doesn't have an impact on the surrounding area. What does impact the surrounding area is the whole issue of the noncombatants' conception of the military. There's the matter of 'acquiring' the area around the tunnel, figuring out who can wrest control over the tunnel's opening. This can entail tanks opening up shellfire on buildings

buildings. The air force uses drones, and planes too, but that's usually a preceding step. You'll have all kinds of other buildings around the tunnel – so a D9 (armored bulldozer) comes over and flattens the entire area.

54

It was just for kicks – the sort of fun you have at a shooting range

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant

The topography shifted as much as the routes shifted – new routes were cleared, old ones destroyed. The D9s (armored bulldozers) there were working 24/7, all the time, building rampart enclosures. That's a square of walls a few meters high – they need to be taller than the tanks, so that each tank is covered plus a little extra for security. It's similar to how one builds a skyscraper. First you build the foundations, a few meters deep. You could have an orchard or a courtyard of a house where suddenly the terrain dips down a few meters lower. The construction of the enclosure changes everything. It had strategic use, but it caused a lot of damage to the area. The enclosure we were in during most of the period ruined the yard, but nothing besides that. The trees did get destroyed in the end, because the tanks ran over them when





Even my commander, because he was hyped up to fire his personal weapon, took the entire team out just to shoot at the house, which was already obviously empty. So many shells were fired at it, and it was clearly empty. "Well, fire," he told us. It was meaningless. It was just for kicks - the sort of fun you have at a shooting range

they entered the orchard. That happened a lot. In the first day or two, that stuff didn't happen so often. There were some ruins here, some there – but it all looked relatively OK, relatively intact. Slowly but surely, as the operation went on, so did the destruction of houses [and also] those that were half destroyed – ones that D9s ran over, which a few shells, or even the air force, had hit. Every place you get to you shoot a few bursts and shells to 'sterilize' the house before you even enter. Any house that infantry guys enter – a tank precedes them. That was really the formulation: any force that enters a house – first, at least one tank shell is fired at it before the force even goes in. Immediately

after the engagement we set up in this orchard, we blasted shells at the surrounding houses. Even my commander, because he was hyped up to fire his personal weapon, took the entire team out just to shoot at the house, which was already obviously empty. So many shells were fired at it, and it was clearly empty. "Well, fire," he told us. It was meaningless. It was just for kicks – the sort of fun you have at a shooting range.

55

Because this is our home, because we have nowhere to escape to

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Khan Younis

Was anything in particular stressed regarding rules of engagement?

Yes, they explained what you do if you see a civilian. [They explained that] that's the way it is in combat. It was shoot to kill immediately if you see stuff. But there was nothing organized – no one said, "If someone is dressed this way don't shoot, if someone is dressed that way, shoot." [It was more along the lines of] "If you see someone – shoot." In the end you use your own judgment. Really they did say, "If you see someone – shoot him." There was this one house we entered. We entered it 'wet,' (using live fire) and suddenly we hear screaming from inside the house and this father came out of a room with his hands in the air. They stopped shooting, and within seconds the battalion's field interrogator runs in and goes to talk to

There was this one house we entered. We entered it 'wet,' (using live fire) and suddenly we hear screaming from inside the house and this father came out of a room with his hands in the air. They stopped shooting, and within seconds the battalion's field interrogator runs in and goes to talk to him. They were in the house. A family: father, mother and three kids

him. They were in the house. A family: father, mother and three kids. They were asked why they were still there, why they had stayed. And they said, “Because this is our home, because we have nowhere to escape to.” In the end the platoon stayed in that house for like three days. That entire time, the family was in one room, they were told, “We are staying in this house in the meantime, you stay in that room.” A guard was assigned to them, and they were given Israeli food. After three days the platoon moved to another house. The family either stayed or left, I don’t know.

56

Anyone there who doesn’t clearly look innocent, you apparently need to shoot

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

What were the rules of engagement?

If it looks like a man, shoot. It was simple: You’re in a motherfucking combat zone. A few hours before you went in the whole area was bombed, if there’s anyone there who doesn’t clearly look innocent, you apparently need to shoot that person.

Who’s innocent?

If you see the person is less than 1.40 meters tall, or if you see it's a lady. You can tell from far away. If it's a man you shoot.

Do you take into consideration his distance from the forces, whether he's armed or not?

Yeah, of course. I'm talking about close range. If it's from far away you have time to figure out what you're doing. From far you don't shoot immediately because you have time to report. But what's a report, it's just saying, "Commander, two enemies identified 400 meters away, southeast of blah-blah-blah, opening fire." He responds, "Affirmative."

If you see the person is less than 1.40 meters tall, or if you see it's a lady. You can tell from far away. If it's a man you shoot

Upon entering houses, is there an organized protocol used?

It really depends on the case, but generally the idea is to use a lot of fire – this isn't Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) – you want to find people in pieces inside. That's how it's managed, in a nutshell. Besides, usually a D9 (armored bulldozer) comes over, takes down a wall and you enter through the wall.

57

They weren't sure it wasn't some family they just took down in there

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

We identified a few [figures]. Something black moving through the house – ‘black’ meaning hot. It took some work to secure a source of firepower that could be used against the house. An aircraft was directed at it – and later we spotted ambulances [arriving] at the area and some kind of crowd. The soldier and the officer weren't sure they understood what had happened there, they weren't sure it wasn't some family they just took down in there. And later on the news there were reports of five deaths in that neighborhood. There was no way to know, you can't know for sure – but there was no way we could have [determined if the figures in the house] were armed, or posed some kind of threat. It was clear to everyone that the possibility [of determining whether or not they were armed] was nonexistent, and it was clear to everyone that this was a gray zone where you say to yourself, “That could very well be an innocent person.” If that's an innocent person, what's he doing there? It could be that a second later he'll pull something out and endanger a soldier who is somewhere out there. It was perfectly clear that this was the situation there. This dilemma is

always present, throughout the operation. You don't know who's innocent and who isn't, and there are cases when you will never know. Seen in this light, [that incident] was very significant.

What was the distance between the forces and [the figures they spotted]?

I don't know. We knew there were forces there, you could see tank rampart enclosures (defensive compounds made of rubble embankments) here and there. But it wasn't like there was a detailed update about where there were forces and what the distances were between them and the identification. You verify with the operation rooms that there are no [IDF] forces there, you inform the battalion, the battalion is supposed to arrange for firepower from the division, that's where the circle closes. It took a long time until they addressed that report, that's why it took, like, two hours.

And what happens after those two hours?

They (the forces facilitating the fire) get in touch with us for precise details, exact location, which window, which floor. It's the most precise fire there is. And then they fired, and [reported] a hit.

We identified a few [figures]. Something black moving through the house - 'black' meaning hot. It took some work to secure a source of firepower that could be used against the house. An aircraft was directed at it - and later we spotted ambulances [arriving] at the area and some kind of crowd

58

Lots of innocent people were hurt in that incident, lots

Unit: Not for Publication · Rank: Sergeant First Class ·

Location: Gaza City

When I saw what was going on in there it was quite a shock because

There was a feeling of craziness in how much fire was used [in the aftermath of the event] – and once it was over we continued fighting ‘normally.’ The lack of proportionality between the before and after – some would say that it’s understandable, but my feeling was that even while you’re fighting you can’t lose your sense of proportion

really an enormous amount of artillery was fired there – not only [bombs fired from jets], and for me personally that was hard. We lost several soldiers there (the testifier is referring to the incident in which seven soldiers were killed when a rocket hit their APC). On the one hand there was that, and on the other hand there was a feeling of craziness in how much fire was used [in the aftermath of the event] – and once it was over we continued fighting ‘normally.’ The lack of proportionality between the before and after – some would say that it’s understandable, but my feeling was that even while you’re fighting you can’t lose your sense of proportion. In order to evacuate the guys who were left they

created a smokescreen to keep hostile combatants away from in the area. Lots of innocent people were hurt in that incident, lots. Sometimes, like in that case, you don't really have time to double-check [that the civilian population had evacuated], and despite the fact that in this incident I think a warning did go out to the civilians to leave the neighborhood – there were people there. I can't tell you if we knew there were people there, but factually, there were.

59

Shooting if you feel threatened is absolutely the most moral thing to do

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Deir al-Balah

If you see a figure or person in the window of a house, what are you supposed to do?

You shoot, right at that second. The gunner reports to the commander or to someone else, but anyone who makes an identification reports it immediately to the commander and he usually authorizes.

Say you're conducting a sweep at night, and suddenly you identify a person in a window 250 meters away. What happens then?

I report to the commander. It depends on the distance, on a few

The gunner is searching, and he knows that he is expected to ultimately locate people in windows. He says, "I spotted something in that window," and the commander looks along with him. He looks, they verify and then he says, "Authorized" and they shoot

variables. But I release a shell or a burst of fire. That happened lots of times. The gunner is searching, and he knows that he is expected to ultimately locate people in windows. He says, "I spotted something in that window," and the commander looks along with him. He looks, they verify and then he says, "Authorized" and they shoot. It was clear to everyone that there is no such thing as civilians. Only on the last day did we come into contact with civilians, for the first time. We didn't identify too many people except for a head in a window once in a while. The

air force warned [them] ahead of time, and it was pretty obvious that the area was clear. Anyone that's in the area despite that fact that it's 'clean' is almost certainly a combatant. He isn't going to be innocent, and the risk is significant enough to shoot him immediately. That's also what the commanders told us, and the officers, both senior and junior. They told us, "Bottom line is, shooting if you feel threatened is absolutely the most moral thing to do because the chance that it's a civilian is very small," because everyone had been evacuated.



60

You don't spare any means

Unit: Infantry • Rank: Lieutenant • Location: Rafah

So I heard that the reconnaissance platoon got into a confrontation, and that it looked like we were talking about two [IDF soldiers] dead and one captured. That's when the mess got started. The minute 'Hannibal Directive' is declared on the radio, there are consequences. There's a fire procedure called the 'Hannibal fire procedure' – you fire at every suspicious place that merges with

a central route. You don't spare any means. A thousand shells were fired that Friday morning, at all the central intersections. The entire Tancher [Route] (the continuation of Highway 4 in Gaza) was bombed. The air force attacked places inside Rafah City, places in which we knew there were Hamas militants. Was there collateral damage to houses? I'm sure there was. It was very intense, that incident. After the area was hit by 1,000 shells that Friday morning, I saw Tancher in ruins. Everything totally wrecked.

How long did this shelling last?

Three hours.*

*Note: As a result of the IDF bombings in Rafah, between 41-150 Palestinians were killed, many of them civilians.

61

Running over a car is sort of the wet dream of every guy in a tank crew

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Running over a car is sort of the wet dream of every guy in a tank crew, of every tank driver, more or less. Me, myself, I got to do it. On some of the first nights we carried out attacks on a few houses

for which we had intelligence, and really we then discovered that we had destroyed two anti-tank missile launchers. On the way back, just a few dozen meters after we turned, we turned around and saw a car on the side of the road – already half destroyed, nothing we hadn't seen before.

I asked my commander if I could run over it and he approved, and he told me, "Just remember that you're going to have to clean it off the caterpillar tracks later." And on the last day we indeed had a lot to clean up.

The platoon commander authorized that?

No, the tank commander. It's not something you need permission for, it's not like shooting, for which I would need to get permission. I asked the tank commander if I could run over the car for a second, it was parked anyway. With one caterpillar track I got up on it, and really you don't feel it at all. Going over it we felt so little that I suspected we might have missed it. It was pretty cool in the end, I didn't feel any remorse or anything, that I had done something wrong. The car was a bit wrecked anyway, and that neighborhood – we had just attacked it, there was fighting there – so I wasn't thinking to myself, "Hmm, someone might need that car now."

Running over a car is sort of the wet dream of every guy in a tank crew, of every tank driver, more or less. Me, myself, I got to do it

62

Listen, we did just destroy at least a whole neighborhood in there

Unit: Nahal · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

What was the process for entering houses?

Any neighborhood you go to, when you arrive it has already been ‘sterilized,’ that is to say, you have lookout posts telling you it’s empty, and specific places in it have already been bombed. These tactics were effective – fact is, not once did we run into a single terrorist up close. Also, when you get close to a building you ‘soften’ it up, which usually involves tank fire, and if not tanks then portable rockets – shoulder-fired rockets and grenade launchers, things that blow up inside the houses.

Would the tanks be firing machine guns or shells?

Shellfire. The forces usually fire at least one shell before going in [to a house]. Either that or a MATADOR or a LAW (portable anti-tank rockets), so that if there’s anyone inside, they won’t be there when we go in, one way or another. And then we go into the house, shooting as we ‘open’ it, often using lots of grenades, too. Every room you ‘open’ you do it while firing – depending on the forces in the area. You don’t want to shoot your own forces, so you don’t shoot in their direction. You go room by room, ‘clean’ it all

up. If there's a locked room you usually open it up with some sort of explosive, or a grenade. In Beit Lahia we used small explosives on every door. We used segments of a breaching frame (a frame constructed out of a chain of explosive segments, used for breaking through doors or walls). You take one segment and affix it to the door – and very little of the door is left, it gets blown in and then you 'open' the room. Or you can use a grenade, which is what we did in Beit Hanoun, for example. You put a grenade by the door, go way back, the grenade blows the hell out of the door, and that's that.

How do you feel when you complete the operation?

It's complicated. It's not a happy feeling – but it does feel good, mostly thanks to the fact that no one in my battalion was hurt in a serious way. 'Happy' isn't the word, because listen, we did just destroy at least a whole neighborhood in there. When you set up in a house, the house doesn't stay the way it was. You open an exit in the back with a hammer, you fortify the house, you usually throw grenades at a lot of places. You erect a rubble embankment in front of the house with a D9

When you set up in a house, the house doesn't stay the way it was. You open an exit in the back with a hammer, you fortify the house, you usually throw grenades at a lot of places. You erect a rubble embankment in front of the house with a D9 (an armored bulldozer) to protect against rockets, you raze the house that's closest in order to reduce risks, and you level the area both in back and in front

(an armored bulldozer) to protect against rockets, you raze the house that's closest in order to reduce risks, and you level the area both in back and in front.

How do you raze the adjacent house?

It's razed by a D9. Usually when the company positions itself in several houses in the area, part or all of the houses in close proximity that pose a threat are taken down. Let's just say wherever the battalion was positioned, nothing was left standing, at least not at full height.

63

OK, mark another one here. And here

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant

My job is to look at the area, determine what's a threat to [the forces] and demarcate it as a target. When and how we activate [firepower], that's done according to the rules of engagement, according to the situation, according to the specific intelligence that exists at the time. In the end you also okay it with your commander, who's a person with really a whole lot more experience and he's the final authority in the unit, and he tells you, "Listen, I want [targets] here, and here, and here too." Usually what the commander does is tack on another five or ten targets on top of

the list you made, approves all the stuff you listed, and that's it.

When the commander adds targets, that's after he already calculated the safety ranges from civilians?

No, no. The commander worries about the safety of his troops and he doesn't care about anything professional. When he sees something that's a threat – no matter the reason – he tells you, “Add a target there, we'll approve it later.” The commander's logic being that we don't want this thing threatening us. The moment the smallest thing poses a threat to me, I wipe it out. And I know that if I enter into an engagement there, the target will already be marked and I'll say over the two-way radio that I'm being threatened from over there. I mean, that's the commander's logic. The most serious [‘target list’ I prepared] was during the entry [to the Gaza Strip]. I marked the spots and went to the commander and he told me, “OK listen, mark another one here. And an artillery target here.”

What was there?

Nothing. Just to broaden [the list]. I brought a transparency like that to the commander and he tells me, “Listen, I want a line of artillery targets here as well.” And you mark a line there, or you mark a specific target, and then he tells you “OK, I want as much as possible – the most.” The commander gets this transparency

He tells you, “Listen, I want [targets] here, and here, and here too.” Usually what the commander does is tack on another five or ten targets on top of the list you made, approves all the stuff you listed, and that's it

and he tells you, “Listen, this is the first line – I can't take any risks on the first line of houses, use artillery on those.”

Did he have any intelligence on those houses?

No, no, he has no intelligence. The commander takes a look, goes, “I go in here with my soldiers, and I want to get everyone out after the war.” The brigade, which [works] really closely with the intelligence [corps], has to approve or not approve [the targets] for you. In the end it's [the brigade] that's in control – me, I don't have artillery, they're the ones in control. There were many times that they, for instance, canceled things, canceled stuff. But because of the heavy workload and the madness and the fighting and the wounded, then [over in the brigade] they get a transparency, go ‘whatever,’ and approve it. You know, everything is written down, and it just gets fed straight into the system, “These are the targets,” coordinate one, coordinate two.

64

When the ‘target list’ is exhausted

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

Do you know how high-ranking a [Hammas] militant needs to be in order for his residence be incriminated as the ‘house of an activist?’

No, and it depends on the stage of combat.

When the ‘target list’ is exhausted, is the threshold of the rank of militants whose residences get struck lowered?

Absolutely. See, you start the fighting with a very orderly ‘target list’ that has been assembled over a long period of time, and there are also units whose objective is to mark new targets in real-time. And when we start running out [of targets], then we begin hitting targets that are higher on collateral damage levels, and pay less and less attention to that – but there are also all sorts of efforts aimed at gathering intelligence that’s specifically for establishing new targets – which means, for example, which areas are being used to launch [missiles or mortars toward Israel], statistics on where rockets are being fired from, where mortars are being fired from. [The coordinates] are calculated in a pretty precise way, and are used to try and figure out where it’s likely that there is rocket-launching infrastructure. And you say, “OK, I’ll strike that piece of land, because every morning at 7:00 AM, 10 mortar shells are fired from there.”

But there’s no information that there are people there carrying out launches – the fact that they go there doesn’t mean anything about that piece of land?

You start the fighting with a very orderly ‘target list’ that’s has been assembled over a long period of time, and there are also units whose objective is to mark out new targets in real-time. And when we start running out [of targets], then we begin hitting targets that are higher on collateral damage levels, and pay less and less attention to that

That's correct.

And yet it would still be considered a launching site?

Possibly, yes.

65

He's inside a combat zone... He's an enemy, he should have known better

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Deir al-Balah

What are scouts?

There are places we knew no one was supposed to be – so if you saw anyone there, even if he's unarmed, he's considered a scout. Maybe he has a sniper rifle concealed behind him, maybe he's a sniper – but we would call such a person a scout because no weapon could be seen. As far as we're concerned, such a person is a terrorist, for all intents and purposes. He could be directing forces, directing mortars, gathering information on where we sleep.

In order to incriminate him, do you need something in particular – or is his very presence incriminating?

His very presence in a combat zone. If you see someone walking in the street and he's just wandering around in the street but you can

tell there's something unusual going on – you don't just go ahead and shoot him, especially if he doesn't have a weapon on him, doesn't have a big coat on. That's what we were told. Say you see someone in the window of a house, in a place with a good vantage point, looking around – that's a scout. From our perspective he's a target, by all means. He's inside a combat zone, it's pretty clearly a combat zone, it's being bombed, and [the Palestinians living there] were warned two days beforehand to leave. So he's an enemy, he should have known better. Do you want to risk your life when he has a sniper rifle behind him as he's looking around? No, I won't take that chance. If I see a man in a window in a place he's not supposed to be – he's incriminated.

Then you direct fire at him?

Yes. If it was the house next to mine I would immediately respond. The problem is that my effective range isn't so far when I'm using an M16 and its sights – so we directed other forces. If I were to see something like that – he'd get a bullet straight away. Without hesitating. I say this very clearly. I would not risk my life for any person like that, who's in a place that is a known combat zone. Say

I say this very clearly. I would not risk my life for any person like that, who's in a place that is a known combat zone. Say you see a pregnant woman – and keep in mind even a pregnant woman could blow herself up on you – you are still a human being – you don't just throw a grenade at her. There is logic. But if you see a man, and it's clear that he's between 20 and 40 years old – then you don't hesitate

you see a pregnant woman – and keep in mind even a pregnant woman could blow herself up on you – you are still a human being – you don't just throw a grenade at her. There is logic. But if you see a man, and it's clear that he's between 20 and 40 years old – then you don't hesitate.

66

Let's show them

Unit: Givati • Rank: Lieutenant • Location: Rafah

The motto guiding lots of people was, "Let's show them." It was evident that that was a starting point. "Let's show them." Lots of guys who did their reserve duty with me don't have much pity towards... The only thing that drives them is to look after their soldiers, and the mission – they are driven towards an IDF victory, at any price. And they sleep just fine at night. They are totally at peace with that. These aren't people who spend their days looking for things to kill. By no means. But they aren't afraid to kill, either. They don't see it as something bad. The power-trip element is also at play, it's all kinds of things. I think that a lot can be learned from Operation 'Protective Edge' about the issue of dealing with civilians, and how that works. There were a lot of people there who really hate Arabs. Really, really hate Arabs. You could see the hate in their eyes.

67

The lives of our soldiers come before the lives of enemy civilians

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Gaza Strip

[Combat engineering forces] blew up a lot of houses, even while we were there [in the Gaza Strip]. Here, too, the question arises about the operational benefit versus the cost. There are all kinds of considerations about why to blow up a house. One of them, for example, is when you want to defend some other house. If there's a house blocking your field of vision, [and you want to] expose the area so that it's easier to defend.

Did you do that?

We didn't blow up the houses but yeah, the company did it, the battalion commander and company commander decide on it. Sometimes we blew up a house when we suspected there was an explosive device in it, but I think ultimately we blew up pretty much the entire neighborhood. There are other considerations as well: " Hamas could set up a lookout post there, so let's blow up the house" or stuff like that. I think there was operational justification for blowing up houses – but the policy was a bit trigger-happy. There was this bumper sticker during the operation that said, 'The lives of our soldiers come before the lives of enemy civilians.' This

was sort of the policy because all these things really help protect the lives of IDF soldiers, and so the question becomes, where is the line? Or in which cases do we risk the lives of IDF soldiers because of certain values, because of ethics? That's a big question. If I, as a commander, need to take over house number 22 and on the way there there's this little house number 21, and the D9 (armored bulldozer) can raze it so that it poses no risk to me... This wasn't the choice I made, but that's the way the scales were balanced. Either I don't take it down and it keeps posing a risk, or...

68

The possibility that some old man who can't get out is there

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: Not for publication

On Sunday afternoon we went to protect a tank that was stuck in the field. We replaced a different platoon toward which fire had apparently been directed – they didn't identify exactly where from. Something that sounded like small arms. They returned fire to the area but didn't quite see and then one of the soldiers identified [a figure] inside a house in the neighborhood, inside our zone. We knew it wasn't one of our forces. He thought he saw movement inside the house, he couldn't know for sure – a soldier who's very

alert can also be overly alert perhaps. A tank was directed [to fire] there, too.

At that moment were you – or the engineering forces working with you – being fired at?

No. It was just before evening, before twilight maybe. My officer was directing the tank. But the directive, “Whoever you identify is an enemy” was convenient for any of the soldiers, and for me, too. [It’s] a convenient directive. The justification that’s behind it is that the IDF distributed hundreds of thousands of flyers warning the residents to evacuate, and also made phone calls, and I don’t know what other methods. In addition, before we entered [the Gaza Strip] there was warning fire by the artillery corps – imprecise fire, not directed at targets but rather as another means to warn the residents. Fire is directed at open areas as a warning, and then at the [structures pre-determined as targets]. The armored corps, too, was firing from the line where it’s positioned. The problem with all these things is that there’s always the possibility that there’s some old man who can’t get out, who has difficulty evacuating. But because the firepower is so great, the [individual] soldier almost never faces any dilemmas. It takes the burden of

The problem with all these things is that there’s always the possibility that there’s some old man who can't get out, who has difficulty evacuating. But because the firepower is so great, the [individual] soldier almost never faces any dilemmas. It takes the burden of dilemmas off of him

dilemmas off of him. The less firepower we use upon entering, the more civilian population there will be, the more enemy presence there will be – lots of dilemmas for the individual soldier over whether to shoot or not to shoot. A woman, a child, a teenager...

69

An accomplishment before the ceasefire

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication ·
Location: Northern Gaza Strip

In general, making incriminations was harder during the beginning [of the operation], so as is natural during a difficult combat situation, in an area where fighting is taking place, it was sufficient that we knew there was intelligence on a certain house – [and even if it was] less intelligence than usual, it was enough to fire at the house or

to tell [the ground forces] to shoot at it.

Various targets were hit by fighter jets that night - the air force just hit them after the ground forces retreated

For example, in the ‘Sevimon’ neighborhood, (east of Beit Hanoun) I would say that half of the houses were wiped out. There were battles in Beit Hanoun – [IDF soldiers] were wounded and a few munitions caches were found during those battles. And then



there was one night that [ground forces] advanced into combat and then retreated, and when they retreated air force jets struck the houses in which the caches were found earlier on. Aside from those targets, there were also the houses belonging to Hamas' battalion commanders and company commanders. Various targets were hit by fighter jets that night –the air force just hit them after the ground forces retreated.

When did [the air force] attack?

Six or 7:00 AM. Before the beginning of the ceasefire.

Why right then and not earlier, if there was intelligence?

To strike a significant blow – ‘an accomplishment’ before the ceasefire. It's sad, but that's the way things are done.

70

The discourse is racist. The discourse is nationalistic

Unit: Gaza Division • Rank: Lieutenant

As opposed to previous operations, you could feel there was a radicalization in the way the whole thing was conducted. The

I was in the base, and
some clerk goes to me,
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that way because
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discourse was extremely right-wing. The military obviously has very clear enemies – the Arabs, Hamas. There is this rigid dichotomy. There are those involved [Palestinians involved in the fighting] and those uninvolved, and that’s it. But the very fact that they’re described as ‘uninvolved’, rather than as civilians, and the desensitization to the surging number of dead on the Palestinian side – and it doesn’t matter whether they’re involved or not – the unfathomable number of dead on one of the sides, the unimaginable level of destruction, the way militant cells and people were regarded as targets and not as living beings – that’s something that troubles me. The discourse is racist.

The discourse is nationalistic. The discourse is anti-leftist. It was an atmosphere that really, really scared me. And it was really felt, while we were inside. During the operation it gets radicalized. I was at the base, and some clerk says to me, “Yeah, give it to them, kill them all.” And you say to yourself, ‘Whatever, they’re just kids, it’s just talk’ – but they’re talking that way because someone allowed them to talk that way. If that clerk was the only one saying it I’d write her off – but when everyone starts talking like that...

71

They fired the way it’s done in funerals, but with shellfire and at houses

Unit: Armored Corps · Rank: First Sergeant

On the day the fellow from our company was killed, the commanders came up to us and told us what happened. Then they decided to fire an ‘honor barrage’ and fire three shells. They said, “This is in memory of ****.” That felt very out of line to me, very problematic.

A barrage of what?

A barrage of shells. They fired the way it’s done in funerals, but with shellfire and at houses. Not into the air. They just chose [a

house] – the tank commander said, “Just pick the farthest one, so it does the most damage.” Revenge of sorts. So we fired at one of the houses. Really you just see a block of houses in front of you, so the distance doesn’t really matter.

Three shells on the same spot?

Yeah. I don’t remember exactly what time it was, but it was close to sunset.

72

There was no electricity or water. The electrical poles were leveled too

Unit: Mechanized Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant

I don’t know how much [what I saw] was similar to what was going on in the areas around us, but there was no electricity or water. The electrical poles were leveled too, but I think the electricity was down before that already. The D9 (armored bulldozer) passed through and the electrical poles were in its way. I don’t know if it was a clear order, or just collateral. From the first day we entered Gaza there was no electricity – or water, either. There was a house that had a bathroom that for some reason a Puma (a type of APC) or Merkava tank tore down a wall and broke its only

functioning bathroom. We (the forces positioned in the house) were in there and it was dirty, the rugs, and the whole mess we made there. And in another house we broke a window when we entered and there were lots of holes from heavy machine gun fire. The refrigerator got shot. There were ‘suspicious points,’ so they fired at refrigerators.

Because they thought someone could hide inside a refrigerator? Or put explosives inside. Piles of blankets were fired at, too, and the closets had bullet holes in them. And broken windows, things like that, mostly. We didn’t have camouflage netting because they were on the APC that left, so we took all kinds of curtains and stuck them up and stretched them, and that was our lookout post.

73

Suddenly Haniyeh’s mansion goes up in the air, too

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Lieutenant

Were there attacks on “symbols of government?”

Symbols of government, definitely. There’s always love directed at Haniyeh’s mansion, (Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas’ leader in the Gaza Strip) and at some point it got fired at. Such targets, by the way, are often kept for the later stages, as a psychological kind of thing.

That is, they don't do it right at the start [of the operation], during the big wave. Often it's isolated into some specific incident – say, a one-sided escalation, or they hit something, or they carried out some really big terror attack –and then suddenly Haniyeh's mansion goes up in the air, too.

74

Then we went down into the street
and the houses we were supposed
to take over no longer existed

Unit: Infantry • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Northern Gaza Strip

I remember one time that explosives were detonated in order to clear passage routes. They told us, “Take cover, it's about to be used 100-150 meters away.” Then an explosion – I've never heard anything like it. Lamps crashing, it was insane – a crazy mushroom of fire, really crazy. Then we went down into the street and the houses we were supposed to take over no longer existed. Gone. [You] start walking up the stairs, and you walk two steps up and there are no more stairs – it's destruction on a whole other level. When we left [the Gaza Strip], we went through all the wreckage, which used to be Beit Hanoun, and I really remember that. It was before the air force strikes on the neighborhood. We just couldn't

believe it – we kept asking ourselves, how does one even start to clear this up? We tried to think about what the family would go through when they returned to their home, and in the best-case scenario what's left of the house is a bit of its floor and two walls. How does one go about cleaning all the wreckage? Who's going to clean it up and how are they going to do it?

75

We are entering a war zone

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Captain

The entire time, neither before the incursion nor during the incursion [to the Gaza Strip] were there any clearly defined rules of engagement. Rules of engagement are part of the combat procedure, it's the first thing given to every company that goes in – and there were none.

They didn't explain the rules of engagement, or what they said was unclear?

They didn't say, they didn't touch the topic. During the briefing with the battalion commander on the night of the incursion, he was asked what the rules of engagement were, how we conduct ourselves, whom we shoot and whom we don't. What he said was – and this was the general gist of things – “We are entering a war

During the briefing with the battalion commander on the night of the incursion, he was asked what the rules of engagement were, how we conduct ourselves, who we shoot and who we don't. What he said was - and this was the general gist of things - "We are entering a war zone." Meaning, what we prepared for during training - combat in urban areas. The IDF distributed flyers informing the residents of the areas we were entering, and that anyone remaining in the area was in effect sentencing themselves to death

zone." Meaning, what we prepared for during training - combat in urban areas. The IDF distributed flyers informing the residents of the areas we were entering, and that anyone remaining in the area was in effect sentencing themselves to death. That's what was said. This, I think, was very reassuring for any soldier about to enter [the Gaza Strip]. Because A) you want to know the IDF is warning the residents. B) Combat in Gaza is very complicated because on the one hand there's us [going in] and on the other hand the [Gaza] Strip is so small that the residents don't really have anywhere to escape. I say this is reassuring as a soldier because if, for example, you want to know whether you can throw a grenade into a house [to protect] your life, you would rather know that you can do that.

Often rules of engagement also describe at whom you cannot shoot. Were there any instructions regarding civilians or uninvolved people?

That was what was missing. There was no reference to it from higher up - from

the battalion commander, say. I was waiting for this to come from higher up – and it didn't. I remember that night I sat the guys down and told them what happens in the event of civilians. Officers held a meeting on how we define that issue to the soldiers. [Our definition was that] we would enter while shooting, enter a house with a grenade – the way it was defined – but ultimately we use our judgment if we run into a woman or child. We use our judgment and we don't shoot. During Operation 'Pillar of Defense,' I remember everything went by really fast – within 36 hours of being called up, we were geared up and ready to go, but even during that short period of time I remember that when we got to the staging area, someone said to me, "You're an officer? Here," and gave me a kit with maps and all kinds of booklets and formal IDF materials, and also a little booklet with instructions on how to deal with the civilian population. In that exact stage of the preparations, this kit [was something every commander was given]. I was given no such thing during [Operation] 'Protective Edge.'

When you laid out rules of engagement for your soldiers, were you in effect violating, or contradicting the battalion commander's orders?

Yes, we contradicted the rules of engagement, but I think what we defined as regulations filled a certain vacuum. The rules of engagement were more or less that we were entering a war. We briefed the soldiers on [how to act while manning] posts, while inside houses, while defending themselves. We laid out rules of engagement using our common sense. If I remember correctly, we

defined a suspect arrest procedure (a procedure that dictates firing warning shots before directing fire at a suspect), a procedure that contradicts the directive of, “Anyone you see, you shoot.”

Which was essentially the directive?

Basically, yes.

Shooting to kill?

Yes.

76

The only thing left standing was one wobbly house

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

There were lots of discussions on ethics before we entered [the Gaza Strip]: what we can do, what we can't do. When we enter a house, can we sleep on the beds? Should we sleep on the floor? But when I'm actually going into combat, whether or not it's OK to sleep on their bed is the last thing I'm worried about. What's sleeping on their bed compared to my life? Some people did voice concerns. When we left the first house [we had taken over], we slogged away cleaning it for about three hours because there was some claim that we shouldn't let it be detected that we had been in there – and

also because of the moral aspect – that we need to try and return the house to its former state, as much as possible. When we left [the Gaza Strip], most of the houses we had stayed in were blown up, so it's kind of funny... But the way we treated all the following houses was different. It becomes clear that you don't have it in you to deal with this – not emotionally, not physically. You don't have the patience to keep a house clean. It was a dilemma, when we entered houses. There's one image that's burned into my memory. There was a house that we entered, which we stayed in for a very long time – we had taken to sitting on the couches – and if the floor got wet we tore off a piece of mattress to wipe it up with. In the end, one thing that was very dangerous was the illnesses. We used whatever we had around in the house. At a certain point you have to go to the bathroom.

Did you use the bathrooms in the houses?

Yes. You use a plastic bag and then throw it out. But when you wake up in the middle of the night you're a little more disrespectful – when it comes down to it, it's a difficult situation emotionally, and you don't have the emotional energy – especially when it comes to your most basic needs: peeing, shitting, and eating. So sometimes you find yourself peeing in a toilet that you know is getting flooded, and whoever comes back to that house will have a very hard time getting the place back to the way it was.

You said earlier that the houses you stayed in got blown up afterward.

Yes. After we left I heard a boom. I looked back and I saw an air

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bombardment, and they told us, "Yeah, there's going to be a ceasefire, so we want to have 'the final word' before we leave."

Who told you that?

All kinds of lectures from our commander. I saw it with my own eyes, it was a kilometer away. It's hard not to notice a half-ton bomb getting dropped on a house. And after that three more bombs, and then five more, and then another 20. It was impossible to sleep, really. At a certain point there was this crazy thing, the only thing left standing was one wobbly house. This was three weeks, two weeks in. Two weeks in, the reaction that this got was a

cynical one, and it really couldn't have led to any other kind of reaction.

What do you mean by a cynical reaction?

"Aww shoot, look, now they're blowing everything up, damn, why didn't we allow ourselves to use that couch, it looked so comfortable."

77

It was obvious that if it wasn't our forces there, we needed to shoot

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Captain

There was an incident in which a soldier manning a post with binoculars spotted a person moving inside a house that was far away – beyond the perimeter of the battalion's zone. The location meant he was definitely not one of our forces, [it was in the zone where] a company from a neighboring force was deployed. We knew it wasn't them, so we opened fire. Our sharpshooters fired, and two minutes later we directed the battalion commander in the tank. They missed with the first shell. I don't know where it hit, it went over the house. They hit with the second and third shells.

Was this during the day or night?

Day. [We] weren't being fired at.

Why was the fire authorized?

Within the context of the unclear, undefined instructions, it was obvious that if it wasn't our forces there, we needed to shoot. Two minutes later we moved on to the next house and forgot all about it.

78

Everyone wanted to take part

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Captain

I'll tell you about something that I consider very, very, very problematic. It took place within our forces, and it happened in lots of cases. During quiet moments, when not a lot of intelligence was coming in, when we weren't really firing at any targets, at times when there was a lull – for whatever reason, and Hamas was quiet and not firing as much as usual – then there was always a question mark: is [Hamas] not shooting now because we managed to hit a strategic target? And then we start digging into our intelligence to see if something specific happened, or maybe they're just collecting themselves? Or maybe they really are taking a break because we called a ceasefire and they are honoring it. And during such a lull an officer will come up to you – sometimes a more senior one, sometimes less – and say, "OK, we have this moment of quiet, let's see which targets we haven't bombed yet, what else we can incriminate, what else we can declare as definite targets, let's start working on it." And then you find yourself – and I'm being very careful about how I say this – coercing yourself to find more targets that are quality targets, good targets. Now, in some cases that's totally legit. You've suddenly got a moment of quiet so you can clear out all the noise and look at the data that's coming in and see if it's really

quality and if you can wrest some targets out of it, or figure out some puzzle that eluded you until now by cross-checking data or something else. And sometimes the forces are so eager to keep firing or creating more targets for themselves, that often you cut a few corners to be able to say, "OK, there might be something here, and in the past when we saw such things we turned out to be right, and, well, if the house is empty and you happen to have the munitions then OK, go ahead, take it down." That was how it was for everyone. Everyone wanted to take part.

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79

Everyone - from the commander all the way down - took dumps in pots, out of some kind of operational principle. Whatever

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant ·

Location: Northern Gaza Strip

I'm thinking about that poor family whose rooftop was turned into a public bathroom by the entire company, what an awful thing.

What's this story?

At some point you need to take a crap, and at first we weren't given the bags one stashes in one's helmets, which are really uncomfortable, so one of the guys found a plastic chair, a simple classroom one, and unscrewed its seat, and that chair was moved from one shaded place to another shaded place. The entire battalion had diarrhea and was throwing up. How awful, I thought, it would be to come back home and discover your bathroom is clogged and half the pots in your kitchen have shit in them. Your entire roof is covered in shit, and there's shit in your garden.

People shat in pots?

Yes. There were lots of disputes among the commanders about this. At a certain point we entered a house that had working cooking gas. First thing everyone thought was, 'Let's make

ourselves some coffee.’ So then there was a very, very heated argument among the company commanders over whether it was legitimate or not to use it. There were some commanders who thought it was legitimate to use their coffee pot if we washed it afterwards. ‘I made a hole in their wall and floor, so what, I’m not going to make some coffee in their pot?’

So did you make coffee?

Yeah, and it was tasty. But the shitting in pots bit was very clear to everyone. There were some assholes who were just like, “What, I don’t like shitting in a helmet.”

So they just shat in pots. There were very few houses that had running water in them, and in most houses there, what you have are squat toilets. But once in a while you would get to a house with a real [seated] toilet, which is a whole other world, proper hospitality... There was no running water the entire time we were in Beit Hanoun. There were some houses where I think the residents had prepared for the situation in advance – bathtubs filled with water and all kinds of things like that. The residents there saved up water because they knew what was coming. But in most houses the sewage system didn’t work and it usually overflowed very quickly. When you shit in the toilet it stays there, the water doesn’t go down. That’s on the one hand. But then on the other,

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if there is a toilet there – why shouldn't I shit in it? So the simple soldiers, like good soldiers, found the 'middle path' themselves; they got their hands on some laundry detergent and whoever finished taking a dump would throw a handful on it. Eventually I figured out that there are some battles where it's you fighting a wall. You need to decide where you're going to invest your energy, with regard to discipline. Successfully upholding a routine of discipline within the platoon, while in a combat situation, is a very difficult, complicated thing. It was clear to me that I couldn't win everything. If I wasn't going to discipline soldiers, then besides creating a bad atmosphere and frustration for both them and me, I wouldn't get much accomplished. So I would tell them my opinion, and explain what I thought wasn't OK, and ultimately I let each man decide for himself, whether he sees it as OK or not. I know there was one platoon where everyone – from the commander all the way down – took dumps in pots, out of some kind of operational principle. Whatever.

80

The day after

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Lieutenant • Location: Gaza City

Part of the [military] engineering rationale, of what's called 'the

day after' – I don't know if that's a term that gets published – is that when we blow up and raze areas, we can in effect sterilize them. Throughout the period of combat, one keeps in mind that there is this thing called 'the day after,' which is: the day we leave [the Gaza Strip], the more [areas] left wide-open and as 'clean' as possible – the better. One decides on a certain line – during the days after Operation 'Cast Lead' it was 300 meters from the fence – and it's leveled, flattened. Doesn't matter if there are groves there, doesn't matter if there are houses, doesn't matter if there are gas stations – it's all flattened because we are at war, so we are allowed to. You can justify anything you do during wartime.. Everything suddenly sounds reasonable even though it isn't really reasonable. We had a few D9s (armored bulldozers) in our battalion and I can attest that the D9s alone destroyed hundreds of structures. It was in the debriefing. There were a few more structures that we blew up in the end. Obviously there were all kinds of other things, but the D9 was the main tool, it doesn't stop working. Anything that looks suspicious, whether it's just to clear a path, whether it's some other thing, whatever – it takes it down. That's the mission.

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81

Rules of engagement were, in effect, to shoot to kill upon any identification

Unit: Engineering · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Gaza City

The briefing on rules of engagement was [to open fire at], “Anything you think you should [open fire at]... Anyone you spot that you can be positive is not the IDF.” The only emphasis regarding rules of engagement was to make sure you weren’t firing at IDF forces, but other than that, “Any person you see.” From the very start they told us, “Shoot to kill.” As far as the IDF was concerned, there wasn’t supposed to be any civilian population there. And we really didn’t ever run into the civilian population.

You were told this before entering [the Gaza Strip]?

That’s what we were told, not in those words. They gave us all kinds of briefings, warned us about the threat of explosive devices and about terrorists disguised as civilians. So we know this exists and that there’s no reason to let a civilian get up close to you. When going out into the field, the rules of engagement were, in effect, to shoot to kill upon any identification [of a person].



82

'Roof knocking' gave them enough time to go down into some burrow

Unit: Gaza Division • Rank: Lieutenant

The whole 'roof knocking' thing (a practice in which a small missile is fired at the roof of a building as an advance warning that it will shortly be destroyed in an air strike) was understood [by Hamas] very quickly. Hamas forces are very light, really, and for them – in contrast to the general [Gaza Strip] population, and

this is the great tragedy –‘roof knocking’ gave them enough time to go down into some burrow, or to run between the houses and vanish from the area. But for a family with a grandmother who’s sitting in the living room, it’s a bit harder. And that, too, is part of the whole thing. Because of the huge amount of data being received and sent out, and also because of the amount of targets bombarded every day, you would often get a lot of data that says, ‘such-and-such a number of uninvolved civilians were wounded,’ and you don’t really know who are civilians and who aren’t. This is data that comes from the Palestinians’ sources.

83

Look, we’re going to put on a show

Unit: Infantry • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Northern Gaza Strip

There was a humanitarian ceasefire that went into effect at 6:00 AM. I remember they told us at 5:15 AM, “Look, we’re going to put on a show.” It was amazing, the air force’s precision. The first shell struck at exactly quarter past five on the dot, and the last one struck at 5:59 AM and 59 seconds, exactly. It was amazing. Fire, nonstop shelling of the ‘Sevivon’ neighborhood, (east of Beit Hanoun) which, if I remember correctly, ran down more to the west and south of where we were in there. Nonstop. Just nonstop.

The entire Beit Hanoun compound – in ruins.

When you saw this neighborhood on your way out [of the Gaza Strip], what did you see?

When we left it was still intact. We were sent out of Beit Hanoun ahead of the ceasefire, ahead of the air force strikes.

And when you went back in, what did you see of that neighborhood?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Nothing. Like the opening scene in [the film] “The Pianist.” There’s that famous photo that they always show on trips to Poland (organized trips in which Israeli youths visit Holocaust memorial sites) that shows Warsaw before the war and Warsaw after the Second World War. The photo shows the heart of Warsaw and it’s this classy European city, and then they show it at the end of the war. They show the exact same neighborhood, only it has just one house left standing, and the rest is just ruins. That’s what it looked like.

Were you attacked while inside that neighborhood?

Yes. There was a lot of resistance, relatively. It was an area which [Hamas], at least this is what it looked like to me, had designated for combat.

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84

Every five hours that the tank is idle, it's better to 'provoke' the place

Unit: Armored Corps • Rank: First Sergeant • Location: Khan Yunis

When we first entered [the Gaza Strip], when we took over houses, there was this thing of 'provoking' the area. If you're standing for hours and the tank is idle, you don't start driving back and forth. There's no comparison between a tank that's in motion and a tank that's idle. An idle tank is 1,000 times more vulnerable, and you can't just drive around for seven hours if you're stationed at a certain building. So once in a while there were steps we would take to 'provoke' the area. What does that mean? It means machine gun fire at 'suspicious spots.'

What are 'suspicious spots'?

Bushes, suspicious buildings.

When you fire at a 'suspicious spot' that's a building, do you fire toward the window or toward the corner of the structure?

The corner. You want to 'provoke' the area and make sure that if there's someone in there he won't suddenly pop his head out and screw you with some anti-tank missile.

You stay inside the vehicles but start shooting at 'suspicious spots'?

Every few hours, not the whole time. Every five hours that the

tank is idle, it's better to 'provoke' the place.

The commander would tell you to shoot 'provocation fire' at a preordained time, and the targets were chosen by the tank team?

By the tank commander?

Yes, in accordance with what you have around you. You locate 'suspicious spots' – one doesn't need to be a genius to do that. There's no precise definition, but you know a 'suspicious spot' when you see it. You analyze the area, figure out what's what, which house is tall and has command over you, which windows are pointed right in your direction. And then wham, I fire a burst. You don't waste shells, you don't just shoot shells for no reason.

Up to what range can you define something as a 'suspicious spot'?

Any range. In principle, any house that can see me, that's within eyeshot of me, which could take me down – can be defined as suspicious. We would scan the entire range – any place within eyeshot.

What's the farthest point?

Hundreds of meters away from us. I'll give you a stupid example, it's even sort of funny. There was one night when someone said, "I saw [movement] over there." The whole time, of course, we're on

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the two-way radio making sure, asking questions – you don't want to find out that one of your guys went out to take a dump and you accidentally shot him. So he said, "I saw it for certain and there's nobody of ours out there." They said, "You have authorization to fire" so he opened fire with the [tank's machine gun] – he was satisfied, he did his job, he did what he had to do. The next morning it turns out it was a cow. He made a fool of himself, no doubt. But he couldn't take the risk it was a person.

85

Ultimately, they were all bombed

Unit: Infantry • Rank: Lieutenant • Location: Gaza City

There was a list of targets distributed to the soldiers who were providing assistive fire, of all the things you can't fire at unless you get authorization from the assistive fire commander. A school, a kindergarten, things like that. UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East), a hospital, gas stations, power stations, community centers, which are partly run by the UN, all kinds of health clinics – they told us they would mark them on the maps. They were marked in green, very clearly.

Some of them were eventually bombed?

Yes. Take [the neighborhood of] Shuja'iyya – almost all the locations

on the forbidden list there were bombed. Each one had its own particular story, but ultimately, they were all bombed.

Those targets all required prior approval by the firing officer?

Yes, his advance authorization. And also the population officer (an officer charged with supervising combat-related humanitarian issues) explains to the officers that if you bomb a kindergarten without approval it could result in the entire operation being stopped. That's what [the population officer] is there for, to give you answers.

Does he address the fact that civilians could die?

He does, but that's not what the talk is focused on. We discuss the mission.

Do you recall rockets being launched toward Israel from public buildings, hospitals, things like that?

We could see the launching – there's an alarm and you can see from where they originate. It's a question of what you can figure out from the aerial shots, what that building is. There are buildings that look more 'governmental,' there are ones that look like big residential ones, there are yards. Most of the launchings were made from houses' yards, and it's unclear to which building they belonged – the one to the right or to the left. Is it part of the school courtyard? Or does it belong to that building? Or to the

Take [the neighborhood of] Shuja'iyya – almost all the locations on the forbidden list there were bombed. Each one had its own particular story, but ultimately, they were all bombed

guy with the farm next to it? And then we say, “OK, we’ll bomb both of them.”

86

The civilian was laying there, writhing in pain

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

It was during our first Sabbath. Earlier that day one of the companies was hit by a few anti-tank missiles. The unit went to raid the area from which they were fired, so the guys who stayed behind automatically cared less about civilians. I remember telling

Either we let him die slowly, or we put him out of his misery. Eventually, we put him out of his misery, and a D9 (armored bulldozer) came over and dropped a mound of rubble on him and that was the end of it

myself that right now, the citizens of Gaza, I really don’t give a fuck about them. They don’t deserve anything – and if they deserve something it’s either to be badly wounded or killed. That’s what was going through my mind during those moments. There was this one time when an old [Palestinian] man approached the house and everyone remembered hearing about that booby-trapped old man (earlier in his testimony the testifier described being

briefed about an elderly Palestinian man armed with grenades who tried to attack a different force). This happened right around noon, between noon and 2:00 PM. So this old man came over, and the guy manning the post – I don't know what was going through his head – he saw this civilian, and he fired at him, and he didn't get a good hit. The civilian was laying there, writhing in pain. We all remembered that story going around, so none of the paramedics wanted to go treat him. It was clear to everyone that one of two things was going to happen: Either we let him die slowly, or we put him out of his misery. Eventually, we put him out of his misery, and a D9 (armored bulldozer) came over and dropped a mound of rubble on him and that was the end of it.

In order to avoid having to deal with the question of whether he was booby-trapped or not – because that really didn't interest anyone at that moment – the D9 came over, dropped a pile of rubble on his body and that was it. Everyone knew that under that pile there was the guy's corpse. What came up during the investigation when the company commander asked the soldier, was that the soldier spotted a man in his late 60s, early 70s approaching the house. They were stationed in a tall house, with a good vantage point. The soldier spotted that guy going in his direction, toward his post. So he shot in the direction of his feet at the beginning. And he said the old man kept getting closer to the house so he shot a bullet beneath his left ribs. Kidney, liver, I don't know what's in there. A spot you don't want to be hit by a bullet. That old man took the bullet, lay down on the ground, then a friend of that soldier came

over and also shot the man, while he was already down. For the hell of it, he shot two more bullets at his legs. Meanwhile there was a talk with the commander, and because this was happening amidst a battalion offensive, it really didn't interest anyone. "We have casualties up front, don't bother us, do what you need to do."

What were the lessons derived from that incident?

The lessons were less about conduct with civilians, because you can't define conduct with civilians on the company level. That's the 'problem' with combat in a place like the Gaza Strip. With regard to lessons learned, they were primarily related to defense: where to position defense posts, guarding protocols, is guarding done in pairs? That was the level of discussion over lessons to be learned from this incident.

87

Wherever there aren't any of our forces – you have permission to fire

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Gaza City

The specific night of the incursion [into the Gaza Strip], it sounded like the Yom Kippur War on the two-way radio. There was fire and you pull back and the battalion commander comes on and says, "We have two 'flowers' (an IDF term denoting wounded soldiers),"

and a second later he comes on again and says, “No, it’s two ‘oleanders’ (an IDF term denoting soldiers killed in action).” Everyone was manic. I heard them saying on the assistive fire support radio that we were now firing at the entire area that was beyond our zone’s perimeter, right at the streets – central streets. Along those streets, along those tall buildings, there’s cannon fire, shells, combat choppers, everything was being used. All the targets that were marked in advance – streets, hideouts, control centers, tall buildings – the entire area blasted. All targets bombed. No playing around.

All the targets that were marked in advance – streets, hideouts, control centers, tall buildings – the entire area blasted. All targets bombed. No playing around

Where were you shooting at?

At the area surrounding the spot where that incident happened, around it in a radius of 200 meters, right up to the 200 meter line, 210 meters. Boom, boom, boom. Firing protocol of three shells per minute, at all targets. If you have two [artillery] batteries you use both. Wherever there aren’t any of our forces – you have permission to fire.

Do you remember a specific such incident?

I remember an incident when one of the units (a ground forces commando unit) had casualties when they were advancing, it was when their senior commander was wounded, I think. There was a crazy panic and everyone started firing like crazy. ‘Started’ means the fire protocol was ready and the assistive fire support

starts opening fire and I hear all the booms and see the flares up in the air, and it was obvious the entire area around them was in mayhem. That was a specific incident.

88

We were encouraged to avoid directing high-arc trajectory fire into built-up areas

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

The whole conception was that during that stage, there were no civilians inside the area in which we were fighting – there was no such thing. It doesn't happen. The situation on the ground is very clear – the preliminary fire, which isn't directed at houses, signals very clearly [to the Palestinian population] that we are going in; this is after the leaflets and all those things. We have our zone, which is totally open, there are no other forces there and we know where the next battalion is located. During the first stages we would still go on the [two-way radio] to get authorization [to fire] from our commander – we say, “We spotted a [missile] launch, we have a coordinate, do we have authorization to fire?” After we validate that launches were made in our direction, or in the direction of Israel, from within the built-up area – then there is authorization

to fire at them, and then we just open fire on our own. In the beginning, they tried to define priorities, and [we were encouraged] to avoid directing high-arc trajectory fire into built-up areas. But in practice, when we were in the field and we had a combat chopper or some other aircraft up in the air, we used it first thing [to fire at the site from which the launch was detected]. But at times when [air support] wasn't available due to constraints – we employed [the artillery] straight away.

Identify the spot where it landed – I don't know if I could say whether it was right on target – but if we saw that it landed in the same area from which we saw the rocket being launched, then we authorize the artillery guys to fire, say, five shells

After you detect a launch, you go on the radio with a senior officer, get authorization to fire and then employ the artillery division.

First an explosive shell is fired. We identify the spot where it landed – I don't know if I could say whether it was right on target – but if we saw that it landed in the same area from which we saw the rocket being launched, then we authorize the artillery guys to fire, say, five shells.

The first shell is for calibrating [the mortar's] range?

It's not calibration because we don't exactly pinpoint the location [where the shell lands], but [if] we see it hit the spot and the deviation isn't serious than we authorize five shells on that spot.

What's the range of a mortar's deviation, how precise is it?

The standard deviation range, that isn't due to an error in aim, is

up to 400 meters. Less than 400 meters, it's not an error in aim; it's a possible deviation that gets fixed. In practice, [the mortars] are usually precise at a range of 50 to 100 meters.

Did you have any of those new GPS-fitted mortars?

Our crew didn't, we heard that the battalion tried to get hold of some but didn't manage. I know that generally those are very, very precise, with a 20-meter range of deviation.

89

Achieving diplomatic effects

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

What about bombing government facilities, government symbols?

All [attacks on Hamas] symbols of government come under the authority of the southern command, they don't come from the division. Due to the sensitivity of this operation, it's also a state-level decision. We concentrate on providing assistance in the field, combat assistance—not on achieving diplomatic effects. But I know that there were also strikes against symbols of government, that there was a desire to pressure Hamas leadership— or that Hamas activists were in there, so regime symbols were also hit.

90

This area, there haven't been any civilians in it for a long time

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

The whole thing about civilians comes down to, “What are civilians?” and “Are there civilians in there?” Debating that is nice and all, but the moment your entire mode of awareness is that there are no civilians in there, then maintaining a safe range from civilians is not something you consider, even if you're shooting at something that's very likely to have civilians inside it. It's as if [you say to yourself], “This area, there haven't been any civilians in it for a long time,” that's irrelevant to us by then— we've been fighting for two days already.

So the safety ranges, too, are of no importance?

You pay no attention to that. Civilian presence is not something that's on your mind, so you don't give it any attention in any consideration. In operational considerations, in safety considerations.



91

Operational consequences that are more permissive for us, and more severe for them

Unit: Gaza Division · Rank: Not for publication

How is the firing policy determined?

From high up. The heads of the military, together with the intelligence cadre, they decide on what the current firing policy is. Each firing policy has a different level within which we're allowed

to operate. In an extreme case – say fire has been opened at our forces and there are casualties on our side – you’re allowed, of course, to override it – with the commander’s discretion, that is – but under regular circumstances, you don’t exceed the regulations and the orders.

How many levels [of firing policy] are there?

Three.

Do they, beyond being determined by the uppermost ranks, reflect anything, conceptually?

They reflect not only conceptually – they also reflect practically, the level of collateral damage you’re allowed to cause. [They] reflect which means you’re permitted to use, and the distance you’re allowed to use them from ‘sensitive locations.’ They reflect a whole lot of parameters concerning opening fire.

What are the consequence of the most severe level with regard to, let’s say, the use of fighter jets?

The consequence is, you’re allowed to [fire bombs] at a shorter distance from a ‘sensitive location’ – you’re allowed to hit structures that are more than one story tall, and so forth. Operational consequences that are more permissive for us, and more severe for them (the Palestinians).

92

The safety regulations are just there for the out-of-touch guys in the headquarters that don't really have a clue

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Lieutenant • Location: Gaza Strip

Each corps has its own tricks that reflect the gray areas, for how far things can be pushed. During a debriefing with the officers we discussed the protocol orders, the general plan, when you do this, when do you do that. Safety ranges were always a topic of discussion. How do you assist soldiers in the field when you need to maintain safety ranges everywhere? What happens is, you are left with very little space at which you can fire, because you need to allow for a safe range away from civilians and a safe zone from soldiers and a safe range from UNRWA buildings (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East), and so on. So during the informal part of the conversation, one of the senior officers was this reservist and he says to us, "There's a well-known trick, which we used [during the war] in Lebanon, too. Say you're instructed to maintain a [safe range] away from civilians, but the target is too close to them. What you do is, on the map you mark a target that will get cleared through the higher channels

– you mark a target that’s far enough [from the civilians] in the computers, so that it shows up that way. And then on the two-way you tell the [artillery] battery, “Fire on [coordinate] no. 2, and adjust by 200 meters.” It’s within your authority to decide and to discuss where to mark a target and where not to. If you know that place needs to be bombed, then you will get the target authorized by the supervising ranks – they will grant authorization, because that’s what they do – because you listed it on the map – and then it’s, “OK, the battalion granted him authorization for that.” And then in real time you’ll tell [the battery] to adjust 200 meters to the right. “Recalibrate by 200 meters.” See, that doesn’t mean much to the [supervising officers]. To them it’s “[The artillery brigade] adjusted 200 meters, they’re just recalibrating.” Those guys don’t really understand. [The soldiers in the battery will say] “We were given faulty coordinates,” or “The wind got in the way.” Standard range recalibration. You are a good war agent when you know how to strike where it’s truly needed. The safety regulations are just there for the out-of-touch guys in the headquarters that don’t really have a clue. [The reservist] told that to a bunch of guys as a sort of lesson from someone experienced, from someone who knows how things actually go down in reality, as someone who had come to explain ‘the professional secrets.’

93

The battery fired 900 shells that night

Unit: Artillery · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Gaza Strip

During occasions when there was a significant amount of fire [directed at our forces], or during the ground incursion to Gaza – to Shuja’iyya – I know my unit fired a lot. One of the senior officers in my unit talked about how we had fired [at targets] that were in very close proximity to our forces, how we had really saved them. He said it was an important mission and that apparently during it we had also killed a number of civilians. They said that tragically, some uninvolved civilians were apparently hit, but that it was a situation where it would either be our troops or civilians [being harmed]. He said that it wasn’t even a question, that it was obvious that our troops [came first]. They emphasized the fact that that was obviously not done on purpose.

Did he say what the mission itself was, what the role of the [artillery] battery was?

To assist them with artillery fire. If they need flare shells, or if they need smoke to conceal themselves, or, of course, if they need explosive shells to evacuate [forces from the field]. The battery fired 900 shells [that night], and the battalion fired about 1,200 or 1,500, I think. There were certain stages during which we were

firing at a maximum fire rate – after Goldin was kidnapped, (an IDF soldier captured near Rafah) and in Shuja'iyya.

Do you know how many shells the battalion fired during the operation?

The figure we were told was 11,500 and something. Most of the explosive shells were fired into open areas, and the rest were either for rescue purposes or to destroy targets.

94

The drones play an active role

Unit: Southern Command · Rank: Not for publication ·

Location: Gaza Strip

The air force carries out an insane amount of strikes in the Gaza Strip during an operation like 'Protective Edge.' The drones play an active role during these strikes, and that includes the strikes executed by fighter jets. I think almost no fighter jet bombings were carried out without a drone beforehand looking at the target for a moment to see make sure that...To 'verify' it, as they say. It's supposed to also check that the target is clear of uninvolved parties (innocent civilians) and such things. And it also does what's called a BDA (Bomb Damage Assessment), a review of the aftermath to check that the bomb hit the target, and the results of the strike.

95

We're talking about human beings,
it's a dialogue that takes place
through fire - if there's an
escalation, things intensify

Unit: Air Force · Rank: Not for publication · Location: Gaza Strip

What's a problematic target?

A target that doesn't fall under the firing policy – that hitting it would entail violating the firing policy criteria.

Can you tell me about a target that at first wasn't approved for striking, and later did get approved?

Well, after the APC in Shuja'iyya, (an incident in which seven IDF soldiers were killed when a rocket hit their armored personnel carrier) and when the brigade commander was killed (certain members of the IDF mistakenly believed, for a period during the operation, that a Golani brigade commander was killed), so things weren't done the same as they were before. There are things in the military that are in flux – we're talking about human beings, it's a dialogue that takes place through fire – if there's an escalation, things intensify.

Can you describe a concrete example?

It's something that's known in advance. The operation wasn't ending, it entered its first week, second week, third week, and

[Hamas] kept trying to enter [Israeli] towns and kill people, so in response we struck harder. Targets that we had set aside – ‘golden targets’ of sorts – they started to hit them.

What are these ‘golden targets?’

Residences of [Hamas] battalion commanders and brigade commanders. There were many, many targets that [weren’t attacked] because they didn’t qualify under the firing policy, and then after Shujai’yya for example, suddenly some of those targets did get approved. The sort of problematic targets that were at a certain distance from some school – suddenly stuff like that did get approved.

96

The artillery is constantly firing

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

The artillery is constantly firing. It’s called ‘retaining tension’ – that is, keeping [Hamas] unsure about when exactly we will be going in – so that they are constantly thinking that we might be about to go in. It’s called ‘softening targets,’ and it’s done also to clear a range for advancing. What this means in practice is, that shells are being fired all the time. Even if we aren’t actually going to enter: shells, shells, shells. A suspicious structure, an open area, a field, a place

where a tunnel shaft could be – fire, fire, fire. There was a period of about five days from the moment when we were first called in for duty until there was a ground incursion. Throughout that entire time, fire.

The idea behind the action being – both during the fighting and after it – that from the moment you incriminate a building – incriminate meaning that you saw some movement there, even the smallest – a terrorist going in, maybe – those are sufficient grounds to take it down.

The entire building?

Yes. At the beginning [of the operation] they were really careful, they tried to do this with combat choppers, or guided missiles or all kinds of special forces. But the deeper we got into the operation, and the more the patience and understanding given to you by the levels of oversight – and by the Israeli public at large – slowly runs out, then it becomes OK to use artillery. “You don’t need a chopper, let’s use artillery on it, let’s bring it down, no problem with that.” It’s statistical – it has a 50 meter radius. In the end, that’s one of the problems, too – [mortars are] a statistical weapon (an imprecise weapon that cannot be aimed at specific targets, but rather at general areas), and people don’t get that. There is this conception that we know how to do everything super accurately, as if it doesn’t matter which weapon is being used – “OK, let them fire, they’re OK.” But no, these weapons are statistical, and they strike 50 meters to the right or 100 meters to the left, and it’s... It’s unpleasant. What happens is, for seven straight days it’s non-

stop bombardment, that's what happens in practice. Now, there are degrees of applying fire – in the first degree, you can fire up to a certain distance away from civilians, or from a place where civilians are believed to be. In the second degree, you narrow that down. And there's a third degree. Let's say, [when the third level is imposed] the instructions for jets and combat choppers allow for 'reasonable damage to civilians or to their surroundings.' That is to say, something indefinable, that's up to the brigade commander and whatever mood he happens to be in: "Let's decide ourselves what's reasonable and what isn't."

97

Not enough time for everyone to leave

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Not for publication

You said there were cases in which an operational necessity trumped the risk of causing harm to civilians. Could you give me an example?

Say there's a building that's over two stories high, and you know for certain there's a meeting between two heads of [enemy] cells in there, and you decide to take it down.

And this is when you know that there are additional civilians in there, or this is when you prefer not to check?

On occasion, you do know.

Can you give me a specific example?

I don't remember much – I do remember there was this one house of five or six stories in Khirbet Khuza'a. I remember there was 'hot' intel data on a meeting between militants there. The head of the cell was there for sure, and a decision was made to 'knock on the building's roof,' (a practice in which a small missile is fired at the roof of a building as an advance warning that it will shortly be destroyed in an air strike) and then immediately after that drop a bomb on it.

What's 'immediately?'

Not enough time for everyone to leave. Somewhere between 30 seconds and one minute.

Did you see anyone leaving the house?

Nope, actually – no one. I remember that after the 'roof knocking,' nobody left the house. I don't know if that means they were being held there by force, or I don't know what. I didn't follow up to see whether harm was really inflicted upon civilians there, whether innocent people got killed there.

While you're getting approval for [striking] the target, do you have any tools to find out whether there are other people in the house?

You can find out.

Do you try?

Absolutely, yes. You use all the means at your disposal to ascertain the number of militants that are in there, how many people, how many 'hot spots.' These probes don't always work – either you didn't manage to collect all the data you wanted, or you did and it's not

the answer you wanted to find. In any case, you decide to [bomb]. **If you have all the means at your disposal to make sure there are no people [in the buildings], how come all those people were killed anyway?**

There's no way we can know everything. We do everything we can to know. If some family doesn't have a phone and there's no verification, and despite that you went ahead and 'knocked on the roof' and nobody came out after a few minutes – then the assumption is that there's nobody in there.

Is there some possibility that they would decide not to leave despite a 'knock on the roof?'

There's nothing you can do about people who are willing to sacrifice themselves. I'm not trying to justify such behavior. But the way the IDF sees it, if, say, 'roof knocking' was executed [and people stayed in the building] then there's no way we can know about it. We have no way of knowing if there are people in there who chose not to leave.

Verifying that there are no civilians in the building – is that a mandatory prerequisite for carrying out a strike?

It's not mandatory. Because even if there are civilians sometimes – [for example, while targeting] the Shuja'iyya deputy battalion commander, [the strike] would be carried out if there weren't too many civilians. When I say 'too many' I mean a double digit number.

Say there's a building that's over two stories high, and you know for certain there's a meeting between two heads of [enemy] cells in there, and you decide to take it down

This story, how atypical was it?

This was atypical due to the fact it was a multi-story building, five or six stories –because most of the houses that were seriously flattened were two, maybe three stories, tops. It was also atypical in the sense that there was information about the presence of innocent people in there. There was data about a certain number [of civilians] and it withstood the equation, apparently – and there was simply enough of an accumulation of intelligence and verified data about the presence of heads of cells in there, that they decided that the bombing was justified.

98**From what we knew, that area was supposedly devoid of civilians**

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

I remember in Shuja'iyya there was one time I needed to interpret an attack that took place on a building or something like that. I opened up the footage, and it was all scorched, burned to the ground. Entire streets where one building is half-destroyed, the next one totally destroyed, the next one half-destroyed. Entire streets that were totally shelled, and I needed to verify a certain target that had clearly been obliterated. I opened up the footage

and saw that it was taken right after the strike had been carried out, and there were lots of people there, and lots of ambulances, and a whole lot of smoke and lots of commotion. And from what we knew, that area was supposedly devoid of civilians.

You said earlier that you did know the neighborhood was supposed to be empty of civilians?

Yes. That's what they told us. They told us – maybe really so we wouldn't think the IDF does immoral things – they told us the civilians had been informed via leaflets scattered in the area, and that it was supposed to be devoid of civilians, and civilians who remained there were civilians who apparently chose to be there.

Who told you that?

The commanders, in off-the-record type conversations, or during all kinds of briefings. Just so we'd know, for our general knowledge, that this is what's going on. That there's no civilians supposed to be there, and any who are – are there because they chose to be. In conversations between us it was summed up as, "There's nothing we can do, war is war." You don't really talk about it – any discourse or opinions that are slightly 'deviant' are pretty much silenced.

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99

I spotted someone, I shot him in the legs, I don't know who he is

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

I remember they told us, “We are slightly modifying the rules of engagement, making them more permissive towards [opening fire].” Triggers get pulled more easily, to protect our lives in case something happens.

Why did they decide to do that?

This old man came over [to another force], and they carried out an arrest procedure – and [during the ‘acquittal’ procedure] they discovered he had a hand grenade on him. I don’t know what would have happened if he would have managed to get it out and harm the force. This was a story that went around. And so we sat down together and discussed it and said, “We need to be a bit more wary. They’re going to be using civilians to blow us up, to harm us.” In a way, I’d say, that’s what led to the incident [that happened in our force] where there was shooting with intent [to kill]. It happened, I think, in the late morning sometime, around 10:00 AM. One of the soldiers was on guard duty. [Suddenly] we hear shots, so we run over to him and go “What happened?” and he says, “I spotted someone, I shot him in the legs, I don’t know who he is.” We aimed at [the Palestinian who had been shot] and then suddenly I see two

more bullets fired [at him] simultaneously, boom. At that point it was clear that it was over, period. I don't know if they shot his legs or higher up. That's how it ended. After that, somebody from [military] engineering went up and examined him. He wasn't booby-trapped.

At what point did you realize this was an adult?

You could see, physically.

The soldier on guard duty, what did he identify?

He identified a figure and he opened fire. And I'll tell you what made him open fire so easily. There was a long alley over which

we had lookouts posted. They didn't spot him, and he got up close to the house's entrance. People make mistakes after they've been standing around on guard duty shifts, 24 hours a day.

Why did the shooting continue beyond the shots fired by the soldier on guard duty, after the man who had been shot was already on the ground?

Out of fear, out of stress, out of instincts. And the second thing, which I want to hope isn't why, is also maybe out of an urge to mark an X (a military tradition where the killing of an enemy combatant is observed by marking an X on one's weapon). We examined the event among ourselves, morally. Some people

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weren't as bothered by it. OK, a human being just died right here, was he innocent or not? Each person has his own positions, some who are more sensitive to that, and others less.

Was this event formally investigated?

I don't think so. The IDF investigates things and keeps them internal. Most of the investigations I was involved in were professional investigations; I think that's the kind of thing they dealt with in respect to us.

100

He just came over with an urge to take down targets

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

Guys there, they go in [to the Gaza Strip] wanting to bust up Hamas. There was this one intelligence officer there, a horrible guy, nobody could stand him, he just came over with an urge to take down targets, he couldn't help it. He comes over to you and for an entire hour is going, "Check what this is, and check what that is, why aren't you attacking." The thing is, it's not a yes-no black and white thing. It really depends on how you choose to deal with it. There are some people who will try to push for a certain target and it could be that that's why it'll be hit. They'll talk to somebody



they know, “Listen, do me a favor, prepare that target for me,” and then [the target] goes into the target list and passes through all the authorizations and it could be hit. That happens sometimes.

When did that happen?

You’ve got a lot of leeway there. It’s not cutting corners – you just figure out that it’s war, and it’s not all black and white, and you need to know when to be flexible, and there are lots of people there whose input goes a long way. Whenever they say something, their opinion is respected, and that’s what will be done.

101

Deter them, scare them, wear them down psychologically

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

Why are militants' houses bombed?

A house belonging to a militant, who isn't there at the time? Deterrence. Deter them, scare them, wear them down psychologically, et cetera.

How do you know this?

From years of experience. It's for claiming a toll.

Do you know what rank a militant needs to be so his house gets listed as a target?

It depends on the stage of the fighting.

Based on what you know, when the target list gets depleted, does the rank level for whose houses will be targeted decrease?

Absolutely.

In the debriefings, is there any reference to the number of militants' houses and of munitions caches that were bombed?

No, usually the way that gets summed up is, 'such-and-such targets were hit,' and sometimes they also say how many of those entailed 'roof knockings' – but those are astronomical numbers, really.

What do you mean?

Say 100 targets were hit in the past 24 hours – that's an unimaginably

high number for a given day. And another level on which things are treated is that of readiness – when you discuss the Hamas militants’ morale and confidence, sometimes after militants’ houses are struck you say, “We know that in such-and-such [Hamas] brigade they are expressing concern over the continuation of the fighting,” it’s at that level. I mean, nobody’s saying “We’ll strike that target because it’s the house of a militant and it will lower his motivation” – but one does say the morale is low due to the fact that the strikes on the militants’ houses is having an impact and decreasing the Hamas militants’ morale.

102

The second guy got incriminated too, and nobody knew from where he had popped up

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Not for publication

There were a few times where it was just too much and I had to say something. Because in two months of fighting, people make mistakes, mistakes happen. It’s our good fortune, and I mean both as a nation and as the IDF, that there are some people who know how to stand up and say, “Hang on, something bad is happening

here.” I remember one incident in which there was permissiveness of sort on the part of the upper levels with regard to wanting to open fire, and it was fortunate that somebody stepped up and said something.

What was the story?

Some militant was being monitored, he had been incriminated, and he was on his way to a meeting with other militants, and on his way there he was joined by another person who started walked alongside him, and the moment their paths were linked up – despite the fact that it was totally against regulations – the second guy got incriminated too, and nobody knew from where he had popped up. So you couldn’t incriminate him ‘dry.’ And in that case, there were people there who said, “Hang on, this is no good.” And in the end the strike wasn’t carried out, it wasn’t executed. What I’m trying to say is, that sometimes even the commanders up top make mistakes, and I was present during an incident where it was stopped. I can’t know if there were incidents in which it wasn’t stopped, but in my estimation there were cases in which incriminations were made against the regulations.

103

In the Hannibal Procedure, you (hit) all the targets that you've prepared in advance

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

In the 'Hannibal Procedure', you [hit] all the targets that you've prepared in advance, all optional targets. Optional targets, that can mean shafts [Hamas militants] could come out of, that can mean buildings in which they might be hiding.

Can you describe what happened there?

Say a certain force goes into a building to blow it up. I consider all the possible scenarios of what happens if [an IDF soldier] is kidnapped. Where there are shafts they could come out of, where there are buildings they can hide in. I brought them a list of targets for preliminary approval, and they told me: "That's not enough targets, bring it back [with more]." Now, I look at the aerial footage, and I don't know – I mean, I don't know if there are civilians in there, I don't know anything – I just analyze it. Now, while I was doing that I felt fine about it. I mean, I was getting all the support, I felt like everything was fine. I'm allowed to. I'm allowed to designate a seven-story building as a target, I'm allowed to say now I'm ordering a 'debilitating strike' along this 600-meter stretch, which is a central route where there's a power station.

Because it's a key route where if they manage to kidnap a soldier, he won't be coming back. Hannibal is like, everything's allowed.

104

Go ahead – his wife and kid are in the car too? Not the end of the world

Unit: Air force · Rank: Not for publication

There is what's called in the jargon a 'firing policy.' It's changed according to whether it's [a period of] routine security or wartime. During routine, there's targeted killings once in a while – they take place during periods of so-called routine security, too. You still use firepower, but during those times the wish or the instruction that no uninvolved civilians will get harmed is top priority. And sometimes that overrides [the targeted killing of] a very, very senior figure, in cases where an opportunity [to attack him] arises.

So it's given up?

Yes. But during times like 'Protective Edge,' go ahead – his wife and kid are in the car too? Not the end of the world. It's unambiguous.

There's that shift?

Yes, it's by definition. The firing policies are leveled, numbered. One, two, three.

What exactly are the different levels?

There are exact definitions, of firing ranges [you need to keep] from uninvolved civilians and all sorts of things like that. The more the policy is ‘permissive,’ let’s call it that, the more you’re ‘allowed’ to be less careful about uninvolved civilians. There’s also, by the way, the question of which arms you use – there are some that pose a greater threat to the surroundings, and there are more precise ones.

What are the regulations in each one of these levels?

There’s, say, a certain range [from civilians] defined for the strictest level, and then that distance decreases [on the second level], and then it’s, “Don’t concern yourselves with that at all” for the most ‘permissive’ level. [The level] doesn’t stay fixed throughout ‘Protective Edge.’ [For example, it can be one level] when one is providing assistive fire to ground forces and [another during] other operations, where, say, no ground forces – which would be at risk – are involved. And during routine security [periods], it’s always at the maximum.

Maximum caution from harming civilians?

Right, caution. Unless, as I said, it’s an exceptional case, and then that’s [a call that’s made] at the highest ranks of decision-makers, they decide whether to drop a bomb, what size it’ll be, what’s the

There are exact definitions, of firing ranges [you need to keep] from uninvolved civilians and all sorts of things like that. The more the policy is ‘permissive,’ let’s call it that, the more you’re ‘allowed’ to be less careful about uninvolved civilians

level of risk.

They'll use a drone for looking, but in the end it's an F-16 that comes over and drops the half-ton [bomb]?

That's right, but it works in exactly the same way. As a rule, in times of routine security the decision goes up to really the highest ranks – and in times of combat, it's up to the senior officer in the field.

105

Lots of people with white flags came over and [warning] shots were fired near them, too

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

During the first entrance [to the Gaza Strip] we were near Beit Lahia, in a place called the Bedou'iyya. We were there for a few days. When we got there, there were white flags on all the rooftops. We had been prepared for something very... For some very glorious combat, and in the end it was quiet. We set ourselves up in our spot and slowly, slowly, [the Palestinians] started returning. At one point early on an older woman came near, and one of the officers said she should be shot. They told him to fire [warning shots] in her direction, and after a few shots she backed off. Later

on, lots of people with white flags came over and [warning] shots were fired near them, too.

What's 'near them?'

I don't know exactly how many meters away. There wasn't a cease-fire, because during cease-fires we would be taken out and stationed in the protective ramparts [that were set up] between the Strip and Israel.

So why were [warning] shots fired near those people?

So that they wouldn't pose a threat to us.

What distance were they from you?

Far off – about 100 meters. [We] didn't want to take the risk that they would even get close.

And to where were they trying to walk?

They were returning to their homes, that's why they were holding up those flags... This was a very poor neighborhood. You could tell by looking at their animals, too – they were really bony. They were locked up, the animals, so they didn't have any food. And there was another guy, when we entered the house he was just sitting there. [The soldiers] cuffed his arms and legs and tied a cloth around his eyes and he sat there for like a whole day.

What happened after that?

We were told that he was taken to be investigated. Him and the cellphone he had with him.

106

If you ask me, we need to level their entire area over there

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

Emotionally, it was a very difficult period for me. I had a very hard time with the atmosphere going on, and I had a very hard time with the things being said by the people serving with me in my unit. It was very hard for me mostly because I felt like I totally didn't understand what was going on, and that lots of us were just acting on 'automatic' mode, like we just didn't get it. I felt like I had no idea what... Whether the targets I was analyzing – and I decide if they should be hit again or not – whether it's really imperative we hit them, or if it's just something we do 'casually,' because there's already an attack underway, there's already a war underway, so you can hit lots of stuff as part of the fighting. There's like, 'an opportunity.' And I felt that the atmosphere was hyper militaristic. There were things said by commanders that... That is, things like, "If you ask me, we need to level their entire area over there. If you ask me, that's where stuff is coming out of." Or saying things like, "I don't understand this regulation and that regulation, and I don't get why there's hesitation over attacking again, why not throw more bombs in there?" Stuff like that, very, very militaristic and totally out of line. The atmosphere was very

difficult, and every so often we would be updated about what was going on with the fighters who were inside – which is something that’s not supposed to be done, it influences our work.

How?

Let’s say there’s a [soldier] who knows there are friends of hers inside [the Gaza Strip], and she’s a soldier on regular duty, and she hears something like that and her thoughts are all going in the direction of, “Man, just level their entire place,” and so she marks every target as “suspicious, suspicious, suspicious,” and maybe manages to prove to her commander – who at that exact moment isn’t really focused on her work because he’s under a lot of pressure – he isn’t paying special attention to that area so he’s kind of skimming through it, and he tells her, “OK, all right, call in for another attack in there.”

And stuff like that happened around you?

Yes. And I, for example, was one of the only ones who really did take the time to open up lots and lots of angles, lots and lots of footage, to prove that there’s no need to strike again. Me, I was really looking for reasons not to attack – and maybe that, too, is immoral, maybe that, too, is wrong – it’s all a question of

I felt like I had no idea what... Whether the targets I was analyzing - and I decide if they should be hit again or not - whether it’s really imperative we hit them, or if it’s just something we do ‘casually,’ because there’s already an attack underway, there’s already a war underway, so you can hit lots of stuff as part of the fighting

perspective. I was really looking for ways to see how the buildings, how one sees, from which angle you can see a certain floor, the damage that was inflicted to the building. These are grey areas – it's not like you go, "If you see only three columns left, that's enough damage, if you see more than that – it's not enough damage." There aren't definitions for these things, why such-and-such counts as significant damage to a structure, and stuff like that – each person takes it in his own direction.

107

We expect a high level of harm to civilians

Unit: Infantry · Rank: Lieutenant

There are levels of [opening fire] – First level, second level, third level. The decision to move from one to the other comes from high up, they have some sort of forum. First level means you can fire artillery up until a certain distance from civilians, or from a place where you think it's likely there'll be civilians. And a shorter range for the 120mm mortars, which are more precise. For fighter jets and the bigger bombs of one ton, half a ton, it's defined verbally – it's defined as, "Low level of damage expected to civilians." The next level is the second level. The mortar ranges stay the same,

and for artillery the range from civilians decreases. For jets, it says, “Moderate harm to civilians” or “Moderate harm to civilians is expected,” or “Moderate collateral damage,” something like that. This means, something undefined, something that’s according to the way the commander sees things and the mood he’s in: “Let’s decide ourselves what ‘moderate’ means.” In the third level, the artillery’s [safety range from civilians] gets cut by about half. I’m not talking about jets, where there’s already significant damage and it’s considered acceptable, that’s the definition. We expect a high level of harm to civilians. Like, it’s OK from our perspective, because we’re in the third level. They aren’t given a specific, defined number – this is something I remember clearly. That’s left to the commander.

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Some decision was made, and they were struck

Unit: Southern Command • Rank: Not for publication

It was defined: Whoever was in that specific house was [automatically] incriminated. Whoever left it – incriminated. The drone was watching from above and suddenly a guy comes out of the house. I mean, he appeared – but not exactly from that exact

location itself, but rather he popped into view a bit onwards, and so they said, “Hey, he must’ve had to come out of that house.” There was a bunch of back and forth: “He came from there,” “He didn’t,” “Incriminated,” “Not incriminated,” and suddenly another guy shows up, the same thing all over again, and then they said, “OK, this one for sure came out of the house,” and some decision was made, and they were struck. And later, in an inquiry held in their unit, they figured out that there was a footpath going through there, which they hadn’t noticed at all...

A path that went by the house.

Yeah, and there was all kinds of vegetation and stuff that was sort of concealing them, and the path mostly, but if you looked well you could see them arriving from there and passing by.

The path went under a tree in front of the house, but didn’t originate from the house.

Exactly. And then when they took a closer look – after the event, not during the heat of the mission – they saw that both men had arrived from there.

Did their mission continue after that mistake?

It continued. You don’t stop a war because of a mistake.

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To hit it in a way that'll look good to the Israeli audience, and look bad for the Palestinian audience

Unit: Not for publication · Rank: Not for publication

The collateral damage, it has a few levels: zero, one, and two. [Level] zero means up to X amount of people. It increases at [level] one, and increases further at [level] two. But in every case there are intervals, it's in steps.

You're talking about [the number of] uninvolved civilians expected to be hurt in a planned strike?

Right.

OK. So what decides if we are on level one, two or three?

Planning crews. For each 'valuable target,' you have a grade. I think that at this point in the fighting (The testifier is referring to the later stages of the operation) [the IDF] started attacking multi-story buildings, too. So that's already a period in which approval for certain cases was given for collateral damage at the most severe level. What decides how the level of collateral damage of a given target is classed is its location in terms of the surrounding structures, and of course the munitions, too – what munitions do you need to use to complete the mission, and what damage will it

cause? And then what is its radius? Whether it's in an open area. Whether it's in a crowded urban area. If it's in a crowded urban area, then is it a two-story building or a seven-story building? If it's a seven-story building, can you destroy one flat in a 'surgical' fashion – that's IDF jargon. Are there people in there? Did people evacuate their residences? Do you have a way of evacuating them from their houses without alerting the target? There are cases where the target is a munitions cache, and then it's, like, easier – and there are cases where the target is a person and then it's...

How do you decide whether you can strike a target that's classed in a certain level?

For every level of [collateral] damage there's an authority that needs to approve it.

Do you remember what the authorities are?

It depends on the stage of the fighting. I think that at the beginning, the instructions were that we don't attack [targets at level] two at all. There was an instruction like that, and when we saw that things were progressing towards completion and the point was to hurry up and act, and get whatever you can done, then the authority [level] was decreased, and they said we can submit such [targets] for approval.

Who said that?

A pretty senior commander, explicitly, as part of a morning briefing.

Can you describe what he said in the briefing when he explained that?

It's always "Targets, targets, targets." And at a certain point they say "You can start submitting targets to the planning crews, you can start submitting targets for approval that are at the highest collateral damage levels, at collateral damage level two." This was during a later stage of the fighting, and these are targets that in general, if you don't count exceptions, hadn't been struck until that point. So they just say that there was an instruction issued by the general staff (The IDF's supreme command) that from now on we can plan strikes on targets that are level two collateral damage. They need to get confirmation from pretty high-up levels, but you can submit them for planning to the strike crews.

Did he explain what had changed, and why that was suddenly possible?

Because the target bank was being depleted. Like, " Hamas is pushing for a display of victory," that's always the expression used, 'pushing for a display of victory' is this sweeping expression that's used at the end of every round [of fighting]. [There is talk that] the delegations are in Cairo, or on their

The target bank was being depleted. Like, " Hamas is pushing for a display of victory," that's always the expression used, 'pushing for a display of victory' is this sweeping expression that's used at the end of every round [of fighting]. [There is talk that] the delegations are in Cairo, or on their way to Cairo, or will soon be arriving in Cairo. But the fighting kept going, and even if you think it's about to end - you have to keep acting like nothing's about to end

way to Cairo, or will soon be arriving in Cairo. But the fighting kept going, and even if you think it's about to end – you have to keep acting like nothing's about to end. So that's why you go up a level, to turn the threat around and also as a show of might. And so it's possible that the target will be approved if it's justified, if there's a good reason, if it's a valuable target, or if there's a good chance to hit it in a way that'll look good to the Israeli audience, and look bad for the Palestinian audience. That'll hurt the military rocket-firing capabilities of Hamas or Islamic Jihad, or of other organizations.

During briefings, is the collateral damage of attacks [that were carried out] mentioned?

No. Unless it was an attack in the style of Kafr Kanna, where there's a strategic impact on the ability to proceed with the fighting – there won't be any mention of unsuccessful strikes during briefings. They'll mention targets that were hit, and accomplishments, and what we didn't manage to get done – but they won't mention collateral damage. The humanitarian situation plays a role in the intelligence estimations, but the collateral damage inflicted during specific strikes doesn't play a role in the briefings, or on morale.

Collateral damage means only bodily harm, or also damage to property?

Bodily harm.

Property isn't counted at all?

Not as far as the levels – the levels are practically binary. These are the levels of collateral damage, and the grading is based solely on human lives.



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If you're a Hamas militant, there would be no way that there wasn't some house that just got taken down near you right now

Unit: Not for publication • Rank: Not for publication

One should start out by saying that leaflets did get scattered and military intelligence did say that [the Palestinians] knew [the IDF]

One of the most senior officials in the IDF, he just marked off houses on an aerial photo of Shuja'iyya, to be taken down. He simply looked at the map and saw commanding points and commanding houses and [picked targets] in a way that was in some sense sort of random

was about to enter Shuja'iyya – and then updates started coming in from the battle in Shuja'iyya. And then what happened is that a very senior officer from the army strike coordination center comes in running and says, “Listen up, the brigade commander was killed and a soldier was kidnapped, it’s a mess, we need to help them.” So then the entire air force drops whatever it was doing at the moment and starts dealing with this thing, first priority. One of the most senior officials in the IDF, he just marked off houses on an aerial photo of Shuja'iyya, to be taken

down. He simply looked at the map and saw commanding points and commanding houses and [picked targets] in a way that was in some sense sort of random – so that there would be no way that – if you’re a Hamas militant, there would be no way that there wasn’t some house that just got taken down near you right now. It’s not like in every building that was struck in Shuja'iyya there was some Hamas militant or somebody firing at our forces.

So why was it attacked?

In order to keep their heads down and allow our forces to get out of there, to use firepower – that’s how the military works.

I’m trying to understand: it was random, or as part of a target list prepared in advance?

It wasn't prepared in advance at all. In the inquiry later on it was described as a mistake.

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What the hell, why did you have to shoot him again?

Unit: Infantry · Rank: First Sergeant · Location: Northern Gaza Strip

We were in a house with the reconnaissance platoon, and there was some soldier stationed at the guard post. We were instructed [during the briefings] that whoever's in the area is dangerous, is suspect. Especially if it's a vehicle – in that case you really pound it with bullets, everybody stationed in the posts. [There was one case where] a soldier who was in one of the posts saw an old [Palestinian] man approaching, so he shouted that some old man was getting near. He didn't shoot at him – he fired near him. What I know, because I checked this, is that one of the other soldiers shot that grandpa twice. A big hoopla got going, everyone got their gear quick and wanted to go outside because, like they say in the IDF, 'strive for engagement.' I went up to a window to see what was going on out there, and I saw there was an old man lying on the ground, he was shot in his leg and he was wounded. It

So an argument starts up: 'What makes you an expert on death? What are you, some doctor?' And then after that, some guy from the company went out and shot that man again, and that, for me, was the last straw. I don't think there was a single guy in my platoon who wasn't shocked by that

was horrible, the wound was horrible, and he looked either dead or unconscious to me. So we went down and told that entire force – these guys were all truly twisted – “Enough, there’s no reason to shoot him, get a grip, he’s dead.” And so an argument starts up [between the soldiers]: “What makes you an expert on death? What are you, some doctor?” And then after that, some guy from the company went out and shot that man again, and that, for me, was the last straw. I don’t think there was a single guy in my platoon who wasn’t shocked by that. It’s not like we’re a bunch of leftists, but – why? Like,

what the hell, why did you have to shoot him again? One of the problems in this story is that there was no inquiry into it, at least none that I know of. Not a word was spoken to us about it later on – nobody told us how we were expected to behave. So we hashed out our own conclusions – that the first two bullets were justified because if he had an IED on him, then what?

What was it for, really?

Dead checking. I don’t buy it. You leave [the Gaza Strip] and the most obvious question is, ‘did you kill anybody?’ What can you do – even if you’ll meet the most left-wing girl in the world, eventually she’ll start thinking, “Did you ever kill somebody, or

not?” And what can you do about it, most people in our society consider that to be a badge of honor. So everybody wants to come out of there with that feeling of satisfaction. That’s what shocked me the most. We have guys in our company walking around with X’s marked on their straps, it’s a sort of culture. Maybe it sounds to you like I’m exaggerating, but... I’d like for this whole thing of X marks – even if it’s somebody who just saved an entire Israeli family – to be forbidden. Because when it comes down to it, when we don’t need to use fire, then people – even if they are very good people – something in their mind just jerks.

